

# F.S.J. dancer learns new moves in Las Vegas

**KELLY LAPOINTE**  
ALASKA HIGHWAY NEWS

Fort St. John dancer Garrette Smith is headed back to Las Vegas this November to learn dance with dancer and choreographer LJ Jellison.

Smith ventured to Las Vegas for a weekend in September to take lessons from Jellison and appear in four videos to promote his choreography.

"I felt really special to go. I thought it was a great opportunity to get that outside experience," she said.

Jellison is from Fort St. John, which Smith found to be inspirational that he can make a name for himself, especially since they are from the same town.

The choreography videos were shot like music videos where the dancers had a costume director and

people to do their hair and make up. They shot on of the videos on a rooftop, which Smith described as "very, very cool."

In the video Freak Show, Smith danced the part of the "snake lady" in a circus sideshow.

"It was really cool. I did it in pointe shoes. I just tried to make it as smooth as possible," she said.

Along with the snake lady the video features a fire breather and a bearded lady who are introduced through the ringmaster.

In return for helping Jellison promote his choreography skills, he taught the dancers a few classes in jazz, lyrical and hip hop.

"I think it's really good to have a lot of different styles. When you practice them more, the easier they become to put on to your own body and make them look good," she said.

Smith said she couldn't remember

any specific dance moves she learned from Jellison but said she learned a lot even if the classes were quite intense.

Studio 2 Stage owner Shauna Milne said it is an honour to have Jellison work with Smith, one of her dancers. She said it's nice to know the school is leading the dancers in the right direction.

Many students from the dance school have gone to work with different instructors in these sorts of capacities, something which Milne said makes dancers more versatile.

"It's is really useful, especially since we're such a small town up here to get the opportunity like Garrette had to go to Vegas to work with other choreographers and other teachers," she said.

To see Smith dance in Freak Show and the other videos visit Jellison's website at <http://dancesnob.com>.



**Garrette Smith**

# Adults dance group gets competitive

KELLY LAPOINTE

ALASKA HIGHWAY NEWS

There are an abundance of dance schools in Fort St. John, but what happens when a dancer ages out of the system at the age of 18?

Sisters Stephanie and Lindsay Schneider have started the Edge Dance Company to give experienced dancers an outlet for their creativity that doesn't require them to move away from Fort St. John.

"The way it works for dancing is you can basically compete from the age of five to 18, but after you're done high school everything just kind of stops," said Stephanie Schneider.

"I know there's about eight of us who really love performing and we miss it so it just seemed like a sensible thing to do."

She cited examples of larger centers such as Vancouver and Edmonton having dance companies and wondered why no one in Fort St. John had thought to start something similar.

"In the last couple of years there have been more dancers who stick around because Fort St. John is starting to offer more school wise," she said.

The local dance schools do offer adult classes but they are mainly beginner classes.

"We get phone calls at the studio all the time asking for advanced classes but we don't offer any," said Schneider, who works at the Studio 2 Stage Dance Academy.

The company will start practices in September at Studio 2 Stage. Schneider already has plans for the company to do its own show in May and is also trying to get the company guest performances in other shows, or in theatrical performances where dancers are needed, throughout the year.

Experienced dancers are welcome to drop by their practice at Studio 2 Stage the second week in September to see if they want to join the

company.

"We don't want to take in dancers that we'd have to train because we're only meeting for a couple of hours a week, and it's basically just to do choreography for the shows," Schneider said.

The Edge will dance in the styles of jazz, lyrical, contemporary and tap, said Schneider. There are about eight people interested in the company so far and they are having a meeting next week to see what they want to do with the company.

"Basically it's to open more doors for dancers who are still in Fort St. John to keep performing, who miss it," Schneider said.



Karleigh Smith, Shannon May and Garette Smith May recently participated in the Okanagan Summer Dance Intensive program with Ballet Kelowna.

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# Dancers hone skills in summer ballet program

**KELLY LAPOINTE**

ALASKA HIGHWAY NEWS

Fort St. John dancers recently got a taste of professional dancing after participating in the Okanagan Summer Dance Intensive program, affiliated with Ballet Kelowna.

The five-week program culminated in a show which the dancers had to audition for.

Fourteen-year-old Shannon May from Fort St. John said the show, performed at the Kelowna Community Theatre, added a new dimension to summer school.

"In normal summer schools you just

do the work, but in this one you had a show at the end, so it was fun to prepare for that one and to practice," she said.

Fort St. John dancers Garrette Smith, Karleigh Smith, Heather Nicoll, Tristen Jackman and Becca Chmelyk also attended the program, where they trained six days a week for five to seven hours a day in pointe, jazz and modern dance.

"It was nice to be busy all the time," May said. "You weren't homesick because you were always busy."

The summer ballet program was taught by professional dancers who specialize in various disciplines of

dance. Garrette Smith said the dancers talked with Fort St. John's Tiffany Bilodeau, who has been dancing with the company for four years and formerly danced at Studio 2 Stage.

"It's exciting to see someone from a small town make it and be a professional," May said.

