

Dance Element operators have plenty of experience

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about pursuing dance she'd need to learn ballet — since it's the foundation for all types of dance because it teaches proper technique, she explained.

It wasn't long before she was competing and participating in pageants. In the late 1990s, Ms Labelle — along with Ms De Geer — was part of the Canadian National Tap Team, which won a gold medal in Germany.

At the age of 16, Ms Labelle began teaching in Brampton and she hasn't looked back. While most of her friends wanted to dance professionally, Ms Labelle said she knew teaching was what she wanted to do.

"I started teaching as a fluke and I loved it," she said. "I want to pass on this knowledge and passion I have to my pupils."

Dance, Ms Labelle said, develops skills that can be applied in all areas of life. It instills a lasting confidence and is the common bond of many a friendship.

"A lot of students, when they first step in the class, are afraid and shy. And by the end of the year they're dancing on stage," Ms

Labelle said. "The confidence to be able to do that is a major thing."

Dance classes are a great way to escape from life's pressures, including school, Ms De Geer added.

Something both women said they feel strongly about is continuing to sharpen their own dance skills and staying current in the dance field "so our students are always getting what's up to date," Ms Labelle said.

Both women continue to receive dance training, with Ms De Geer traveling to New York each summer for workshops at the Broadway Dance Centre.

"Continuous education is so important. We don't stop the learning process just because we're teachers," Ms Labelle said.

One of the benefits of taking over an existing dance studio is there's an automatic clientele — about 65 per cent of their students so far are former Rhonda Copeland students, they said.

When it comes to how parents decide to put their kids in dance lessons, Ms De Geer said she often hears the same story over and over.

"A lot of parents come in and say their child dances around the house constantly. That's a good sign — they love music and movement," she said.

As for choosing the right school, Ms De Geer said it's important for parents to visit any studio they're considering to get a feel for the staff and facility.

So what defines a successful studio?

"In my mind, for a successful studio, I'd like all our students to have that love for dance, that passion for dance," Ms Labelle said. "I want to be recognized in the dance world as a dance studio with caring teachers and qualified dance training."

Although neither woman currently lives in Milton, they both expressed their desire to re-locate in the near future, saying Miltonians have been more than welcoming.

Already, the women are trying to get involved in the community. Recently, they held an open house, in which students new and old were able to meet them and take in some free classes. And just over a week ago, the pair raised money for hurricane relief by holding a \$5 hip-hop class.

In the future, Ms Labelle said she hopes The Dance Element will gain more clients and move into a larger facility. But, she said, that's not what's most important.

"It's about quality training as opposed to having 1,000-plus students."

Stephanie Thiessen can be reached at sthiessen@miltoncanadianchampion.com.

Stay-at-home parents group starting up

Are you a stay-at-home parent and want to connect with others? If so, you may want to swing by the Milton Community Resource Centre (MCRC) on Bronte Street Wednesday evening.

That's when the newly-formed Milton Stay at Home Parent Association holds its first meeting at 7 p.m.

Monthly meetings will follow on rotating days each month, with a variety of topics planned for discussion — including maternity leave, working part-time and finding activities for parents and children.

The group will feature both a social and physical fitness activity, and is looking for volunteers for both.

The Milton Stay at Home Parent Association is affiliated with the MCRC.

Those interested in joining the group are asked to call Shawna Marroccoli at (905) 875-3952.

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Want to learn more about Halton?

Those who do will want to check out one or all of a free six-part public forum the Halton Environment Network is hosting this fall.

Topics include everything under the sun when it comes to the region's natural environment, and the first seminar will be held Monday from 7 to 8:45 p.m. at the Tansley Woods Public Library in Burlington.

The fourth event features a nature walk at Rattlesnake Point October 1 from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. with Bill Gaines of Conservation Halton.

For more information on the series, call the Halton Environment Network at (905) 849-5501.

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