

**BEST DANCE STUDIO****Astoria Arts & Movement Center**

Astoria, Oregon

**Runner-up:** Maddox Dance Studio, Warrenton**Honorable Mention:** Encore Dance Studio, Warrenton/Gearhart**By DWIGHT CASWELL**

There are a many reasons Coast Weekend readers voted the Astoria Arts & Movement Center as Best Dance Studio. AAMC has great instructors who know there's a need for individuals to express creativity in a healthy way, and it's a nonprofit that works to keep fees low.

The biggest reasons, though, may be the incredible number of classes offered at one time or another: ballet, Zumba, jazz, tap, swing, ballroom, salsa, belly dance, yoga, pilates, meditation, hip-hop, Argentine tango, Irish dance, women's gatherings, ecstatic dance, qigong, tai-chi, Bollywood, bhangra, giddha and classes with live music such as contra dance and country swing. To say that there is "something for everybody" understates what this studio has to offer.

AAMC was founded in 2010 by local belly dancer and KMUN programmer Jessamyn Grace. She saw a need for a diverse dance, performing arts, yoga and movement studio that offered a range of classes for all ages and levels. From humble beginnings, the studio has grown into what may be the most culturally, economically and physically accessible studio on the Oregon Coast.

Classes are taught in the historic Odd Fellows Hall ballroom where students laugh, sweat, stretch, de-stress, meet new friends and express themselves in an encouraging environment. "We're always trying to be more inclusive, to broaden our reach," says Grace. "Many that may benefit most from a dance or meditation class can sometimes be the least likely to come forward or the hardest to reach. It takes a lot of courage to take a class, especially a class



PHOTO BY DWIGHT CASWELL

Jessamyn Grace, founder of the Astoria Arts & Movement Center, leads a belly dancing class at the dance studio.

that seeks to get you more in your body."

Grace says, "Dancing is where I find myself. It's when I feel strong, authentic and in love with life." It's a feeling she wants AAMC students to have too.

"Our classes improve self-esteem, motivation, physical health, emotional well-being, social skills, cultural sensitivity and the ability to learn, and they benefit the local community in many ways," she says.

"I want people to find their fire here, to find the courage to do something remarkable. I think of Anais Nin, 'And the day came, when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.' Everyone blossoms here. That is true."

*The AAMC is located 342 10th st in Astoria. To find out more or view a schedule of classes, visit [astoriaartsand-movement.com](http://astoriaartsand-movement.com)*

**BEST AUTO SHOP****Jim Varner's Automotive**

Astoria, Oregon

**Runner-up:** Lum's Auto Center, Warrenton**Honorable Mention:** Box K Auto Repair, Seaview, Washington**By DWIGHT CASWELL**

Last year my Honda Element needed an oil change and was having suspension problems. I'd had a couple of other mechanics look things over, but I had the feeling that they didn't know what the problem was. I was afraid I would pay for work that didn't have to be done. Jim Varner's Automotive was voted the Best Auto Shop choice of Coast Weekend readers for the seventh consecutive year, so I decided to give him a try.

Varner's technicians changed the oil, and then he and I went for a five minute spin up Lewis and Clark Road. He diagnosed the problem, accurately, within a minute and fixed it a week later. And I had a new mechanic, one I've learned to trust as my car approaches the 200,000 mile mark.

Ask Varner what makes his shop special, and he'll tell you that it's his technicians. "I hire people who are better mechanics than I am," he'll say. That may be true, or not, but there's more to it than that. Varner's is a cheerful shop. It's clean and well organized.



PHOTO BY DWIGHT CASWELL

Jim Varner's Automotive has been serving Clatsop County customers for almost 23 years.

The whole place looks like a business where people enjoy working and doing the best for their customers.

The only drawback at Varner's is that you may have to wait due to the number of people who discovered him before you did. But the wait is worth it. And one more thing: Jim Varner is a pretty cheerful guy himself. He has the ability to make bad news sound like the most fun you'll have all week.

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