

No slowdown after a decade's worth of dancing

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Debra Swaim hasn't worked a day in 10 years. At least it hasn't felt like it, as the owner of Frisco Dance Force, a studio set to celebrate a decade of business in January, has never stopped enjoying her job. In fact, she's ready for another 10 years.

"I would absolutely love it," Swaim said. "This is all I know how to do, and to me it's not working. I come in here, I have fun; I go in a class, check it out and talk to the families and talk to the kids. It's like our own little dance family here."

Frisco Dance Force offers classes in a variety of styles, including jazz, ballet and contemporary. Students range in age from three to upwards of 50, and levels of expertise from the completion team the studio fields, which line the tops of the classrooms with the trophies they've earned, to those who dance for pure entertainment.



Swaim opened her first location in a smaller Frisco ready for expansion. At the time, the city had only one dance studio. Swaim's husband had received a job offer there, and upon arriving she saw opportunity. Wanting to settle down and start a family, she needed to move away from dance performance and toward teaching. Swaim said that the area's open market made her think of giving opening a studio a chance.

"I have danced all my life," she said. "It's all I know how to do really. I started when I was three, got a degree in dance, danced professionally for many, many years throughout the North Texas area, and then got married and decided to slow down with the performance aspect of the dance career. I was teaching at that time too. To supplement performance gigs you would teach in the evening, rehearse all day and perform on the weekends. I just thought I could continue teaching when I was married and planning a family. It worked out that way. That's how we got into the studio business."

And business has been good for Frisco Dance Force since. Particularly now, as despite the general condition of the economy, Swaim's studio is booming. In September, she opened another location in Prosper and shortly after that started an offsite program at Infinite Bounds in Plano.

It's all a far cry from the one classroom that was Frisco Dance Force's beginning. It transitioned from there into its current space, three classrooms plus an art room, and then to its multiple locations and staff of 12 teachers. But however the studio grows, Swaim's favorite aspect remains its family atmosphere. She said many families make dance class a joint activity, part of their weekly routine. Being a facet of the lives of so many students keeps the studio from feeling like a business. She still teaches, right now focusing on preschool age kids.

“Some of the best memories are being part of some of these families’ life,” Swaim said. “You get to see a child who at the age of three has started out with you, you planted that seed of passion for dance and you’ve seen it grow with them until they’ve become teenagers or gone off to college. It’s really a gift that you got to see them grow and aspire to be a dancer or go into other fields of performance arts like acting.”

For its 10-year anniversary, Frisco Dance Force is holding an essay contest that will reward 10 scholarships, one for each year, for an equal amount of months of free dance classes in the style of the winner’s choice. The topic is Why Dance is Important and the length requirement 500 words.

As inspiration, essayists can take words from the owner herself.

“You learn so much from dance, not just steps” Swaim said. “You can learn life skills that will last with you forever.”