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Katie Moore, 2009 Rosemary Zander Award Winner



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of St. Louis County
12110 Clayton Road
Town & Country, MO 63131

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SPECIAL EDITION



Issue 2, 2009

Dancing Dream

Student's passion helps him perform complete turnaround

To see Lawrence Young dance is to bear witness to the epitome of graceful strength.

And while the strength required to be the accomplished dancer he is today is remarkable, it is equally matched by his strength of character.

"Dance is not a hobby for me; it's my life," said Lawrence, 19 and a senior at University City High School. "There's always something new in the dance world. There's always a new technique or new dance move, and it's always a challenge to try and learn that and perfect it."

Lawrence, who dances a minimum of seven hours a day, is enrolled in four dance classes at school. He serves as dance captain, a cadet teacher and captain of the cheerleading squad. He has performed as a lead dancer in the school's musicals and has several dance solos prepared for the school's spring concert.

In addition to his grueling dance schedule at school, Lawrence also dances with the pre-professional program at The Center of Creative Arts (COCA) and with Matiffe, a local dance company based in the Central West End.

In the fall, he plans to attend Columbia College Chicago, where he has been accepted as part of the dance program. He has also auditioned and been accepted to be part of the prestigious Alvin Ailey dance school in New York as well as the dance program at Webster University.

"This is his dream," said Alexandra Kavourinos, who has served as Lawrence's speech-language pathologist since his freshman year. "He's living out his dream, but he's not dreaming. This is real. He's a remarkable young man."

Alexandra said it has been amazing to witness Lawrence's progress over the past four years, and Lawrence admits that it has been quite a transformation as well.

"I was a problem child at first," he said. "But dance helped me change that negative into a positive."

As a freshman, Lawrence, who has a learning disability in the area of reading and dyslexia, struggled with school. He had a difficult time adjusting to high school, including some run-ins with law enforcement. He said he was literally "counting the days" until he turned 16 so he could drop out of school.

But becoming involved with dance changed all of that. Discovering his natural gift and working to refine that gift gave him something positive on which to focus his attention.

"I think it's my (change in) attitude," Lawrence said regarding the reason for his transformation. "At first I looked at all the negative things, but being around positive people, that vibe starts to leech off on you."

In addition to Alexandra, one of those "positive people" is Calla Smorodin.

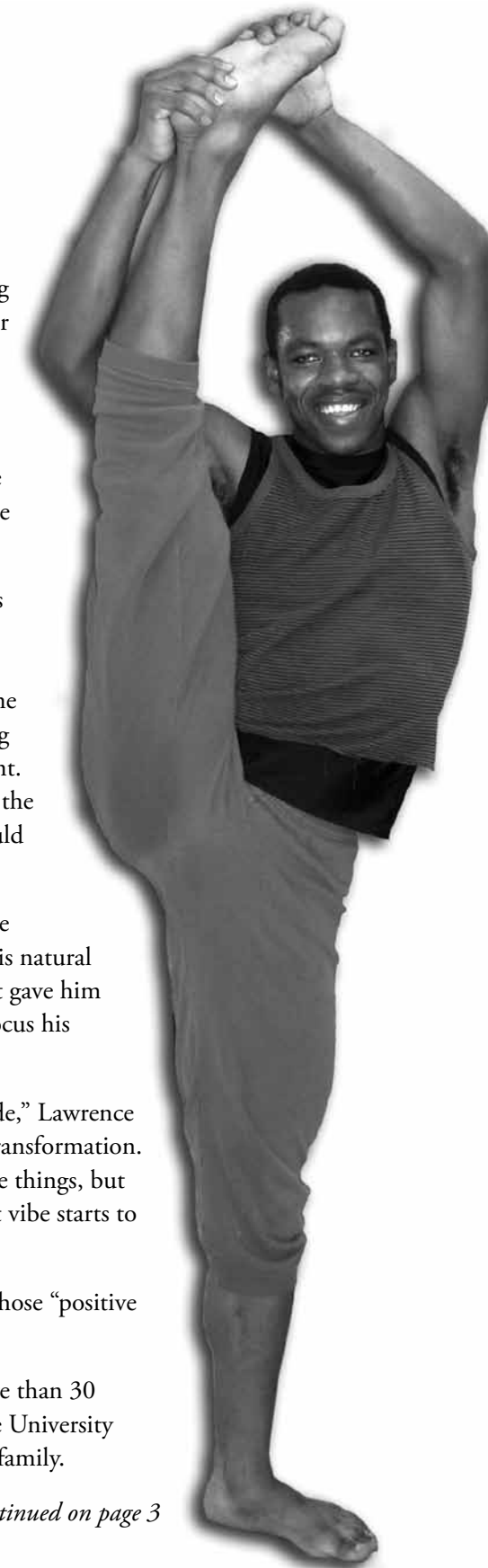
Calla, a retired educator with more than 30 years' experience, lives in the same University City neighborhood as Lawrence's family.

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Did you know that April was Autism Awareness Month?

SSD and partner district students and staff from Spoele Elementary School in the Ladue School District were one team of more than 500 that helped raise more than \$850,000 for autism research at the 2008 St. Louis Walk Now for Autism. The 2009 Walk will be held on Oct. 10. Register at www.walknowforautism.org.



Down to the Letter

The field of special education is rife with technical terms, jargon and acronyms. This feature in Special Edition shines a light on some of the more frequently used acronyms at SSD.

MDVR – Missouri Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. The agency assists eligible persons with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining quality employment. Some of the services that may be provided include an evaluation to determine the kind of work that best suits the individual, guidance in choosing suitable employment, and vocational training to prepare for employment. For more information, visit www.dese.mo.gov/vr.

