

Dancer, Neuqua Valley graduate leaps into business at academy

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By JANE DONAHUE For The Sun

Running a business keeps Michelle Masciopinto on her toes. But for the 25-year-old dancer and choreographer, it's all in a day's work.

In June of 2008, Masciopinto made a leap from instructor to owner when she opened Midwest Edge Dance Academy, a studio offering a range of classes for dancers of all ages.

"It's amazing -- the outpouring of support we have had from the beginning," said Masciopinto. "All of these people believed in us and trusted us. We have been very fortunate."

Dancing has been part of Masciopinto's life for more than two decades. Growing up in Naperville, she danced at Neuqua Valley High School and built a loyal following of dance students while a teen instructor at a local studio. After graduating from college, Masciopinto took her passion for dance and turned it into a career.



Sisters Danielle (left) and Michelle Masciopinto review some notes before they begin teaching a group at Midwest Edge. Michelle said after years of teaching at other studios she was ready to use her experience to start her own business.

—Jane Donahue/Special to the Sun

To help with the creative side of Midwest Edge, Masciopinto joined forces with her 20-year-old sister Danielle, who is the assistant director and fellow instructor. Like her older sister, Danielle has been dancing most of her life and has been instructing aspiring dancers since she was 16.

"When Danielle and I were younger, we always knew we wanted to teach dance, never even imagining we could actually own a studio," Masciopinto said. "After years of teaching at various studios, gaining knowledge and experience, we were ready to go out on our own."

Sheri Ireland-Berk moved her daughter from another studio because of the Masciopinto sisters. The Naperville mom said at Midwest Edge, students learn more than the latest dance moves. "They expect her (my daughter) to give 100 percent during dance classes, but they have also encouraged her to be a better student, friend and all-around person," Ireland-Berk said. "They expect her to be on time, on target and focused during dance. They also expect her to do the same in all other areas of her life."

Michelle Masciopinto said her philosophy is simple.

"It's important to me that Midwest Edge has to be about the kids," she said. "Whenever I make decisions, I have that mind set."

It seems to be working. Since opening 15 months ago, Midwest Edge Dance Academy has grown to include more than 300 students.

Seven-year-old student Charlotte Lanier is learning ballet, jazz and hip hop. According to her mom, "she always wants to go to dance class."

"I love all the teachers," said Charlotte. "It's really fun."

Midwest Edge Dance Academy is at 3682 Prairie Lake Court, Unit B, Aurora. Call 630-978-0200 or visit www.mwedance.com.