

# THE LONG ISLAND Advance

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## State grants issued to support local arts

BY TARA SMITH

Nearly 10 years ago, a nonprofit dance organization called CoDanceCo took up residency at Frank P. Long Intermediate School in Brookhaven to introduce fourth- and fifth-graders to ballroom dance. The program, Dancing Classrooms Long Island, was inspired by similar NYC-based programs with a seemingly simple goal, to teach kids how to ballroom dance. The students are taught the merengue, foxtrot, tango, swing and waltz, with salsa added in for middle-schoolers.

Founding director Nancy Duncan explained that the program is about much more than just learning the right steps. "It's a social and emotional challenge," she said. The children dance in circles and change partners frequently throughout the 20-lesson journey. "They learn to work with all of their peers, to respect, help and understand that no matter whether you're best friends or not, you can be civil and caring for other people," Duncan added.

Frank P. Long was one of the first schools to open their doors to the program, which now hosts residency programs for fourth-, fifth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students at 20 schools in

Suffolk and Nassau counties. Grants, Duncan explained, play a major role in the organization's growth.

This year, CoDanceCo received their first ever New York Council for the Arts grant. NYSCA helps support the creation of visual, performing, literary and media arts along with education, economic development and cultural programs for underserved populations.

According to Duncan, the \$5,000 grant helped the organization expand operations for the 2016-2017 school year. "It's made it possible for us to expand the schools that we're in, support our teaching staff and help an at-risk, under-resourced school come on board," Duncan said, explaining a new partnership with Charles A. Mulligan Middle School in Central Islip.

Last week, Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone announced that 23 Suffolk County cultural and arts organizations were selected to receive \$768,890 in NYSCA grants. In total, Gov. Andrew Cuomo awarded more than \$1 million in cultural arts funding to Long Island. Statewide, over 1,000 arts organizations were selected to receive grant money totaling \$41 million. Of the 23 Long Island

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organizations, several local organizations in addition to CoDanceCo were selected to receive state funding, including the Gateway Playhouse, which received \$5,000 and the Patchogue Arts Council, which was awarded \$49,500.

Lori Devlin, Patchogue Village trustee and PAC president, said that the grant money would be put towards hiring an executive director for the first time ever, as the *Advance* has previously reported. "This is very exciting for us," Devlin said, noting that having a director would save her a lot of work as a volunteer. After announcing the new position in January, Devlin said earlier this week that they were "very close" to hiring someone to fill the position.

Scot Allan, director of development at The Gateway, said he is thrilled to see an enriched cultural scene in Suffolk. "There are many organizations here in Suffolk that are becoming icons and anchors for the county to boast about the arts," he said. He also said the art programs are a way to promote tourism and to keep the arts alive on Long Island.

Once The Gateway became a nonprofit six years ago, it became eligible for state grant money. Allan is currently working on an application for another grant opportunity offered through Suffolk County such as the Department of Economic Development and Planning, in cooperation with the Cultural Affairs Citizens Advisory Board for the Arts and the Suffolk County Motion Picture/Television Film Commission. There are three distinct funding opportunities: the Cultural Arts Competitive, Destination Downtown and the Emerging Film Festival Grant programs. "Culture and the arts have always played a significant role in the history of Suffolk County," said Bellone. "We owe it to our residents not only to preserve

this history, but to also continue investing in programs and initiatives that promote the vibrant cultural environment that has influenced our vision of vibrant downtown developments across the country."

Allan described the application process as "in-depth," and he has been carefully crafting their application, which is due next week. He declined to comment on what this year's grant funding would be used for specifically, but reiterated last year's use of a \$7,000 grant for the production of "Ain't Misbehavin'."

"We used it for that production because we felt that the jazz era and Broadway talent we were bringing on was spectacular and unique," he said. "It helped fund the artists we were so excited about having."

Allan also commented on the importance of working with government on a local level.

"The most important thing that any arts organization can do is to keep in touch with their local legislators and politicians," he said, explaining that this grant money would not be possible without the help of Legis. Kate Browning (WF-Shirley) and Rob Calarco (D-Patchogue). "Everyone is worried about presidential politics, but our local legislators and congressmen are well-connected to some great resources," he added.

"Congratulations to the Patchogue Arts Council for their award," said Calarco. "Studies have shown for every public dollar spent on the arts, between \$5 and \$10 is reinvested into the local economy. They are vital partners in our downtowns, giving visitors a quality experience," he said, adding that he is anxious to see the new projects that PAC is working on. ■