

Dancing with a Dynamo

Incomparable Instructor, Maggie Francucci

by Jenna Capra

Loud, funny, and with “*more energy than a box of kittens*,” dance instructor, Maggie Francucci couldn’t stop dancing if she tried. When she started dancing at the age of five (dressed in a big fluffy tutu as the photo on her studio wall shows) she discovered a lifelong love affair with dance that has only grown stronger with time.

Born in Chicago, Illinois to Rose Marie (née Tenerelli) and Gene Francucci, Maggie grew up deeply surrounded by her Italian American heritage. Family was never far in the neighborhood and “Everyone’s name ended in a vowel,” she laughs with fond memories growing up with her older sister and numerous cousins for friends; eating Sunday dinners together, devouring pizzelle trays, and enjoying other Italian specialties and traditions. “It was always about food or religion—” she says, “—Or a lot of the time, *both!*”

After going through a divorce at a young age though, Maggie needed a fresh start away from home and ran to California. “It was a total culture shock,” she says, and without her family network next-door for support and socializing, Maggie was on the lookout for something to help her start anew. “I didn’t want to just go bar-hopping to meet people;” she explains, “That was never really my style.” Dancing, however, still was, and when she walked past an Arthur Murray Dance Studio one day, she found the way to get her feet under her again quite literally. “I went in and after I was done dancing, the owners came up to talk to me. At first I thought, ‘*Oh no... What did I do? I must have really sucked and they’re going to kick me out—*’ but they actually offered me an apprenticeship to become an instructor.”

It was an easy decision for Francucci, but a difficult road to start on as she had to work a regular 9-5 to support herself while juggling dance classes around her schedule. “People tried to talk me out of it for a long time because it was so hard, but I knew I had to follow my heart—I got to *dance!* For a *career!* The rest didn’t really matter. It was the best decision I ever made.” She maintained this lifestyle for about 12 years and never had a full dance partner which added an additional challenge, but one that ultimately worked out to her advantage. “I had to learn both parts of everything—male and female; leading and following—but it made me a better dancer and a better teacher in the end because now I can do it all!”

After Maggie moved to Colorado in 1993, she opened her own studio, “Dance Connection,” in 1995 and taught lessons out of her basement. In 2005, she was able to build a full studio onto the side of her Arvada home which she operates out of today. The beautiful space which sits behind a bright red door; boasts a large hardwood floor, wall to wall mirrors, and all the tools of the trade a student could hope for. “I morph my teaching style to fit each and every student,” Maggie says. “Some people are visual learners, others by hearing or feeling. I do whatever they need... I’ve even been known to get down and beat the tempo onto the floor if it helps!” As she guides her students around the dance floor, her style is fast, funny, and firm—she doesn’t let anyone get hung up on missteps or mistakes for long. “There is *no* such thing as failure in dance,” she says. “I’m a strong believer that anyone and everyone can dance and *should!*”

To that end, Maggie estimates that of the 40-60 private students she regularly teaches; the median age of her clients is around 60-65 years old. “We’re all aging together and I think that’s just wonderful,” she laughs. “Even if someone’s



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physical abilities are limited; we will make it work... It’s not about awards and trophies, it’s about moving and having fun; having a sense of purpose and something to look forward to while making connections... And it’s so much better than sitting on a couch!” One of Maggie’s future goals for the business is to incorporate “*Sit & Fit*” styles of dance so that she can begin to teach ballroom wheelchair dancing as well.

No matter what a student’s age, experience level, or goals are, Dance Connection’s motto is, “*Let’s Dance Together*,” and Maggie is there to help. Private and semi-private lessons are open to everyone in every style: Ballroom, Latin, Swing, Salsa, and even Country-Western. Maggie is also available to choreograph for weddings and competitions; as well as teach at parties and corporate events. Several Italian organizations in Colorado have enjoyed having her lead dance lessons at their holiday parties, and she currently helps run “Mile High Social Dances” every other week at the Sons of Italy #2075 Lodge in Wheat Ridge. “I’m always thrilled to bring dance to the Sons of Italy and other Italian groups because it supports our community and keeps it together. Our culture and traditions are our *glue*; I want to help keep that going.”

Maggie often points to Italian heritage as a big part of her passion. “It’s summed up for me in *Simpatico*,” she explains. “I never knew there was a word for me until I learned that one—but it’s the Italian way of doing everything from and by the heart; with genuine love. That’s dance for me. It’s my one true love and it’s never let me down or disappointed me... To get to share that joy with others as my career is an absolute blessing. I work all day long but there are no downsides to it. I may be tired, but I’m never lonely; and I may never be rich, but my wealth isn’t the kind that can be measured in dollars; it’s all love.”

After 34 years of teaching, Maggie has no intention of slowing down. Her lessons often run late because she is always trying to squeeze in “*just a couple more steps*” with her students and with any luck, she claims she’ll be dancing and teaching forever; “...Even if it means I drop dead someday on the dance floor!”

“I can’t help it!” she laughs, “If there’s music playing, I can’t stop—I have to dance!”

For more information on Dance Connection and the lessons and services Maggie Francucci offers, visit her online at: www.danceconnectioncolorado.com, call 303-421-1293, or email at francucci@msn.com ■

