

Lois Allen: Dancing All Her Days



Photo Credit: Victoria Lassonde

Lifelong dancer Lois Allen is living proof that healthy choices – like staying physically active, eating a balanced diet, setting goals and pursuing the activities that make you happy – are the most important elements of a long, fulfilling life. The 72-year-old retiree attributes her own boundless energy supply to her firmly held belief in eating right and exercising every single day.

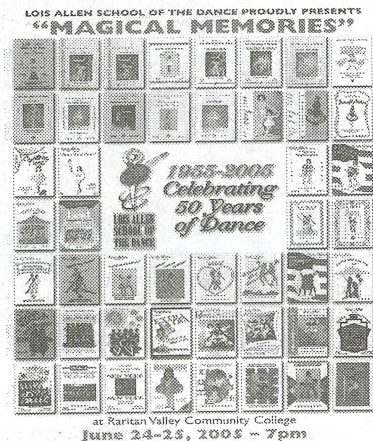
After 40-plus years spent owning and operating the Lois Allen School of Dance in Clark, in Union County, NJ, Allen now resides and continues to teach dance in the Long Beach Island area (not to mention knitting and painting classes, which keep her hands busy, in addition to her feet), at five different locations and to every age from 3 to 92.

Lois Allen instructing the Ocean Breeze Dancers at the Paramount Escapes Ocean Breeze Adult Community in Manahawkin

Pure passion, she said, has fueled her enduring commitment to ballet, tap, jazz, gymnastics and ballroom dancing, which includes the cha-cha, rumba, waltz, fox trot and swing. The discipline inherent in those studies has, no doubt, enabled her to adhere to the healthful regimen she continues to enjoy today.

Some of her students have gone on to accomplish great things in the dance profession, as studio owners, Broadway dancers and members of the world-famous Radio City Rockettes.

Allen said one of the qualities she considers to be most important in a teacher is the ability to relate to the age level of the students in a given



class. Having danced through every stage of her life, Allen has no problem getting down on the floor with 3- to 6-year-olds or understanding the different needs of senior citizens.

As a senior citizen herself, Allen has made the most of her Golden Years not only with her athleticism but also with her beauty and grace. In 1998, she was selected Ms. New Jersey Senior America, a pageant that celebrates women who have reached the “Age of Elegance.”

The crown enabled her to travel throughout the state, spreading the message about the physical and mental health benefits of dancing and the role it has played in keeping her young at heart. At the national pageant in Biloxi, Miss., Allen was the second runner-up and also took home the title of Miss Congeniality. Although entering had taken a little nudging at first from an encouraging neighbor, she described the pageant as a wonderful experience.

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Nowadays, she leads classes in Little Egg Harbor, at Sea Oaks Golf Club; in Manahawkin, at Southern Regional Adult School and at Paramount Escapes Ocean Breeze, an adult (55-and-up) community; in Loveladies, at the Long Beach Island Foundation of Arts and Sciences; and in Brant Beach, at St. Francis Community Center. When she is not teaching said classes, Allen likes to get outside and enjoy various other forms of recreation, like kayaking and walking.

As much as she has always been drawn to the shore, having regularly spent her summers here while the school was closed, from June to September, before ultimately settling at the shore in her retirement, Allen said she “was always so excited for September to come again,” when she could reopen her studio and get back into dancing fulltime. So intense is her love for the art form, she said, that “burning out” has never been a concern. To the contrary, she has preferred never to spend too much time away from it, if she could help it.

“I would do anything for [the sake of] my dancing,” she said.

At the same time, Allen believes variety is integral in a well balanced life; the latest change she has made in her life is the addition of her Maltese puppy, Tiara, who “has uplifted me so much,” she said. As many have experienced and studies have shown, sharing one’s home with an animal feeds the spirit – “because it makes you happy,” she explained.

“If you’re happy with yourself, and your core is happy, I think everything else follows,” she said.

Allen was first introduced to the world of dance when she was just two years old, by Myra Witt. As a toddler, Allen accompanied her mother, a costume designer named Martha Allen, to job sites, one of which was Witt’s dance studio in Irvington, where little Lois was allowed to take part in the ballet and other classes. The more she danced, the more she loved to dance, she said. Incidentally Lois’s brother Ken, who also got the show business gene, makes his living as a professional magician.

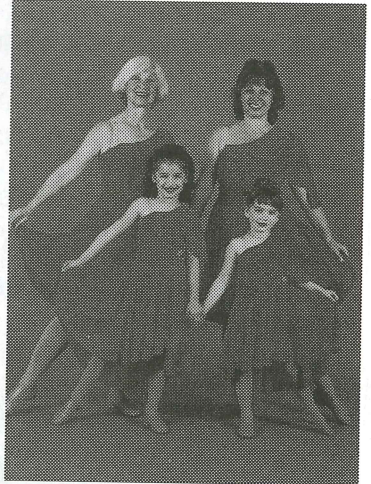
And Lois’s love of dance rubbed off on her daughter, Loralyn, who initially pursued theater arts in college but eventually decided (to her mom’s delight) to pursue dance, first working as a dancer on Norwegian Cruise Lines and later partnering with her mother in the dance school. Loralyn now operates the dance school fulltime, and Loralyn’s two daughters, Carissa Lyn 11, and Heather Lynn, 9, are also budding dancers and gymnasts.

Recently, *Out & About* had the opportunity to attend and observe one of Allen’s dance classes, at Paramount Escapes. Typically about 30 students fill the spacious meeting room – enhanced with finely appointed furnishings and cathedral ceilings – though on this particular Monday evening (after a holiday weekend), fewer couples than usual took to the floor.

Allen enjoys working with larger class sizes, she said, because oftentimes the students’ conversations and laughter and support of each other help to hasten the learning process.

This particular night was the students’ third class since signing up, and most were beginners, Allen said.

In earlier sessions they had learned the basic cha-cha and the rumba, she



Clockwise from left: Lois Allen, daughter Loralyn Gaughran, and granddaughters Heather Lynn, 9 and Carissa Lyn, 11.


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explained. Tonight, they would refine what they had already learned and add a couple of new, more advanced steps to their repertoires.

Of what it takes to be a good dance student, Allen said, it's not necessarily balance, or poise, or posture, or rhythm, or any of that.

"Just love it. And forget the rest," she said.

Allen can be reached at dancinlois@verizon.net. The Lois Allen School of Dance can also be found on Facebook.  - Victoria Lassonde