Seventy dancers from across the country and other parts of the world were part of the summer intensive program. The dancers stayed in dormitories at the University of British Columbia Okanagan campus.

Karleigh Smith said the program allowed her to network with other dancers who liked the same types of

dance and choreography. Her dream is to pursue a professional career in modern dance.

"You don't always dance with the people who agree with the same favourite styles, so it was nice to meet others," she said.

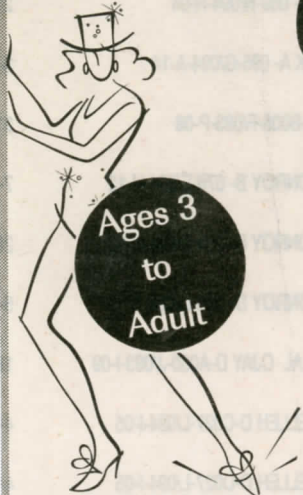
Garrette Smith said the summer intensive program was a great experience.

"I think dance in general teaches everyone a lot of things, discipline, strength, endurance," she said. "It's an expressive thing so you can always express yourself in your own way and find your own movement. It helps you find yourself."

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Submitted Photo

**Dancers from the Northern Dance Theatre Society dance troupe work on choreography for a hip hop dance with instructor Daniel Andries from Edmonton.**

# Dance dance fever

**MARGARET CAVERS MAY**  
NORTHERN DANCE THEATRE SOCIETY

It has been a long hot summer in Fort St. John, but for the dedicated young dancers of Northern Dance Theatre Society it seems like a short break from their exams in the middle of June to their annual summer school, now in its second week at Studio 2 Stage Dance Academy.

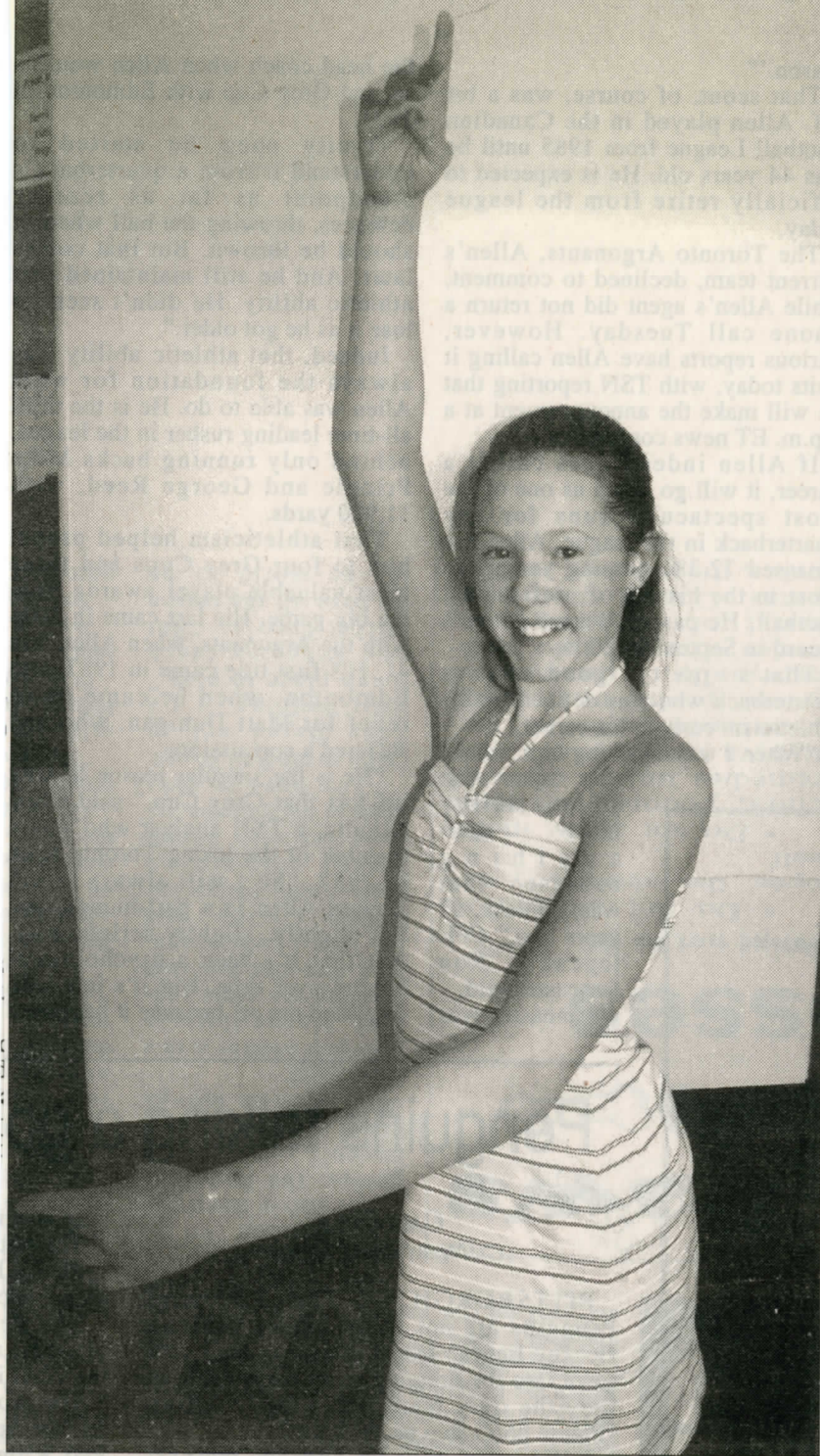
For some dancers the break has been even shorter as a number of them spent time honing their skills at out-of-town dance programs. Intermediate dancers Shianne Fairlie and Tamara Loewen had planned to attend the popular dance camp at Sylvan Lake, Alberta, where Shianne had won a scholarship that would cover her tuition. Unfortunately, this year's program was cancelled at the last minute and the girls went to Innisfail instead. There they spent a week taking classes in ballet, jazz, and tap as well as participating in other fun activities planned for the dancers. Other Studio 2 Stage dancers Garrette Smith, Karleigh Smith and Shannon May spent five weeks at the Okanagan Summer Dance Intensive in

