



The Encore Dance Recital will feature ages 2 to adult performing jazz, tap, hip-hop, ballet and more on stage at the Seaside Convention Center Dec. 11.



Dancers rehearse as reindeers for the Encore Dance Recital.



Encore Dance Studio's dance recital Dec. 11 encourages audience members to bring a new, unwrapped toy to donate for local children.



Evelyn Hardin, left, lets out a laugh as she rehearses for the dance recital.

# A LOVE of dance

Encore Dance Studio celebrates the season with a Christmas Recital and Toy Drive on Friday, Dec. 11

Story by MARILYN GILBAUGH

The magic of the holiday season will appear in full Friday night, Dec. 11. At 7 p.m., the Seaside Convention Center provides the backdrop as Encore Dance Studio takes the stage for its first Christmas Recital and Toy Drive.

The event is free — yes, free — inviting one and all to come and share in the spirit of the holiday. “Adding the toy drive seemed to fit the season, and it’s optional,” said Encore owner and instructor Denele Sweet. “If you bring a toy, please make sure it’s new and unwrapped.”

The toys will be distributed to local children through the Clatsop County CASA and the Wishing Tree.

But before we get to the specifics of the magic set to unfold at the recital, there is, as well, a magical story behind the evolution of Encore Dance Studio itself, befitting this season of happy holiday tales. It goes like this: Once upon a time a tiny 2-year old named Denele DeCius took her first dance lesson. From that moment, all she wanted for Christmas (and every other day of the year) was to dance.

Through her teen years, dance was front and center; her dream and her focus aimed at a future in the professional dance world. Growing up in Portland, Denele was trained in the many disciplines of dance by some of the area’s legends. Mastering tap, jazz, ballet, pointe, Hawaiian, gymnastics and ballroom

dance, she was soon competing in the Pacific Northwest, California and Canada. She joined Ballet West and became a member of Northwest Tap Consort.

Fast forward another few years when a dancing Denele glanced away from the stage for a moment. That was all it took. Her eyes fell on a guy she had never seen before. She, more or less, never looked away. “For me, it was love at first sight. I didn’t know his name, I didn’t know where he had come from or had been all of my life, but I knew, if I had my way, I would soon find out,” said Denele. In the blink of an eye, thoughts of a big city professional dancing career gave way as zing went the strings of her heart. His soon followed.

Fast forward one more time. It’s 20-some year later, December 2015. Mr. and Mrs. Chad Sweet have been married for over 20 years (the last name, at least for this story is just too fitting don’t you think?). They have a son, 20-year-old Zackary, and a daughter, 17-year-old Megan. Denele Sweet remains happily smitten by her prince charming.

Magic continues to weave its way through our story. Denele thought her dream of a professional dance life in a big city, a small one, or really anywhere, was history. But that was not to be. One fateful day in Seaside, she received a telephone call requesting a tap lesson for a little girl. Her response was a somewhat hesitant, “Yes, I think I could do that.”

This year, Encore Dance Studio celebrates its 20th anniversary of teaching dance. What began in a converted garage with one tap student has seen the studio fill up two locations with dancers; one in Gearhart and one in Warrenton.

There are about 300 students who come to take dance lessons, traveling from Washington State’s Ilwaco, Chinook, Ocean Park, Long Beach and Naselle. In Oregon, dancers arrive from Manzanita, Nehalem, Knappa, Seaside, Cannon Beach, Gearhart and Astoria. Studying a multitude of dance disciplines, they are taught by 12 highly qualified instructors — their resumes and class descriptions are well worth reading at Encore’s website: [getyoudancing.com](http://getyoudancing.com)

The studio provides a performing arts preschool program at both locations, offering beginning dance plus the ABCs and 1-2-3s. School-age dancers and tumblers can arrange school bus delivery to the dance studios from their schools or, if needed, set up rides with the Encore Shuttle. After school dance also includes 45 minutes of supervised homework or reading assistance. Each location is a thriving hub of happy activity.

So now you know the back story: the how and the why leading to Encore Dance Studio Recital and Toy Drive this Friday. The recital will showcase Encore’s dancers from age 2 to whatever-your-age young-at-hearts and all those in between. They are practicing and preparing to twirl, tip toe, balance en Pointe, hip hop, tap, and tumble to a wide variety of seasonal tunes. It’s a guarantee that the audience will clap, cameras will click and videos will roll.

“We run our recitals a little differently than many others,” said Denele.

First, Encore holiday recital dancers are provided only costume guidelines: colors, shoes and hair styles. The dancers can often create what they need from their own wardrobes.



Photos by Joshua Bessex

Kennedi Kemmer, middle, leaps into the air during rehearsal for the Encore Dance Recital and Toy Drive at the studio.

“It’s all about self-expressions within those guidelines. This recital is supposed to be fun,” Denele said.

To that end, the dancers get to have fun both on stage and off. “Traditionally, performing dancers are backstage in dressing rooms waiting to dance,” Denele said. “That’s how I grew up; I always wanted to see my friends dancing. So here, our dancers are also part of our audience.”

Denele reports that the dancers, their families and friends are happy with this format.

“Our main goal is to give the dancers, whatever their age, an experience onstage. And family and friends can see what the dancers have learned over the past three months,” she said. “It’s simple, more like a school talent show. (For this recital) there are no fees to the dancers and their families, no admission, no budget and no fear. Our end goal is putting together a high-energy, professional, stress-free recital.”

Little ones will come on stage dancing barefoot and wearing Christmas

pajamas, showing off their talents to “I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas.” Jazz classes will perform a “Holly Jolly Christmas” creating their own festive black and red outfits. And hip-hoppers keep the “Fire Burning,” aglow in black and silver, wearing high-top black hip-hop sneakers.

Tappers are ready to tap to “Run, Run Rudolph,” decked out in black leotards, black skirts and tap shoes: reindeer antlers provided. Sugar Plum Fairies take over in pink tights and black leotards, rainbow scrunchies in their hair and pink ballet shoes on their feet. Then it’s “guys only,” dancing to “Ice, Ice Baby,” in high-top black sneakers, and black and white attire. And dancers with a long love of dance will kick it up a notch in colorful vintage style costumes — here they come. It’s the Rockettes’ Christmas, Encore style.

Get ready, get set, and dance. This recital is all wrapped around celebrating the season, a love of dance and making it fun for dancers and their audience too.

## Encore Dance Studio Christmas Recital and Toy Drive

7 p.m. Friday, Dec. 11

Seaside Convention Center

415 First Ave., Seaside

Free, with suggested donation of a new, unwrapped toy at the door



From left: Marisabel Condit, Reese Clark and Elise Seppa rehearse for the Encore Dance Recital and Toy Drive.