

# Teaching the art of dance is Jackson's passion

By Kaylia Cornett

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Light from the dance studio's large side window reflected on more than a dozen pairs of tiny, quick tapping feet during summer dance camp. The black shoes caught the glare as if newly polished, but the steel plates on the soles appeared a little used. The rhythmic clogs seemed to almost seep into the floorboards and float out into the halls. Clink. Clank. Dance. Dance. Dance.



***Mindy Jackson slipped on her dancing shoes to teach a routine during one of her summer dance camps. Mindy's Jessamine School of Classical Dance is located at 315 N. Main Street. Photo by Kaylia Cornett***

Mindy Taylor Jackson, owner and artistic director of Mindy's Jessamine School of Classical Dance, jokes about trying to save the world through dance, but in her North Main Street studio, she is having a bigger impact on students than she gives herself credit for — she's giving them a chance to dance.

"I love Nicholasville, and I wanted something here that I knew would give kids who wouldn't necessarily have an opportunity to dance, an opportunity, to not just dance," Jackson said, "but to have good training."

Jackson, who started dancing at the age of 3, moved to Nicholasville when she was 10. She danced with The Lexington Ballet until she graduated from high school and became a member of The Louisville Ballet Company in college. Later, she returned to teach at The Lexington Ballet, and in 1991 she became the director of the Jessamine Dance Company, partnered with Jessamine County Community Education. Seeking to reach out to the Nicholasville community even more, Jackson founded her own studio in 1998.

"Literally, when I started, I had nothing; my dad bought my mirrors for my studio," Jackson said. "Teaching dance and being in dance has never been about the money to me."

Instead, Jackson's focus was to create a place where any child could come to learn to dance, and the fact that she now has a successful business is icing on the cake.

"I'm most proud that I have a place that kids want to be. This is like a second home to them," Jackson said. "I have such a passion for dance and such a love for it, and that I've been able to teach kids and have such an impact that they feel that way about it, too."

Caitlin Withers, 16, who has been dancing at Jackson's studio for nearly 12 years and is now helping teach the hip-hop classes, said that dancing has helped her learn about responsibility, especially while in school.

"(You) learn who you are; I know that kind of sounds cheesy," Withers said. "(But dancing) is a good way to balance what you love with what you have to do — so, I love it."

Jackson's studio boasts nearly 300 students who can learn anything from ballet to hip-hop. Aside from styles and toe-tapping techniques, Jackson said she hopes her students will take something much more important away from dance.

"Not every kid that comes through my studio is going to become a professional dancer, but you just hope that they will appreciate the art and enjoy it for the rest of their life," Jackson said. "I hope that they learn from me, for one, they get self-esteem from dance, I want them to have a good work ethic, because no matter what you do, whether it's dance or whatever you end up doing in life, you can take that, which you get from being in a discipline, like dance, and you can apply it to any other part of your life."

And, for Jackson, dancing certainly found a way to impact her life.

"Dance was a place that I could go that, you know, nothing else mattered. You could go and escape, and I knew I was good at it, and basically, dance was who I was — it still is," Jackson said. "Even though the focus has kind of changed from dancing to teaching, I would be lost without it. I can't imagine not doing it, not teaching at all."

Jackson said she comes from a long line of teachers, from her great-grandmother to her mother, but she has been the only one to instruct dance.

"I just teach in a different way," Jackson said, later adding that teaching has been very rewarding for her and that her small-town studio has just as many perks as the big companies in Lexington. She thinks of her business as, "the best-kept secret in town."

"I don't ever want to be so big that I can't teach everybody," Jackson said. "I teach the babies. I love to teach the babies. Sometimes you want to pull your hair out, but they're fun though. I think I do that so I don't lose that joy. There's nothing better than watching a 3-year-old just dance like they love it."

For more information on Jackson's school, call (869) 881-0851.