

GET IN STEP

WARRENTON — There's still time to sign up for Encore Dance Studio's free community ballet class taking place Mondays through Oct. 29.

Though the first week has passed, the next class is Sept. 17. Classes take place 7:15

to 8:15 p.m. at the Encore Dance Studio in Warrenton. Registration is \$10.

The class is taught by Trixie Leone and focuses on a classical education in ballet for all abilities and backgrounds, including

some instruction on muscles and parts of the body involved in dance.

Leone's experience includes a masters of science in education, instruction and curriculum, along with 20-plus years of training in the

Classical Cecchetti Ballet method.

The classes are for people 13 to adult. Participants should have clothing they can move and dance in.

The sessions are sponsored by businesses and members of our community.

To register or sponsor, contact Encore's Gearhart office at getyouddancing@gmail.com or 503-717-1637.



COURTESY ENCORE DANCE STUDIO

Members of Encore Dance Studio's team gather for a picture at owner Denele Sweet's house in December. Pictured (from left) are Suzannah Hastings, April Cameron, Courtney Bangs, Tia Van Slyke, Trixie Leone, Denele Sweet, Erin Hofseth, Brittani Henderson, Kimmbly Mount and Nikkole Sasso.

AAUW raises awareness of dementia

Speakers will highlight prevalence, advise caregivers

By PATRICK WEBB
FOR COAST WEEKEND

Dementia will come under the spotlight in Astoria next week.

The American Association of University Women, Astoria, will host a panel discussion featuring four medical professionals.

The event, which is free and open to the public, will take place 6 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 18, in the Astoria Library Flag Room.

Speakers will be Rhonda Conrad, a nurse who leads the hospice program at Columbia Memorial Hospital; Mindy Stokes, former administrator of Clatsop Care Memory, who serves on the Clatsop Care Health District board; Dr. Tom Duncan, a family doctor who has practiced in Astoria for 30 years; and Jarrod Karnofski, a physical and occupational therapy specialist.

The event begins a drive by the AAUW to raise awareness of dementia while raising money for scholarships. The panel discussion is free, but admission will be charged for a theater production with the same theme later in the week.

Dementia is a broadly used word to describe brain diseases, most of which affect

the elderly. These cause a permanent decrease in a person's ability to think and remember. The most common is Alzheimer's, for which there is no known cure.

Symptoms may include irritability, restlessness, depression and delusions; people suffering from late-stage dementia often don't recognize family members or regular caregivers.

Some medical researchers believe as many as one in three people aged 85 or older will suffer from some degree of dementia. The British medical journal, *The Lancet*, estimates that worldwide more than nine million cases are diagnosed each year. Modern advocacy seeks ways to relieve the stress on caregivers.

"People suffering from this used to be hidden away," said Jan Horning, AAUW secretary and past president. "It's bringing more awareness and support for family members."



COURTESY AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN

Dealing with reality

Duncan welcomed efforts to support caregivers, who often are upset, frustrated and lonely — and in need of respite.

While other speakers may see elderly patients already in serious decline, his practice often sees people earlier. "The dementia process can begin in the early 30s, and there are variable rates of progress," he said.

"The problem is there's no way to diagnose dementia until it's obvious — there's no 'gold standard.' The treatment for dementia is to make their lives as good as possible, because it's not going to change."

Doctors encourage caregivers to foster physical activity. "The person will decline

faster if they don't maintain social interactions, so we deal with the family to get them to understand that."

However, upbeat TV advertisements offering drugs or treatments raise false expectations. "Since the treatment is marginal, the cure is visionary, the important thing is to deal with reality," he said. "There is denial and confusion. People cannot understand why doctors cannot cure it."

Conrad, who runs the hospice program at CMH, encounters dementia patients at the end of their lives. She said the progressive nature of the brain disease commonly triggers an accompanying physical decline.

"People with Alzheimer's walk less and less, eat less,

IF YOU GO

What: AAUW Astoria free program on dementia and mental health.

When: 6 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 18.

Where: Astoria Public Library Flag Room, 450 10th St., Astoria.

and they are in bed, so less able to do basic things, and this causes muscle atrophy," she said. "And there's the forgetfulness — you hand them a shirt and they don't know what to do."

After four years with the program, she savors its rewards.

"I find hospice to be unbelievable nursing," Conrad said. "You enter into a patient's home and become a member of the family. You help the family feel confidence to communicate with their loved one. It is a privilege."

A play on the way


In conjunction with this program, the AAUW will present its annual scholarship benefit dessert theater next

week. The staged reading features "The Father" by Florian Zeller, which focuses on the lead character's struggle with dementia and his family's reactions.

Performances will be 7 p.m. Friday, Sept. 21, and Saturday, Sept. 22, at the Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall, Harrison Avenue and 11th Street, in Astoria. Tickets are \$15, from AAUW members, Horning at 503-325-1832, or at the door.

Jan Nybakke, AAUW program chairman, said the experts on the panel were chosen to address all stages of memory care. "We want the audience to have more depth and come to the play with as many insights as we can offer," she said.

Pamela Alegria from AAUW said the dessert theater performances raise money for scholarships that the Astoria group awards to students each year.

The play will be featured in the Sept. 20 edition of *Coast Weekend*. 

"THE PROBLEM IS THERE'S NO WAY TO DIAGNOSE DEMENTIA UNTIL IT'S OBVIOUS — THERE'S NO 'GOLD STANDARD.' THE TREATMENT FOR DEMENTIA IS TO MAKE THEIR LIVES AS GOOD AS POSSIBLE, BECAUSE IT'S NOT GOING TO CHANGE."