

# THE IMPORTANCE OF DANCE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

A discussion of dance education and exposure with Lacey Ingersoll and Traverse City Dance Project

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Dance is an art form that teaches you much more than how to move your body to music. Whether a person dances for short period of time during their childhood, continues through college, or makes it a professional career, there is no denying the lasting impact it has on an individual.

This is a sentiment that Lacey Ingersoll, owner of Fitch Dance Company, has believed her whole life. Fitch Dance Company, a dance education studio for aspiring young dancers located in Kalkaska, Michigan, has been a reputable town business for more than 40 years. This is Ingersoll’s sixth year of owning the studio, inheriting the space from her grandparents, the previous owners.

During her childhood, the studio became a second home to Lacey, and while not everyone who participates in dance ends up making it their livelihood like Ingersoll, she acknowledges how beneficial and impactful a dance background can be. “I think one of the biggest things that people take away from dance, or what they *should* take away from dance is being able to channel their emotions into a healthy outlet because there is not a lot of opportunities for kids to do that now a days,” Ingersoll says. “I think it’s really important to keep the arts alive especially in dance [form] because it is really one of the most- at least in my experience- one of the most fun ways to have that emotional release.”



Fitch Dance Company is a school that offers ballet, pointe, tap, hip hop, lyrical, jazz, and Celtic style classes. Ingersoll says she owes her dance education career to the smaller local studios around Kalkaska. Kalkaska is a small rural town in Northern Michigan with a population of approximately 2,210 people. In our discussion, Ingersoll emphasized the importance of keeping her dance studio alive and thriving for her community. “Honestly in this town [Kalkaska], we do not have a lot of small businesses, so to be able to have a studio that has been here for over 40 years feels like such a privilege even in itself. Kids love it- just to see how much they love to have that outlet and to have a studio for them in town is so important,” Ingersoll said.

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Anyone who has ever spent hours perfecting each twirl and leap, understands the important and multifaceted lessons that come with the challenge and dedication that dance requires. This is why Ingersoll encourages everyone to “give dance a try.” “I really think it’s a super important art form, and I think it’s a skill that everyone can carry throughout their lives,” she says. “I know that I use it in my day-to-day life - just the skills I’ve learned in learning dance as a child - and I think there is a genre out there for everybody, so I think everyone should try it and find something they like.”

This summer, Fitch Dance Company has been busy with summer classes and instructors working with their competition team youth dancers. Preparations for their Christmas show will be kicking into full gear early this fall. Also, at the start of this coming season, Ingersoll and her husband will soon be enrolling their son in classes at the studio, which will make him a fourth generation dancer at Fitch Dance Company. For more information, visit their website at: <https://www.fitchdancecompany.com>.





Fitch's Dance Company is just one example of local efforts to bring performing arts and culture to the more rural communities of Northern Michigan. The Traverse City Dance Project (TCDP) is a professional dance company that brings live dance performances to both rural and urban areas, across Northern Michigan, providing audiences to high- quality cultural experiences. The Traverse City Dance Project traces it origins to a New York City rooftop in 2012, where professional dancers and choreographers Brent Whitney and Jennifer McQuiston Lott planted the seeds of their vision. Motivated by Brent's desire to bring top-tier dance back to his hometown of Traverse City, Michigan, they sought to foster a platform for professional dancers, choreographers, musicians, and composers alike. Drawing from Brent's personal journey, having been introduced to the arts at a young age in Traverse City and subsequently pursuing a two-decade-long career as a professional dancer, the project aims to ensure that the vibrant communities of Northern Michigan can readily access and afford opportunities to experience the art of dance at its finest. Over the past twelve years, Traverse City Dance Project has captivated audiences with over sixty performances across a variety of settings.

While Fitch Dance Company is a school where young artists begin their journey in dance, TCDP is a professional company where artists create work together and perfect their art form, (and are paid to do it!) For every professional dancer in the world, there was a time where they went to class at their local studio or dance school. Hours are spent working on specific dance technique and skill, as well and strengthening their physical bodies to be able to execute said technique. TCDP professional dancers prepare for their upcoming tour during rehearsals with resident choreographers and composers. Their performances during their summer season serve as an opportunity for dance students to watch and experience professional dance. It is also an opportunity for everyone in the community to experience a high level of dance they may have never seen before. It is professional companies like TCDP that inspire young people to continue with their passions and pursue a career in dance.

Kalkaska and TCDP have a history of collaborating to bring dance into their communities. This year, TCDP is excited to return to Kalkaska on their 2024 summer tour for a free performance on July 28th, sponsored by the Kalkaska Downtown Development Authority. The performance will be located downtown at the Railroad Square Pavilion. In addition to the pre-show music by professional cellist, composer, and vocalist, Jordan Hamilton, there will be admission-free kids dance class for all levels and abilities at 2:00 pm by the pavilion, taught by one of the dancers. The show will then commence at 3:00 pm.



Photo credit: Susan Kettering  
Dancers: Cristian Laverde, XiaoXiao Cao, Sierra French

Following the performance, attendees are invited to participate in a Q&A session with the dancers, musicians, choreographers, and crew, providing insight into the creative process and behind-the-scenes experiences. The event promises to be a highlight event of the summer, offering a unique and unforgettable experience in the heart of downtown Kalkaska.

Kalkaska is one of six stops Traverse City Dance Project will be making this summer on tour. TCDP, like Lacey Ingersoll and Fitch Dance Company, recognize the transformative power of the arts to unite, empower, and inspire communities both big and small, and these organizations, one educational and one professional, share a passion and mission to bring quality dance performance and instruction to individuals of all ages and backgrounds.

Learn more about the Kalkaska performance and Traverse City Dance Project by visiting their website: <https://www.tcdanceproject.org/>, and follow them on Instagram and Facebook @traversecitydanceproject. Scan the QR code below for their upcoming event information.

## SUMMER SEASON 2024

July 27	<b>GLEN ARBOR</b> The Homestead	August 3	<b>TRAVERSE CITY</b> Rotary Square
July 28	<b>KALKASKA</b> Railroad Square	August 6	<b>GALA IN THE GARDENS</b> Historic Barns Park
July 30	<b>FRANKFORT</b> The Garden Theatre		
July 31	<b>CHARLEVOIX</b> East Park Pavilion		