

Life in LAMORINDA

For the Love of Dance, and More

By Lou Fancher



Susan Edgren Williams Photo provided

Susan Edgren Williams has fallen in love—twice. First with dance, and second, with children. Which is why she is the perfect candidate for starting and expanding a new ballet program at Moraga's

Hacienda de las Flores. Williams is bringing her expertise to dance classes for young children through adults.

Armed with an extensive résumé and experience producing community dance events, Williams' greatest asset was acquired before the age of five. "My mom took me to the Ballet Russe, and that did it," she says. "I wanted to be a ballet dancer for the rest of my life."

Moving from Nebraska to Lafayette at the age of 11 did not reduce her ambitions. She danced with the Oakland Ballet in its early days, describing the company as "a little family who all loved to dance." While attending college, she performed and taught steadily, interrupting her dance career only once, to pour her considerable energy into creating and nurturing a family. While her three children may have pulled her from the stage, she continued to instruct, passing to them her appreciation for artistic endeavors. Now grown, her children have chosen work and hobbies in the physical or visual arts.

Williams, her nest recently empty, is turning her attention to the community. Interested in making a contribution to the thriving Lamorinda dance scene, she is developing the new program based on an academy she founded more than ten years ago in Orinda, of which she shares both fond, poetic memories—"I rented a fairy tale studio, with an antler chandelier and wisteria growing over an arched doorway," and practical ones—"I had great students there." She's part magician and part work-horse; two qualities often found in seasoned dance professionals.

Experienced with both young dancers and young-at-heart adult students, Williams is more than just a teacher. She's an educator, providing historical context, musical background and even archival videos of the great ballets for her students. She knows what's impor-

tant ("You've got to keep those little ones moving!") but also emphasizes correct training, performance opportunities and a positive environment. "They need to work hard, get the right messages, and enjoy it," she says.

Williams expects the community to learn along with the students. Ballet, where arms are like rainbows and leaps land like melting butter, is deceptive. One class will rapidly teach that buried in all the grace and ease, dance is a demanding athletic discipline. Williams, with her wise eye and gentle touch, will teach bodies young and old to stretch, sweat, and fall in love with this timeless art form.

For more information about the program, contact Susan Edgren Williams at 925-255-8391, or the Moraga Parks and Recreation Department at 925-888-7045.



Photo provided

Botanical Art Discovery

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Then photography supplanted painting and for some years, at the beginning of the 20th century, the art form became dormant. A revival movement arose in the early 1980s and in 1995 the American Society of Botanical Artists was founded. It started with 40 painters and there are 1300 of us now."

According to Watters, a painting provides a very different rendition than a photograph. "The colors are exact, the size is always

to scale and we work with a magnifying glass to capture to smallest details." But there is more to botanical painting, a spiritual quality that real artists can capture. "First you observe your plant, you don't glance over it," says Watters, "you choose what you want to represent, you smell it, you feel its energy and you capture its soul." Watters says that when she paints she is appreciative and feels complete. She has noticed the thera-

peutic effect of the art on her students, too.

The exhibition in Berkeley will run January 16-29, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. It is free with garden admission. On Saturday, January 23 from 1:00-2:30 p.m. Watters will talk about Botanical Art through the ages.

For more information go to <http://www.catherinewatters.com> and <http://botanicalgarden.berkeley.edu>.

Community Service

We are pleased to make space available whenever possible for some of Lamorinda's dedicated community service organizations to submit news and information about their activities. Submissions can be sent to storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com with the subject header In Service to the Community.

LASF Honors the Children of Lafayette with "Starry, Starry Night" Party

Submitted by Soshana Mark



The evening will gather members of the community together in order to recognize the importance of Lafayette's stellar public school system and its role in shaping the future of its students. According to Barbara Serwin, president of LASF, "Our students are part of an extraordinary educational environment. They are engaged and motivated on a daily basis by excellent teachers and caring administrators. We are proud to financially support the educational programs which mold the future leaders of our society."

LASF was founded almost 30 years ago for the purpose of raising funds to support arts and science programs that were threatened with cutbacks. As a group of committed parents responded to this call for additional support, the fledgling foundation initiated an enrichment program delivered by private instructors. Today, LASF's programs consist of art, music, science, social studies, writing development, technology and health education. Additionally, the organization earmarks about half of its budget towards school district programs and services at Lafayette's four elementary schools, Stanley Middle School and Acalanes High School

LASF has sent out its invitations for the annual event and urges everyone in the community to honor our young bright stars. Net proceeds go to secure existing district and LASF programs and services through the remainder of this school year and to minimize deficit spending. For additional information about the annual event, please call the LASF office at 925-299-1644 or visit our web site www.last.org.

The Lafayette Arts & Science Foundation (LASF) will celebrate the achievements of the children of Lafayette – its brightest stars—with a Starry, Starry Night theme. The event will take place on Saturday, January 30th at the Veterans Memorial Building in Lafayette from 6:00-9:00 P.M.

Holiday Toy and Coat Drive a Success

Submitted by Amanda Wentz

Thanks to the generosity of the Lamorinda community, needy local families will be able to enjoy the comfort of a warm coat and the joy of Christmas gifts this holiday season. Roughing It Day Camp, which sponsored the coat and toy drives, received hundreds of coats and over three barrels full of new toys during the month of December.

Items were collected for the US Marine Corp's Toys for Tots program and homeless families at the Bay Area Rescue Mission through the One Warm Coat program. Over 600 coats and 200 toys were brought into the Roughing It Day Camp office in Lafayette during the drive.

"We were thrilled by the support of local businesses, our Roughing It camp families, and Lamorinda schools in helping spreading the word" says Ann

Woods, founder and director of Roughing It Day Camp, who coordinated the drive. "We're really impressed with the large amount of donations we received from the community in these tough economic times, and would like to thank everyone for their generosity. Families from schools such as Happy Valley, Burton Valley, Acalanes, OIS, and Stanley stopped by with numerous coats and toys. Plus local businesses had office drives and some people gave parties and asked everyone to bring donations of toys and coats. People came in with large bags brimming full of coats or toys. It was amazing!"

The mission of the U. S. Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Program is to collect new, unwrapped toys during October, November and December each year, and distribute those toys as Christ-

mas gifts to needy children in the community in which the campaign is conducted. The primary goal of Toys for Tots is to deliver, through a new toy at Christmas, a message of hope to less fortunate youngsters that will assist them in becoming responsible, productive, patriotic citizens.

One Warm Coat is national non-profit organization that supports and encourages coat drives. It helps individuals, groups, companies and organizations across the country collect coats and deliver them to local agencies that distribute the coats free to people in need. More than one million coats have been provided to those in need at no cost since its inception in 1992. All coats donated at Roughing It have been given to the Bay Area Rescue Mission for distribution to local people in need. THANK YOU from all of us at Roughing It!!

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