

BEST DANCE STUDIO

ENCORE DANCE STUDIO

GEARHART AND WARRENTON

Runner-up: Astoria Arts & Movement Center

Honorable mention: Maddox Dance Studio, Warrenton

By KATHERINE LACAZE

What's it like to have a job that entails blissful days of dancing, playing and enriching children's lives through the performing arts? Denele Sweet and her crew at Encore Dance Studio have firsthand knowledge.

"We were given a magical gift that we get to come together and share," Sweet said. "It's not like coming to work. We get to come and play all day."

Although she's the owner, she says she's allergic to the word "boss" and considers her team members family. "It doesn't work without them, and I wouldn't want to do it without them," she said.

More than 20 years ago — when Sweet believed her "dancing days were over" — she started a dance class upon request from a local family. It started with two students dancing on a piece of plywood on a concrete floor and grew from there. In 1996, the studio was established, and now serves about 250 students between its two locations in Gearhart and Warrenton.

Sweet attributes the studio's popularity to its warm, fun, family-oriented environment, as well as its community service.

The studio hosts a holiday show-



COURTESY ENCORE DANCE STUDIO

Members of Encore Dance Studio's team gather for a picture at owner Denele Sweet's house in December. **From left:** Suzannah Hastings, April Cameron, Courtney Bangs, Tia Van Slyke, Trixie Leone, Denele Sweet, Erin Hofseth, Brittani Henderson, Kimmbrly Mount and Nikkole Sasso. **Staff members not pictured include** Krysti Ficker, Cheryl Cochran, Christiane Butler, Michelle Lee, Connie Mulvany, Arlene Holmes, Annie Navarjo-Rivera and Dana Larsen.

case and toy drive each winter, and recently put on its eighth annual Cartwheels for Canned Food drive. In conjunction with the recently established Encore Performing Arts Foundation, the studio is offering a free community ballet class 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Mondays for anyone 13 and older.

The class, Sweet said, is "another fun way for us to get people dancing

who maybe thought it was too late for them to get started."

The Encore team consists of Tia Van Slyke, Courtney Bangs, Trixie Leone, Krysti Ficker, Suzannah Hastings, Cheryl Cochran, Nikkole Sasso, Erin Hofseth, Kimm Mount, Christiane Butler, Michelle Lee, Connie Mulvany, Arlene Holmes, Annie Navarjo-Rivera and Dana Larsen. **CW**

Readers' Choice Awards

BEST ART GALLERY

RIVERSEA GALLERY

ASTORIA



COURTESY RIVERSEA GALLERY

Eric Wiegardt's "Anderson's Pond," now on view at RiverSea Gallery

Runner-up: Creation Studio and Gallery, Astoria; Imogen Gallery, Astoria (tie)

Honorable mention: Don Nisbett Art Gallery, Ilwaco

By RYAN HUME

Having just celebrated their 20th anniversary in December 2017, RiverSea Gallery is still rolling swiftly with the currents since opening their doors in 1997.

With prime real estate on Commercial Street near the Liberty Theatre and a thoughtfully curated, ever rotating display of both established and emerging artists, Coast Weekend readers and tourists alike continue to be drawn to this warm, vast space filled with eclectic pairings of medium and style — enough so that the people have handed RiverSea another Readers' Choice award for Best Art Gallery.

The force behind this gallery that sits just shy of where the Pacific clashes with the Columbia is owner Jeannine Grafton. Grafton's mission with RiverSea is to showcase Northwest artists in any medium — from printwork to sculpture to handcrafted jewelry.

"Ninety-nine percent of the

artists are Northwest artists," she said. Her main objective is to show the richness and diversity of the arts in the Pacific Northwest, whether the artists are at the apex of their careers or just beginning to hit their stride. "I curate variety," Grafton said. "But it has to be art with something to say."

And a lot is said upon the walls of RiverSea.

With 3,500 feet of gallery space, there are always multiple conversations afoot, ready for the viewer's attention. Grafton hosts two shows every month: one in the main exhibition space and the other in a smaller, more intimate room called The Alcove. During the winter, Grafton focuses on themed group shows in both spaces, which allows artists who may not have amassed a large body of work a chance to display their creations. Spring through fall is devoted to showing more established artists and usually only features one or two individuals.

Grafton is looking forward to a show in May 2018 featuring the work of Portland-based artist Erik Sandgren, whose prints, woodcuts and oil paintings, in Grafton's words, "reveal the mystery, the layers of history beneath the North Coast landscape." **CW**

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