PBIS – Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. A systematic approach designed to reduce the type of problem behaviors that can impede classroom success for students both with and without disabilities. PBIS involves altering or eliminating the kinds of situations and events that trigger negative reactions in young people with problem behaviors. It also aims to help those young people make changes independently and acquire new coping skills.

SLD – Specific Learning Disability. A term used to refer to an individual who has difficulty in certain areas of learning, rather than in all areas of learning. Specific areas may include attention, reasoning, processing, memory, communication, reading, writing, spelling, calculation, coordination, social competence or emotional maturity.

To learn more about the language of special education, visit the Parents section of the SSD Web site at www.ssd.k12.mo.us.

Unlocking Potential

Ten SSD teachers have been selected as the district's 2009 Key to the Classroom Award recipients for both their skill and their commitment to the teaching profession. Whether it's the creative approach they use to meet a student's need or the time they spend outside of the classroom meeting with parents or attending classes, these educators exemplify great teaching.

One Key to the Classroom Award winner will be selected as SSD's 2009 Teacher of the Year and will represent SSD in 2010 in the Missouri Teacher of the Year program sponsored by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

2009 Key to the Classroom Award Winners are:

- **Maria Ampleman**
Brentwood Early Childhood Center
Brentwood School District
- **Amanda Clemmons**
Pershing Elementary School
University City School District
- **Pam Doty**
Affton Early Childhood Center
Affton School District
- **Carole Garrett**
Drummond Elementary School
Pattonville School District
- **Karen Green**
Litzsinger School
Special School District
- **Gail Klein-Stobie**
Keysor Elementary School
Kirkwood School District
- **Brian Mulvaney**
Bridges
Special School District
- **Liz Rock**
Southeast Middle School
Parkway School District
- **Jeanette Ross**
Mark Twain Student Support Center
Ferguson-Florissant School District
- **Tracy Webb**
MRH Early Childhood Center
Maplewood-Richmond Heights School District

Connect With SSD — Electronically

SSD is proud to introduce BoardDocs, an online resource that provides immediate access to the most up-to-date information on Board of Education meetings.

BoardDocs can be accessed through the SSD Web site or by directly navigating to www.boarddocs.com/mo/ssdmo/Board.nsf/Public. The site contains board meeting agendas complete with all supporting documents; meeting minutes with a record of board members' voting; and a link to district policies.

In addition to being environmentally friendly, the paperless BoardDocs system reduces cost and time spent assembling, printing, distributing and revising agenda items and policies.

For more information about BoardDocs, contact Amy Doyle, secretary to the Board of Education, at (314) 989-8419 or via e-mail at adoyle@ssdmo.org. ■

Tell Us What You Think About SSD Publications

Do you know a great story just waiting to be told? Is there a particular topic that you would like more information on? If so, then SSD wants to hear about it.

In an effort to serve you better, we're asking for your input on the types of information you would like to see featured in SSD publications. The district currently has two primary methods for communicating with parents and other key groups — Special Edition, which you're reading now, and SSD Unfiltered, the district's monthly e-newsletter.

The brief survey is a chance for you to let us know what topics you're most interested in and how the district can best communicate with you.

Please take a few moments to fill out the online survey at www.ssd.k12.mo.us/publication_survey.html or by simply clicking on the survey link on the SSD homepage at www.ssd.k12.mo.us.

While there, you can also sign up for SSD Unfiltered, if you haven't already done so. SSD Unfiltered, which arrives in e-mail inboxes the last Tuesday of every month during the school year, covers timely topics and offers readers a chance to respond and contribute through monthly surveys.

For those who do not have Internet access or who would prefer to fill out a paper survey, please contact the SSD Communications Department at (314) 989-8288. ■



Dancing (continued from page 1)

“She’s my best friend/mentor/grandmother,” Lawrence said. “She’s one of the main reasons I’m successful today.”

Calla, an avid gardener, was planting flowers one afternoon when an 8-year-old Lawrence and his two sisters walked by to see what she was doing. While the two girls got bored and went home, Lawrence stayed to help and the seeds of this life-changing friendship were planted.

“He knew to walk on the path and not on the fresh dirt,” Calla said, laughing. “He listened and remembered. I knew there was something special about him.”

From that initial meeting, Calla has been a strong advocate for Lawrence. With his mother’s permission, Calla started to tutor Lawrence at her home, and then went to his elementary school and talked with his special education teacher.

Through the years, Calla has served as a tutor, mentor and advocate for Lawrence. In March, her dedication to the young man earned her the honor of SSD Special Ambassador, an annual recognition for community members who demonstrate an extraordinary commitment to SSD students.

Calla has “always been there” for Lawrence, and he has the highest praise for her guidance.

“She taught me to make goals,” said Lawrence, whose goal now is to start his own dance company by the time he is 29 and be travelling the world as a choreographer. “She’s amazing.”

As Lawrence’s high school graduation nears, Calla is still there with him every step of the way trying to find the money to achieve his dreams of attending Columbia College Chicago. She admits that seeing Lawrence reach this milestone is exciting but cautions her mentee that his work isn’t done.

“It’s not going to be easy,” she said to Lawrence. “You’re going to have to work hard. I’m excited for you to make that final step into your dream. I’ll feel very proud of you.”

As for Lawrence, he has a goal and is determined to make it happen. He sees high school graduation as just one more step toward his goal of running his own dance company.

“I will be happy (at graduation), but excited about the next chapter of my life,” he said. “Now I know I’m good enough at something to really make it.” ■

Special Edition is a publication of the Communications Department of Special School District of St. Louis County.

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