

LIFESTYLE

Marie Ann Longlade School of Dance celebrates 50 years

By Joseph Chin
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At nine years of age Marie Ann Longlade had already mapped out her future. She had two clear goals: to have lots of children and to become a dance teacher.

Some 60 years later, she has achieved both; in fact, she has perhaps exceeded her expectations. Not only does she have six daughters and two sons, but she founded and owns the Marie Ann Longlade School of Dance.

This year, the Cookville-based studio celebrates half a century of cultivating a love of dance in children and seeing many of them go on to rewarding careers in the performance arts. Despite her accomplishments, the youthful-looking Longlade has no intention of hanging up her dancing shoes anytime soon.

"I definitely have no plans to retire," she says with a laugh. "What else can I do?"

Indeed, Longlade's life has been inextricably linked to dance. Like many children, the Toronto native started dancing when she was two years old. What set her apart from her peers, however, was that she never stopped. Her natural talent earned her a spot in her teens at the prestigious National Ballet School of Canada. By the time she graduated she had years of experience as a professional soloist in ballet, tap, jazz, acrobatic, highland and baton performing, including performances at the Royal Alexandra Theatre in Toronto.

Then marriage at 19 and impending motherhood – triggering the first of her dreams – intervened. In 1970, after founding the Marie Ann Longlade School of Dances in Toronto five years previously, she moved with her young family to Mississauga and set up shop at Applewood United Church.

She outgrew that space after 10 years and moved to her central Mississauga location.

Her school currently commands 3,000-square-feet of space, divided into three teaching studios, at 1650 Dundas St. E.

Marie Ann Longlade School of Dance has become one of the premier dance schools in the area thanks to its friendly environment and team of highly experienced instructors who teach everything from ballet to tap to hip-hop. It was this dedication to her students that earned Longlade the Mississauga Arts Dance Award in 2001.

"We focus, not only on developing quality dance skills in our students, but on developing self esteem and high energy levels in them," she says.

Over the 50 years (45 in Mississauga), Longlade estimates she and her staff have taught more than 5,000 students, both children (as young as two) and adults, including her six daughters and a new generation of grandchildren.

"Many of our students have gone on to be dance teachers, technicians in theatre or TV and professional entertainers on screen and stage," she says.

A proud moment was when Krista Saab, daughter of instructor Carole Tamulionis who's been with Longlade for 48 years before recently retiring, was hired as a Radio City Rockette. The famed precision dance company was founded in 1925 in St. Louis, and since 1932 has performed out of Radio City Music Hall in Manhattan, NYC.

"She was the first Rockette in the troupe from Canada," Longlade says.

Many students, like Saab, have gone on and earned accreditation as members of Canadian Dance Teachers' Association (C.D.T.A.) and Educators of America (D.E.A.) and have returned to Longlade School of Dance as instructors. Currently, the school's eight instructors include two of Longlade's daughters, Gail Longlade-Kossel and Lee-Ann



Marie Ann Longlade



Marie Ann Longlade, circa 1985, with her children.

Longlade-Poff, both of whom are assistant artistic directors.

"That way we can control the teaching. It's what makes us unique," says the matriarch, who has 17 grandchildren.

While not a requirement, Longlade says many students choose to join the Longlade Dance Company, which performs in various U.S. and Canadian dance competitions every year.

"Our teams have won numerous awards and scholarships during these competitions," she says.

Each June, the school puts on a show with all students in full production. This year's will be particularly special since it marks the school's 50th anniversary. *Spring Melody '15* takes place this Saturday in the Living Arts Centre's Hammerson Hall. The three-hour show, choreographed by Longlade-Kossel and Longlade-Poff, is divided into five parts, each showcasing one decade of music.

"Fifty-one of our students, some going back to our first Melody show in 1966, are coming back this weekend. Some will be performing," Longlade says.

Show time is 4:30 p.m. Tickets cost \$40. Call the LAC box office at 905-306-6000.



Marie Ann Longlade's talent for dance earned her a spot at the prestigious National Ballet School of Canada.



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