



Teens committed to training for 2014 dance championships



Left, Chris Small and LeeAnn Farestrand prepare for an upcoming dance competition. Right, Farestrand and Sara Sklenicka practice a line dance they will perform in May in Texas.

Young dancers kickin' it for trophy

Their footwear says it all, and Sara Sklenicka, 15, and LeeAnn Farestrand, 16, hope their black cowboy boots will lead them to the United Country Western Dance Council World's Dance Championships to be held in Nashville in January 2014.

But to reach that goal, the girls have to compete in three sanctioned country-western dance competitions, and that's where they need some help. "They both are hoping for

support from local businesses or individuals because, the truth is, they need sponsorships to help cover transportation and competition costs," said Michelle Small, who with her husband, Chris, coaches the two girls.

The Smalls, Oregon City residents, teach line dancing and a

specific style of ballroom dance put to country music to "select students who are dedicated," said Chris Small, noting that he and his wife teach one day a week at the Abernethy Grange, just outside of Oregon City.

Sara and LeeAnn committed to an 18-month journey last July, Chris Small said, when they

decided to compete in the dance championships.

"They are extremely dedicated. Once they made the decision to commit to a heavy-duty competitive season, their attitudes and motivation were more focused and serious. They come to lessons prepared, and they're willing to work hard," Michelle Small said.

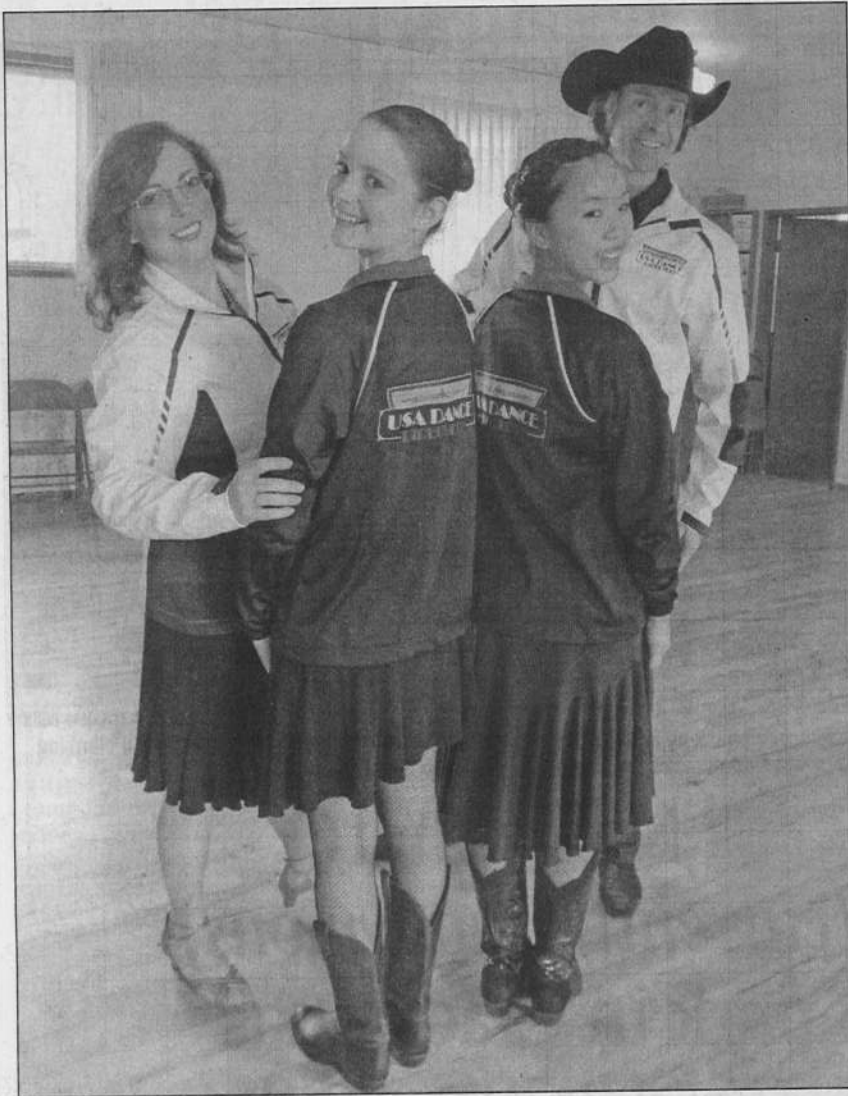
The Smalls and both girls will travel to Houston in May to compete in the Texas Classic.

Fast Facts

■ For more information about how to support Sara Sklenicka and LeeAnn Farestrand, as they set their sights on the United Country Western Dance Council World's Dance Championships, contact Chris and Michelle Small at dancingsmalls@yahoo.com.

■ For more information about the classes that the Smalls teach, contact them at the same email address.

■ They also are putting together a website, USA Dance Directory, which will be a national listing for all things related to dance.



Dancers: Girls to compete in line and classic dance styles

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The two girls will compete individually in five line dances. They also each will perform seven classic partner dances with Chris Small as part of a pro/am competition.

Michelle Small will compete in the adult division of line dancing at the Texas Classic and, with adult student Danny Caputo, will compete in the pro/am classic division.

"We will be doing showcase, so we know our music ahead of time, and the routine is specifically choreographed to that music. In this style of dance, we can use lifts, drops and tricks," Michelle Small said.

There are many competition divisions, based on the age and experience of the competitors, she said, adding that the scoring method is complex.

Michelle Small also noted that set routines are established ahead of time for the five different line dances, so all the dancers

use the same choreography throughout the year. However, she and her husband choreographed all the classic dances for the two girls.

Dance styles

The different categories of line dances are Cuban, pulse, rise and fall, smooth and funky, Sara said, noting that she likes the funky, which is based on hip hop or street dancing.

The classic dances include triple two-step, polka, nightclub, cha cha, waltz, country two-step and swing, LeeAnn said.

Her favorite styles are country two-step, because of its upbeat rhythm, and nightclub, "because it tells a story and lets you express yourself."

"This is going to be a unique experience. Over time as I got better at dancing, I became more serious about dancing competitively, and this is a good way for me to show people how much I've learned," Sara said, adding that she started working with the Smalls two-and-a-half years ago.

LeeAnn was a state gymnastics champion with Precision Elite Gymnastics in 2008, but switched to dancing nearly three years ago, because "it is so different and unique from other sports."

She added, "It is challenging because I'm not used to bringing out my emotions and showing them in a routine. Dancing allows me to find different characters and express myself."

Both girls practice at home at least one hour a day, and they work with the Smalls for five hours per week.

Chris and Michelle Small hope that both girls get community support for their efforts.

Chris Small said the girls are an inspiration, and he would like to see other young people to see that this is something they can do too.

He added, "Kids can be good at one thing, and change. We want people to see that there are other options besides soccer, tap, jazz or ballet."

Michelle and Chris Small present Sara Sklenicka, left, and LeeAnn Farestrand with their official competition jackets.

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