

WOMEN

In Business

PRESENTING SPONSOR:



Denele Sweet

Encore Dance Studio



HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN YOUR LINE OF WORK AND WHAT GOT *you* STARTED?

"I started dancing when I was two and have been dancing my whole life. I started **Encore Dance Studio** in 1996 when my son was born, and it happened by happy accident. I thought my dancing days were over when the phone rang, and someone asked me if I could teach a dance class. I said no, I don't teach. The phone rang again so I decided I would give teaching a try, I'm so glad I did. I started teaching tap on a piece of plywood in a garage with two little girls that were sisters. Then my little class just kept growing to where parents were asking me "Oh, can you teach my kids too"? Then I just kept adding plywood to add more kids and then I realized, I think I'm good at this teaching thing. My parents bought a beach house in Seaside when I was a baby so I have been coming up to the beach during summers and weekends my whole life. But my dance training and career was in the Portland area. I am grateful that I get to share my gift and love for dance and education with our community.

When the pandemic arrived I was operating two studio locations, one in Gearhart and one in Warrenton. The shutdown helped me realize that my heart couldn't be at both ends of the County, so we closed the South County location and poured our hearts into North County to give our students a safe place to go for their distance learning while their parents went to work. I shut down my lobby, took all the furniture out and replaced it with school desks. We were encouraging the kids to participate in their distance learning as much as we could. We saw the kids being frustrated and failing at what they were trying to do. Not having any control of the curriculum at that time, we could only encourage them to be successful, and it just obviously wasn't working."

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN YOUR LINE OF WORK AND WHAT GOT *you* STARTED? CONTINUED...

"I looked around my faculty and saw how incredible these women were with master's in education and we just decided that we could serve these kids so much better. We completed the accreditation process last year and we are now in our second year as a fully accredited K-12 private school. The company that accredits our K-12 private school is the same company that accredits Astoria High School. Our credits and transcripts hold the same weight as any public high school so it's very exciting. I love it so much. Our students receive a very well-rounded experience here at our school.

The program works really, really well for our students. They take their dance or tumbling class, and then they go back and then might have science class or take ballet then they are refreshed and ready for math and so on. We proudly serve preschool through high school age students. Last year, we had our first graduating senior which was very exciting, we're just really trying to enrich these kids with a fantastic education in an atmosphere that is all inclusive with small class sizes. Our school motto is "At **Encore Academy** we value lifelong learning and celebrate self-expression". We have a music teacher we just hired and are adding other elements of Performing Arts. Our school has 50 students this year and it's perfect. We operate Monday through Friday 8-3:30, all of our children fourth grade and up also take Spanish every day. Another goal for our students is to be fluent when they graduate because that's such a big help to being successful in this world, to be bilingual. It's just going to give them one step ahead, to be able to navigate wherever their desires take them."

WHAT IS A CHALLENGE *you* HAVE HAD TO OVERCOME?

"I guess the biggest challenge that sticks out to me is when my kids were little, I was a package deal. My kids came with me. I choreographed high school musicals with my kids I choreographed **Miss Oregon**. I was all over the place! One challenge I remember, I was teaching a class at my first official space that I had rented, and someone walked in during the middle of my class and told me how terrible I was because I was putting my children ahead of teaching "are you kidding?"

The coolest thing right now is I have two teachers that just had babies about six weeks ago, and they bring them to teach dance classes with them. We are very family oriented, we have bouncy seats in the studio, I love it, I think it's the best thing ever. I think balancing being a woman, a mom, and a business owner is probably the biggest challenge."

AS WOMEN WE OFTEN DON'T BRAG ABOUT OURSELVES. TELL ME SOMETHING YOU'VE DONE THAT *you* ARE PROUD OF.

"I think right now I'm most proud of surviving the pandemic, I would go home and just say "I'm locking the doors, I'm not doing it". It was too much stress trying to make it through and not knowing if "what if one of our kids get sick? What if they're going to shut us down?", the stress was intense. I'm proud of myself that I had the faculty behind me that we just we cried together and said "no, we can do it", so we did it and we built a school. I think not only surviving the pandemic but we created something pretty unique and incredible for our community."

WHAT IS ONE THING YOU WISH YOU COULD TEACH ALL YOUNG women?

"Teaching young women to be able to adapt to change, change happens and change can be hard. Changes in life will always keep coming and to be able to merge over the speed bumps and do it gracefully. To be able to adapt is a skill. I think it's a big skill for those young ladies to grab on to the challenges and the changes and figure out how to make a situation the best it can be. Also, just giving them the courage to make decisions and have opinions that not everybody is going to agree with. Teach them you have to be respectful of other people's opinions, but to also have their own opinions in life and be proud of it. Also, just empowering these young women to shake a hand and introduce themselves proudly."

WHO INSPIRES YOU AND WHAT DRIVES *you?*

"I have so many people that inspire me, I'm surrounded by inspirational women that are excited to be a part of the unique success of what we do and inspire me to want to do better every day and make this place better for them. These kids inspire me to think "How do I make our dance studio and school better?". I'm surrounded by inspiration. There's not just one person that drives me, they all do."

WOMEN

In Business

PRESENTING SPONSOR:



LUM'S
AUTO CENTER

"Advice for women? Go for it. Do your thing. Don't hold back" - Lori Lum

"Be strong, yet willing to take chances" - Julie Lum