

dance studio life

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A Little Friendly Competition

Professional association unites industry businesses for the good of all

by Kay Waters

Multi-city dance conventions and competitions have been around since the 1950s (see “Grand Tour,” September 2017). The dance convention and competition industry hasn’t, however, consistently had a professional association that could bring together competition directors to discuss shared interests.

The Association of Dance Conventions and Competitions is changing that. With 28 competition/convention members and counting (as well as 385 affiliate members representing studios, dance-related vendors, and

other business partners), the 3-year-old ADCC represents just over 10 percent of the estimated 260 U.S.-based dance competitions on the scene. But the organization’s leaders say the group’s swift growth—it launched with just seven members—reflects an industry need.

“It’s important that we collectively have some type of organization [whose members] support each other,” says Drew Vamosi, CEO and executive director of Leap! National Dance Competition and vice president of the ADCC board. “We come together and share our experi-



All photos courtesy ADCC



As part of its mission to recognize dance excellence, the Association of Dance Conventions and Competitions has awarded scholarships to dancers such as Katherine Kitzenberg (above); the group's board of directors (opposite, from left) includes Melissa Burns, Melissa R. Tessier, former member Chrisonna Anderson-Lutz, Drew Vamosi, David Sanders, Ginny Faubell, founding member Michelle Kresge, Sean Flanagan, Gina Urso-Dudash, Daniel DeFranco, and Sandra Walsh.

ences to help each other.”

The help ADCC is designed to provide includes professional and business development assistance, networking and marketing opportunities, and group buying discounts.

Daniel DeFranco, CEO of Groove Dance Competition and Convention and ADCC board president, says the Sarasota, Florida-based organization's mission reflects common concerns for people who work in the industry, regardless of the size of their companies.

“We've worked together on group rates for things like [music royalties], car rentals, and hotels,” DeFranco says. “We've worked on developing relationships that can benefit a lot of the organizations. And we have a lot of other projects in the pipeline, different things that will offer benefits for our members.”

Michelle Kresge, president and CEO of Spotlight Dance Cup and a former board member of previous industry organization the Federation of Dance Competitions, worked with Tammy Hauser to reorganize seven FDC-affiliated organizations as the ADCC. Kresge served as ADCC's founding board chair; Hauser is now ADCC's executive director.

“Our industry needed a trade organization. So we restructured so that we were a trade organization that was all

about helping the dance competition industry and recognizing excellence,” Kresge says.

In addition to working on projects such as group discounts for convention-related services, and presentations by vendors about various services of interest to dance convention and competition owners, the ADCC also sponsors college scholarships for high school seniors who participate in at least two events sponsored by ADCC member organizations. And at the ADCC's annual meetings, held in September in Las Vegas, members present awards to employees in their industry such as emcees and backstage managers.

The ADCC also presents a Lifetime Achievement Award during its annual meetings. This year's recipient was master teacher-choreographer Debbi Dee. Previous honorees included dancer, choreographer, and teacher Jo Rowan in 2016 and dance convention pioneers and teachers Art and Nancy Stone in 2015.

Competitions and conventions of all sizes are eligible to join the ADCC provided they have existed for at least two years and hold at least four events a year. ADCC member competitions can also nominate studios at the organization's events for a special Studio of Excellence Award that

“We come together and share our experiences to help each other.” —Drew Vamosi

“We have a lot of projects in the pipeline, different things that will offer benefits for our members.” —Daniel DeFranco



ADCC hosts an annual meeting for members (top, from left, ADCC vice president Lora Bertoldi, office director Elizabeth Girczyc, and president and director Melissa Burns show off the swag they collected) and has presented Lifetime Achievement Awards to Nancy and Art Stone (middle, with ADCC founding president Michelle Kresge) and Jo Rowan (bottom, with Kresge and ADCC board vice president Drew Vamosi).

includes a free affiliate membership to the ADCC. Member studios are listed in the ADCC affiliate member directory and receive marketing materials and a dance industry resource publication called *The Competitive Advantage*.

ADCC board members say the organization also offers members something they can't find in other business support groups such as their local chambers of commerce or business owner associations.

“The dance competition industry is such a unique business. There are things people experience as competition owners that are very difficult to explain to the outside world,” says Melissa Burns, president and director of Turn It Up Dance Challenge and ADCC board secretary. “If I go to a regular business networking group and say, ‘I’m a lawyer’ or ‘I own a restaurant,’ people understand what that means. But when you say you’re a dance convention owner or producer, they just look at you. They don’t know. With the ADCC, you walk into the room and you don’t have to worry about that hurdle or having to explain all that you do. They get it.”

And, board members say, even though they may be competitors, that shared understanding of the industry’s ins and outs is paramount. Vamosi says the ADCC is also positioning itself as an industry force in case there is an eventual push to require some sort of governmental regulation of the dance competition and convention industry.

“That day could come, even down to things like insurance and safety training [standards],” he says. “We are working on those things to show we are a bona fide organization with the goal of making the industry better. We don’t govern anyone. We don’t tell people what to do. We just self-govern and share information.”

Along with practical benefits, Vamosi says, the ADCC offers benefits that he considers priceless, such as the support he says he received this year after enduring a series of challenges including health issues.

“It’s been incredible to have an organization step forward to offer support. I had people [in the ADCC] offering to send people to help me. We call each other for help,” he says. “That wasn’t done before, not like that. But now it’s pay it forward; you help me and I help you. What can we do to help you out? That kind of camaraderie, it’s special.” **ds**

Native Chicagoan Kay Waters is a New Jersey-based freelance writer and part-time dance teacher.