

## In preparation

This year is the third for the Toy Drive and Holiday Showcase. The concept was born “kind of by accident” while staff was brainstorming how to get more involved in serving the community, according to Van Slyke.

“When we came up with this idea of gathering toys at the door we were like, ‘Well, that’s it. It’s perfect,’” she said. “We thought it would be neat for the kids to go onstage, perform and help out other local kids in the community by collecting toys for them.”

For the past two years, the studio has collected hundreds of toys — from stuffed animals and dolls to art supplies and video games — that gradually build into a large pile in the entrance as attendees arrive for the show. Instructors remind the young performers that the donated bounty is due to their initiative and participation.

“They really feel accomplished, that they’ve done something and helped,” Van Slyke said.

Michelle Lee, the performing arts preschool teacher and mother of two 9-year-old performers, said she’s moved by “seeing all the hundreds of toys the community is willing to go out and purchase and bring and share.”

“They just do it so lovingly,” she said.

Students start rehearsing the holiday routines — 19 in all — in October, perfecting the dances up until performance week. In general, the pieces carry over from year to year, with the same age groups or skill levels performing them.

“The kids are excited because they get to sort of level up into the next routine that they watched the big kids do the last year,” Van Slyke said.

## On the road

Encore has long cultivated a tradition of spreading holiday cheer with seasonal performances.

For the past 20 years, groups of students have spent several days around Christmas traveling to retirement and assisted-living facilities in Clatsop County. Encore’s owner and executive director Denele Sweet grew up doing the same with her studio, and she wanted to offer this opportunity to her students, according to Van Slyke.


This year was no different. In the four days leading up to the recital, instead of classes, the students are taking their show on the road, conducting mini performances with selected routines and promoting the holiday spirit. Students who take classes in Warrenton go to the facilities in Astoria and Warrenton, while the Gearhart classes go to South County facilities.

Residents at the homes are eager for the performances, Van Slyke said. When the room fills with them, the young performers and their parents or guardians, “it’s a big holiday party, for sure,” she said.

She is an avid proponent of dance as a practice and art form.

“It lifts your spirits,” she said. “It’s a natural boost for your endorphins. It makes for a happy people, and happy people make for a good community.”

At the recital, doors open at 6 p.m. and the performance starts at 6:30 p.m. The show is open seating, and the past two years have been standing room only; attendees are encouraged to arrive early.

For more information, contact the studio at 503-717-1637 or visit [getyouddancing.com](http://getyouddancing.com). 



COLIN MURPHEY PHOTOS

**ABOVE:** Students take a break while others rehearse at the Encore Dance Studio in Gearhart ahead of the toy drive recital. **BELOW:** Dance students strike a pose at the Encore Dance Studio in Gearhart in preparation for the annual Toy Drive Dance Recital on Dec. 15 at the Seaside Civic & Convention Center.



COLIN MURPHEY PHOTO

A class at the Encore Dance Studio in Gearhart performs a routine ahead of the third annual Toy Drive Dance Recital in Seaside.



COURTESY ENCORE DANCE STUDIO

Encore Dance Studio presents a holiday dance recital at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center.