

Moving Right Along

Denise Thomas-Morrow brings exercise to the classroom BY AMY SCHNEIDER

Not many people can say their business' name was used for a nationwide campaign headed by the first lady, but Denise Thomas-Morrow, owner of Let's Move Fitness and CEO of nonprofit Healthy Moves, knows that feeling all too well. When she first heard that Michelle Obama named her child fitness program "Let's Move," she could hardly believe it.

"Who would have known back in 1988 [when Thomas-Morrow started her business] that the First Lady wanted to use my business name for her national campaign?" Thomas-Morrow says. "You don't really want to go against the president and his wife, so instead I thought we could try to get involved with their cause."

That's how Healthy Moves came into being, as a program that brings local fitness instructors into schools during PE classes to help teachers develop effective exercise programs and techniques.

"The Bethel school district has never had PE teachers," Thomas-Morrow says. "These kindergarten through fifth grade teachers are doing everything, including having to teach PE. Some of them have taken courses in PE, but unfortunately, a lot of them have not."

Vivacious and enthusiastic, Thomas-Morrow is a natural fit for the health and fitness community. Although she played volleyball and basketball and ran track in high school, she turned her athletic aspirations toward dance in college. She had never taken a dance class before, but when she tried jazz on a whim, she loved the idea so much that she switched her physical education major to dance, moved to a new college and graduated from the UO with a bachelor's in dance.

After graduation, she moved to New York and studied jazz, tap and African dance, but an encounter with an aerobics class opened her eyes to a new form of fitness, prompting her to start Let's Move Fitness. When Thomas-Morrow moved back to Oregon, she took her fitness studio with her, followed by the creation of Healthy Moves.

"People are shocked to hear that kids don't have PE because growing up we had opportunities to be active," she says. "I was so fortunate for the opportunity to have PE in elementary school, and I think other kids should have that opportunity, too."

Right now, Healthy Moves is in six schools in Bethel, and Thomas-Morrow has worked with seven schools in Springfield. The program switches districts as the seasons change, and it currently serves grades K through 5. Typically, an instructor will visit a school during a PE class and assist the teachers, helping them develop a curriculum

with a variety of activities, including a warm-up and a cool-down. Thomas-Morrow is also working with local nonprofit Ophelia's Place to help develop a physical activity component to its assortment of classes and workshops.

Thomas-Morrow works with all ages, from grade school kids to seniors, and she says that anyone can benefit from more exercise. "Little things can build to big things," she says. "You don't have to run a marathon; you can go walking out in nature to see the eagles along the Willamette River. That's my big thing — to help everyone get up and move." ■



PHOTO BY TRASK BEDORTHA



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Patricia Cortez

Patricia Cortez started volunteering in 1997 at Amigos, an organization that assists Latino families arriving in the U.S. after experiencing political violence and torture. Since then, not only has Cortez held every position within the organization, she created Juventud Faceta, a leadership program for Latino youth. "The social norm is that young people are a trouble, and are the problem of many communities," Cortez says, but she challenges this idea in her work every day. In its first year, Juventud Faceta was the first group selected for an award by the city of Eugene's Human Rights Commission. Cortez was the 2013 recipient of the American Dream Award from CAUSA, a statewide immigrant rights coalition, for her work with Latino youth. — *Carolina Reid*



PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

Kelsey Juliana & Olivia Chernaik

Kelsey Juliana and Olivia Chernaik are suing Gov. John Kitzhaber and the state of Oregon under the Public Trust Doctrine, and their climate change case came before the Oregon Court of Appeals in January. The young women say the governor and state are failing to protect essential natural resources, including the atmosphere, state waters and coastlines. "I'm the first person that should be stepping up," Juliana says. "You don't have to be an 'activist' to do something. You can be a kid or a parent." — *Camilla Mortensen*