

**VERO BEACH**

# Class for special-needs children is love in motion at Vero Classical Ballet

*The ballet class for special-needs children helping them be 'their beautiful little selves.'*

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Published 1:39 p.m. ET May 30, 2017

If you want to know what love in motion looks like, attend a ballet class for special-needs children at Vero Classical Ballet.

Watching these innocent girls dance is fodder for the soul, including 6-year-old Naomi, who is autistic, and pridefully lifts her leg during floor warm-up. Or 5-year-old Layla, who suffered a spinal-cord injury that paralyzed her from the waist down, sitting on the floor free from her wheelchair, moving her arms like a ballerina – inspiring her fellow students to follow her lead.

And the parents of these girls are grateful for the class, including Layla's mother, Christine Murphy. "Layla has always wanted to be a ballerina," she says. "This class gives her the opportunity to be one without judgment or limits. She can be her beautiful little self.

"It was so amazing watching her open up, and I loved how accepting the other girls were. When they started moving like her, I teared up. She was glowing by the end of the class. I can't wait to see how much more confidence she builds by continuing. Thank you Vero Beach Classical Ballet, you are angels on Earth."

## Vero Classical Ballet

Vero Classical Ballet is run by former professional dancers Amy and Barry Trammell, who are married. The Trammells have been teaching ballet to young girls (and the occasional boy) in Vero for the past 12 years. Through their dedication and expertise, hundreds of girls have developed into wonderful young ballerinas, with some of them moving on to the professional level.

And many of their students could not have done it without the Trammells' incredible generosity, as the couple often waives the fees of students who could not otherwise have paid for classes. The couple's livelihood has primarily depended on the tuition from paying students in addition to local grants.

In the past few years to augment their income, Barry attained his real estate license and is now a broker of Trammel Realty, which he founded last year in Vero Beach.

While finances have improved for the couple, the cost of running a school is an ongoing challenge, but that did not stop Amy from starting the special-needs class, despite concerns it would not attract enough students to make it financially viable.

The community response has been promising, and her sessions are nearly full, although Amy assures there is always room for more.

At a personal level, Amy was also hesitant because she feared she didn't have adequate experience to teach children with disabilities.

But last fall, the mother of an autistic student who was taking one of Amy's "regular" ballet classes, encouraged Amy to start a special-needs class.

To help instruct the group, Amy hired a ballet instructor who has been teaching children with special needs for 16 years, Marilyn Collins. The duo make a strong team and have created a wonderful, welcoming place for students.

## **Amazing rewards**

Now Amy is confident about her newest venture and says she has learned a lot.

"Working with special-needs children is no different than teaching children without these challenges, it just requires a little more attention, a little more patience," she says. "And the rewards are amazing. Dance helps the students with their mobility, and socially they expand because it helps build their self-esteem."

But the best accolades for the class are from the girls themselves. "I'm excited," says Skyla, who is autistic. Her friend Layla agrees. "I like it here," she says shyly.

Amy is determined to continue to give her new students all the same opportunities as her "regular" students, and to that end is going to offer them the chance to participate in Vero Classical Ballet's two annual productions.

As the special-needs class is new, they won't be able to participate in an upcoming production of "Swan Lake," which will be performed June 17 at the Vero Beach High School Performing Arts Center.

But the girls will have the opportunity to dance in Vero Classical Ballet's annual production of "The Nutcracker" in November. Amy plans on choreographing a dance that will adapt to all of her special-needs students' individual abilities, and will be part of "The Nutcracker's" famous party scene.

## **Inclusion**

The importance of including the special-needs students in performances cannot be overstated, a sentiment underscored by students like 9-year old Bella, who has mitochondrial disease and autism spectrum disorder.

Soon it will be a dream come true for Bella, and her mother, Michele Pernice, is thrilled. "Every year we take Bella to see 'The Nutcracker' by Vero Classical Ballet. Each time, Bella has asked if she can join her friends on stage and perform," says Pernice.

And Pernice is confident that Bella will be well prepared thanks to Amy's class. "When this class was offered, we knew it would be an opportunity for Bella to thrive in an environment that she has longed to participate," says Pernice.

## **Enthusiasm**

This kind of enthusiasm from parents and their children is what motivates Amy, and is the inspiration for a new long-term goal. She hopes to make her class available to other children with special needs throughout Indian River County.

The biggest impediment is financial. To that end, she plans on applying for more grants, and is even willing to get a part-time job (on top of her teaching dance) if need be.

Amy is fueled by love for her students and passion for ballet, despite the financial challenges.

"It's my calling," she says humbly.

For more information about Vero Classical Ballet and the upcoming performance of "Swan Lake", visit [VeroClassicalBallet.com](http://VeroClassicalBallet.com).