

## Sole City Dance

All businesses go through changes and evolve over their lifetime. A business may add new products or services, change how they deliver services and of course, adopt new technology to better serve their clients. Not a lot of businesses, however, change from being a for profit business to a non-profit business. Sole City Dance, a non-competition dance education center, did just that.

Christine Hounsell, the Executive Director, has been working in the dance industry since 1991 when she founded Rochester Movement Arts. At the same time she also volunteered with a local non-profit whose mission was the rehabilitation of the Rochester Opera House. Christine's dance company participated in the group's fundraising events while remaining a separate entity. Wanting her own business to be more community focused and inclusive Christine saw an opportunity when this particular non-profit was approaching the end of its lifecycle. Instead of going through all the hoops of forming her own non-profit she simply donated her business to the group and went from business owner to Executive Director.

The organization eventually changed its name to Sole City Dance and over the years grew in number and geographic reach. Dancers were now coming from as far away as Strafford and Sanford Maine and the board realized they needed to relocate to a larger space. The group discovered the vacant building on Route 108 in Somersworth and went for it. The new facility, located at 187 Route 108, provides a central location for their dancers and great visibility for potential new students. Sole City Dance was also able to build out the space which now includes 3 separate studios and a welcoming and spacious lobby area.

Sole City Dance offers every kind of dance you can imagine from classical ballet to hip hop to aerial. The age range is just as wide with students as young as three in the Dance Explore class to others in their 60's trying out ballroom dancing. Men, women, boys and girls are all welcome and those that are financially challenged can apply for a scholarship. Last year well over 200 students were taught by 15 different instructors each bringing their own set of skills and experience to the mix.

Sole City Dance began performing the Nutcracker about ten years ago adding a fun and unique element to the mix. "We are able to bring in new members from the community including an equine veterinarian and a machinist who had parts in one of the productions. The vet actually missed a rehearsal to perform an emergency surgery but it still worked out great. We also incorporate gymnastics, theatre and humor into our performance which makes it unique," states Hounsell.

A non-profit business differs from a traditional business in a number of ways including being required to have a board of directors. Finding a diverse and committed board can be a challenge. Sole City Dance has a small but dedicated board and are looking to grow. A Board member from the legal or accounting field and anyone with grant writing experience would be a welcome addition. "Having the benefit of multiple viewpoints and

input is great. One of the many things I like about being a non-profit is the feeling of being part of a group effort and the expansive connections you can make in the community. Of course multiple opinions and ideas can also slow down the decision making process but it is far outweighed by the benefit of the group, stated Hounsell.

Running a non-profit of any size has its own unique set of challenges. It also has the ability to bring joy to those involved. When asked what brings her joy, Christine's eyes welled up as she related stories about the positive impact dance can have on youth and especially the disadvantaged youth. She has seen many children arrive shy, insecure and without a voice. Those same children leave having found their voice and a self-confidence that they will carry with them for life.

Now that's good business.

Sole City Dance can be found at 187 Route 108 in Somersworth and on the web at [www.SoleCityDance.org](http://www.SoleCityDance.org).