

Dancing to the top: 3 ballet students off to NYC schools

By KATIE TAMMEN | Daily News

Published: Tuesday, June 9, 2015 at 16:34 PM.

FORT WALTON BEACH — Summer will see three members of the Northwest Florida Ballet Pre-professional program jetting off to prestigious dance programs this summer.

One won't return to the Emerald Coast after she leaves, and the other two have their eyes set on a similar outcome.

Courtney Shealy, Ellie Borick and Sabrina Lobner are each headed to New York City to grow the skills they started cultivating in the third grade at the NWF Ballet Académie.

"I'm so proud of them," said Todd Allen, who oversees the local ballet. "Watching them dance up there, it's great. This is what I wish for them."

They'll each be dancing at the top ballet programs even as some of their peers head off to summer programs with the Pacific Northwest Ballet, the Next Generation Ballet and the Orlando Ballet.

All three girls credit their years at the school with preparing them for their upcoming adventures.

"It's just amazing what we have here in Fort Walton Beach, Florida," said Ellie Borick, who will attend the School of American Ballet.

Courtney Shealy, 17

American Ballet Theater

Full scholarship, plus housing and travel allowance

Courtney was at NWF Ballet when she received the email she'd gotten into ABT.

Shortly after a second email came saying all her costs were covered.

"I was crying for a good 30 to 40 minutes," she said. "I've never really had this, ever."

She'll leave June 20 for a five-week summer program along with 14 other dancers.

When it's over, she'll stay in a shared apartment and keep dancing with ABT.

Rather than get a high school diploma, she's decided to get her GED and immediately start working on her associates degree.

Ideally, by the end of the year, she'll be selected to join the ballet company.

“I still have to pinch myself every day,” she said.

Sabrina Lobner, 17

The Juilliard School
Full scholarship

Sabrina started her training with classical ballet, but quickly discovered a passion for contemporary dance.

For three weeks in July, she'll get to expand her skills through the Juilliard summer program.

“I was in disbelief because they take 22 girls and 22 guys,” Sabrina said. “All I saw was the subject line, ‘Congratulations.’”

After the summer program, she plans to return to the Pre-professional program so she is prepared to audition in the winter for Juilliard's college program. It only takes 11 girls and 11 boys.

She credits the school and her parents with helping her get this far.

“Everybody here has a support group behind them,” she said.

Ellie Borick, 14

School of American Ballet
Full scholarship

Ellie is one step closer to her dream of breaking the stereotype for female ballet dancers.

Standing at just under five-feet, Ellie is more petite than most of her counterparts, but she hasn't let it get in her way.

Earlier this year, the 14-year-old found out she'd been spending part of her summer at the school that trains dancers for the New York City Ballet.

“After the audition, they said every number could leave but me,” Ellie said.

Then one of her favorite dancers told her she was in and gave her a hug. She burst into tears.

“I came out of the audition and my mom thought I was hurt,” she said.

Ellie will return to the Pre-professional program in Fort Walton Beach in the fall unless she locks in the spot at the School of American Ballet, which would allow her stay in New York City and dance her way to her dream ballet company.

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