

JT

BALTIMORE Jewish Times

'3-2-8 Hope'

Dancing for cancer awareness, prevention in Baltimore

SEPTEMBER 18, 2015 - זה תשרי תשע"ה
BY JUSTIN KATZ



THE BALTIMORE FULL CIRCLE DANCE COMPANY PRACTICES AT MORTON STREET DANCE CENTER EVERY TUESDAY AND THURSDAY. WHILE MANY OF THE MEMBERS LIVE IN BALTIMORE, SOME MEMBERS TRAVEL FROM WASHINGTON, D.C. TWICE A WEEK.

The Baltimore Full Circle Dance Company will celebrate its 15th anniversary by putting on “Fight and Flight,” a benefit concert for the Baltimore City Cancer Program, which is a part of the University of Maryland Marlene and Stewart Greenebaum Cancer Center.

Since 2001, BCCP has provided thousands of Baltimore's residents with mammograms, free clinical exams and screenings in its effort to detect cancer in its early stages.

According to the Susan G. Komen foundation, Jewish women of Ashkenazi descent are at higher risk of a mutation in the BRCA 1 and 2 genes, a condition that has been linked to causing cancer.

The dance company, which was established in 2000, is led by breast cancer survivor Donna Jacobs, who graduated from the New York School for the Performing Arts. After establishing the Morton Street Dance Center in 1992, Jacobs recognized the school had many talented instructors, but they were missing one thing.

“We had many talented dancers who were teaching but who wanted and needed their own outlet for performance,” said Jacobs. “So I pulled several together and said, ‘Do you want to perform?’”

While there has been turnover in the company, which is now 15 members strong, most of them live in Baltimore and have a bachelor's or master's degree in dance. In the past several years, the company has focused on pieces that tackle specific issues such as race dynamics, the role of religion and body image.

Jacobs explained that as she brainstormed with the company each year, one issue would always rise to the surface. However, due to how close to home breast cancer is to Jacobs in particular, her dancers were unsure about suggesting it.

“I was a bit hesitant to suggest a concert revolving around the topic of breast cancer to [Jacobs]. I didn't want to cross the line or invade a cancer survivor's space in sharing their story if they weren't ready to,” said Allison Powell, who has been with the company for eight years.

Despite hesitations the company settled on the issue of breast cancer. As a way to prepare for the piece, “3-2-8 Hope,” which is also the phone number to contact the BCCP, some of the dancers visited with several survivors of breast cancer to hear their stories at a local support group.

“I wasn’t sure what to expect going to the support group,” said Angelica Daniele, who began dancing with Full Circle after graduating from Goucher College in 2009. “It was very emotional. The women there take their journeys so personally, and they conveyed that very openly to us. They all stressed how the support of other people is what helps them get through their journey.”

After undergoing two surgeries and many radiation treatments, Jacobs understands exactly what the journey is like.

“When you hear you have cancer, things come at you very quickly and you’re trying to get over the shock. I felt fortunate about the specific cancer I had because I work within this industry,” said Jacobs, who is a vice president of government and regulatory affairs in the University of Maryland Medical System. “I could get a keen understanding quickly, but I kept in mind how complex it was for people who are not in the health industry.”

For Jacobs, her own experiences battling cancer have been a motivation to make the benefit concert for BCCP a success. Jacobs’ hard work both as a lawyer and a director has earned her the respect of her dancers.

“Donna Jacobs is something else,” said Hope Byers, who started at Full Circle in 2006. “I call her a miracle woman because she does so much. I’m in awe of what she has accomplished. She is sort of a mentor to me; I look up to her and am proud to be a part of her company.”

Apart from dancing, many members in the company are also wives and mothers.

“We went through a big boom of weddings, and now we’re in the baby boom. We call them our ‘half-full circle,’” said Powell, laughing. “We’re slowly growing our mini-company to replace us.”

Fight and Flight:

A Benefit Concert for the Baltimore City Cancer Program

*Saturday, Oct. 3, 7 p.m. Chesapeake Arts Center
194 Hammonds Lane in Brooklyn Park, Md.*

Tickets: \$20

Post-performance

reception: \$10

VIP Angels Tickets: \$50

To purchase tickets and for more information, visit fullcircledance.webs.com

jkatz@midatlanticmedia.com