

Dance for Parkinson's

Sep. 09, 2010 - by Clara Bush – buzz Writer

In 2001, Mark Morris Dance Group started a project in Brooklyn, N.Y. Five years ago, that project was brought to the Illinois area through a partnership with Carle Hospital.

“This is a wonderful example of how the arts can change lives,” Bridget Lee-Calfas, public information director at the Krannert Center for Performing Arts, said.

The project is Dance for Parkinson's Disease, a class that is taught on the second level of Krannert. Lee-Calfas said that Krannert loves the model that the Mark Morris Dance Group brings to the class for the participants. The class used to be offered just once a year in March, but a year ago it became a monthly event.

“We thought it was important for the community,” Lee-Calfas said.

Dance for Parkinson's Disease has joined forces with Dance at Illinois so that dancers can be trained in the Mark Morris technique to help with the class. For the second year, Kate Kuper, a lecturer at the University of Illinois in dance and community engagement, as well as a national workshop presenter through the Partners in Education program at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., will be teaching the class, along with Marianne Jarvi. Beverly Hillmer will accompany the class on piano.

The class is open to anyone who suffers from Parkinson's disease or any other physical mobility issue, as well as their families and caregivers.

“It's about their life,” Lee-Calfas said.

The dance class is taught much like a normal dance class. A warm up is usually conducted while sitting down, and then the same motions are repeated in the center without a barre. Then, depending on the class, a choreographed routine may also be taught. A cool down finishes off the class. All types of dance are explored in the class, from modern to tap to improv.

“It's a movement class,” Lee-Calfas said. “The intensity depends on the person.”

While she has never participated in the class, Lee-Calfas has observed many times. “I think it's really inspiring to



see the passion of the instructors,” she said. “I think that whenever we are able to use our bodies to express ourselves, it’s encouraging.”

The reason Parkinson’s disease was originally chosen is because it responds well to movement therapy, and dance is a natural extension of that, Lee-Calfas said.

“The dance class is an aesthetic experience that focuses on developing artistry and grace while addressing such Parkinson’s disease-specific concerns as balance, flexibility, coordination, gait, social isolation and depression,” the Mark Morris Dance Group’s official website stated.

The class is sponsored by many organizations, including the Unity Parkinson’s Disease Support Group and Carle Clinic. Giving back to the community is a central tenet of the Krannert Center, so the class is free.

“This is emblematic of what Krannert is all about,” she said. “We are here to serve the public and the institution.”

“Arts and community engagement is always about giving,” Kuper added.

Kuper has taught dance since 1982 and has been involved in many other community engagements. She said that teaching Dance for Parkinson’s Disease matches her needs and her desire to give.

“This work is very giving; making people feel lifted up and happy is a wonderful thing,” she said. “We walk out of every class feeling happy, peaceful and satisfied.”

The dance class will be held in the drama rehearsal room at the Krannert Center for Performing Arts at 10 a.m. on Sept. 17.

Sound Off

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