Kelowna and Raena Shuster danced for three weeks in Hawaii. She flew all night on Sunday and arrived in Fort St. John just in time to join her friends for the second week of the Northern Dance Summer School. The main focus of both the Kelowna and Hawaii programs was on ballet. The girls spent long hours in class, followed by rehearsals which would often take them well into the evening. At the end of the schools they had the opportunity to dance alongside professional ballet dancers at two shows. In Kelowna, local dancers were excited to find themselves sharing the stage with former Fort St. John dancer, Tiffany Bilideau who dance professionally with Ballet Kelowna and dazzled the audiences at the Okanagan Summer Intensive shows.

Now that everyone is back dancing at their home studio, the dancers have been enjoying classes in ballet, pointe, modern, tap, jazz, hip hop and musical theatre under the expert direction of five visiting teachers. Old friends of the studio, Jennifer White from Vancouver and Carmelle McKinlay are guiding the dancers through their ballet exercises for the full two weeks and Lisa

Robb from Vancouver spent the first week teaching jazz and hip hop. This week Jennifer and Carmelle have been joined by tap expert Michael Boston who teaches tap at his own studio in Victoria and all the dancers are excited to welcome Daniel Andries back to town to teach hip hop. All teachers are also spending extra time on choreography for groups and individuals that dancers will perform at festivals in the spring.

The amount of time and physical effort expended over the course of a long dance season by these young dancers is impressive. A typical day at summer school may include up to four hours of class time, followed by one or two hours of choreography added to any individual choreography that can be squeezed into the busy schedule. Once summer school is over, the dancers will have a short break before regular classes start in September. Many hours will be spent in the studio working on difficult technique and perfecting the dances learned in the summer all in preparation for competitions and performances at the end of this long season.



Kelly Lapointe/AHN

**Raena Shuster will be practicing her ballet at a summer intensive program at Ballet Hawaii this July.**



# Ballet , Hawaiian style

**KELLY LAPOINTE**

ALASKA HIGHWAY NEWS

What started out as an internet search for a school project has become a dream come true for Raena Shuster, who will be heading to Ballet Hawaii in Honolulu for a three-week intensive dance camp in July.

Shuster, 13, has been dancing competitively since she was seven. She has traveled for competitions, but Hawaii will be her farthest trip yet.

Shuster sent in a DVD filmed by her dance teacher, Shauna Milne, as her audition, but never thought anything would come of it until she received an acceptance phonecall in April.

"I was going to audition just to see, and I didn't really expect to be (accepted)," she said. "When I got accepted I was just really surprised."

The Grade 9 Bert Bowes Junior Secondary student will attend classes - which will include technique, pointe, floor barre, modern, jazz and body conditioning. She said she hopes to strengthen her

body, among other things.

"I hope to make my technique stronger and maybe learn some new stuff," she said.

At the program, which runs July 28 to August 17, Shuster will be taught by professional dancers from around the United States and will learn with other dancers at the intermediate level from across North America.

"It's definitely going to take the dancing to another level," said her mother Laurie. "I just think it's a wonderful opportunity and I'm glad that we're able to support her in doing this."

Shuster's family will be going to Hawaii for the first two weeks. Her mother will remain with her until the program is over.

In addition to the opportunity, Shuster will also get a chance to perform in a full-length production of "Giselle" at the Neal Blaisdell Concert Hall with professional dancers. If she gets accepted for the production, it will add another few hours to her training schedule.

When Shuster returns to Fort St. John, she will be back in summer school at Studio 2 Stage.



Contributed photo

**David Lahaye, Artistic Director, from Ballet Kelowna held a workshop for dancers from the Peace area on Saturday, Feb. 23. Dancers from Studio2Stage, The Move Dance Centre, and Dawson Creek participated in the 2 1/2 hour workshop. Twelve of the dancers also used this workshop to audition for the "Okanagan Intensive Ballet Summer School" - a five-week on-campus program from June 30 - Aug 2. Auditions for this intensive program have not been completed so dancers will not know the results of their audition until later this Spring.**