



WISE COUNTY MESSENGER

VOLUME 137 - NO. 46 WEDNESDAY, JUNE 8, 2016 DECATUR, TEXAS 22 PAGES IN 2 SECTIONS PLUS INSERTS \$1

DECATUR

Bulls win the night

Only 2 riders earned scores at J.W. Hart PBR Challenge

BY RACEY BURDEN
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In three hours of bull riding Saturday night, only two men hung on for at least 8 seconds. The night belonged to the bulls.

Quentin Vaught of Missouri walked away with the buckle and 80 points toward the PBR World Standings with the only scoring ride of the 13th annual J.W. Hart PBR Challenge. Vaught rode bull High Time for

more than 8 seconds late in the first round, to the delight of a large crowd that had watched rider after rider take early tumbles.

Vaught fell fast in the championship round, but with no other riders scoring to challenge him, took home the win.

"It's awesome," Vaught said after claiming his belt buckle. "I wish I could have got that last bull rode. I'll get him next time."

Many of the riders likely

walked away from the arena wishing for a next time, including three-time J.W. Hart Challenge champion and Decatur native Mike Lee, who missed qualifying for the championship round but walked out of the arena to some of the loudest applause of the night from the home crowd.

"It's been kind of nasty tonight," event emcee Matt Merritt said after another rider bit the dust hard. "We've almost

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TOUGH SPILL — Rider Luke Bradley misses the 8-second mark Saturday night at the J.W. Hart PBR Challenge in Decatur.

EnPointe

WISE COUNTY

Teacher fosters young dancers for more than 30 years



JOE DUTY/WCMESSENGER

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BELOVED TEACHER — Top, students swarm dance teacher Karen Smith on stage during tech rehearsal for "Sleeping Beauty" last weekend. Bottom, Smith gives a student pointers on her posture.

Karen Smith was mesmerized by the tiny ballerina as it twirled to the tinkling music of the jewelry box. She was only 4 and forbidden to be in her aunt's bedroom.

But she simply couldn't resist.

She crept into the closet, unzipped a wardrobe bag and discovered a pair of pointe shoes and a tutu. Smith gently removed the shoes and slipped them on her tiny feet.

"I put on those pointe shoes, and that's all it took," she said. "Seeing the costume, seeing the pointe shoes ... I knew what that little jewelry box girl did with them."

Her eyes still sparkle at the memory.

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WISE COUNTY

Man arrested for stealing tombstone

BY BRIAN KNOX
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A stolen tombstone was recovered last week, but it didn't lead to a suspect in the Ball Knob Cemetery vandalism case as investigators had hoped.

It did, however, lead to a felony arrest of a Decatur man.

Wise County Sheriff Lane Akin said he was contacted by the Decatur Police Department last week after they located a stolen tombstone bearing the last name of "McCright" after acting

on a tip.

Akin said the tombstone dates back to the late 1800s.

Wise County investigators processed the tombstone for fingerprints, and the investigation led to a suspect: Ralph Hunt, 24, of Decatur.

"Our investigator talked to Ralph Hunt, and he admitted to stealing the headstone," Akin said. "But instead of being from Ball Knob, it was from Deep Creek Cemetery."

Hunt was charged Monday with the state jail felony charge of criminal mischief.

See Hunt on page 7



HUNT

GREENWOOD/SLIDELL

Under construction

Fire hall project slow, but steady

BY DAVID TALLEY
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Adam North's to-do list just keeps growing. The Greenwood-Slidell Fire Department chief has a running list of jobs needed to complete his department's new fire hall.

"I've got my notes on my phone full of stuff," North said, "like when I think of it I just jot it down. We have volunteers that come up when they've got time, so

we've got a checklist on a white board with what we need to do and what we've done. The other night they came up and finished out all the insulation. We've still got a lot of work to do."

The department purchased a portable building in January after its previous home, an old church, was declared unsafe by insurance adjusters in November. Firemen have been meeting next door in the metal build-

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CHEVROLET



En Pointe



OFFERING ENCOURAGEMENT — Karen Smith laughs with students during a rehearsal break.



STORY BY KRISTEN TRIBE
PHOTOS BY JOE DUTY
LAYOUT BY TODD A. GRIFFITH

Continued from page 2

In that moment 54 years ago, a passion for ballet was imprinted on her heart. It led her from her Pennsylvania hometown to the stage of Texas Christian University and the spotlight of the Fort Worth Ballet.

And finally, to Wise County where she has instilled that same passion in young dancers for 31 years.

The Denver Post, the department became “one of the best training grounds in the nation for ballet and modern dance during his tenure.”

Smith thrived under Schaffenburg, dancing under his direction with the Fort Worth Ballet, which later became Texas Ballet Theater, and graduating in 1981 with a bachelor of fine arts in ballet perfor-

concession. One of the horses died.

And Smith broke her back.

“The vertebrae L3, 4 and 5,” she said. “I crawled out, and I remember I had a big gash on my arm, and that got my attention right away. (My back) didn’t start to swell or anything right away, but then the doctor took X-rays.

“It was really hard going and watching a ballet after that,” she said, her eyes filling with tears. About a year later, she did so and cried throughout the entire performance.

“I didn’t think I could ever go watch another one,” she said. “I don’t even remember what ballet it was because I had tears in my eyes the whole time.”

Smith’s husband and boys were not injured, and although she could

School in 2001.

After college, she returned to Wise County to teach with her mentor.

“She’s my other mom,” Browning said, “and now I get to work beside her and learn from her and see what she does for other people, then put my own perspective on it.”

Browning said she most admires Smith’s combination of patience and demand for excellence.

“She’s so patient and loving and kind, but she wants you to be the best that you can be. She pushes you.”

In an effort to give her dancers a more complete experience and introduce ballet to the community, Smith began putting on productions, instead of traditional recitals, almost 15 years ago.

The 14th annual production, which this year is “Sleeping Beauty,” is this

sia,” “Arabian Nights” and “Pocahontas.”

Smith picks the music and choreographs every production.

“I never wanted to do the Disney versions,” she said. “I would either go back to the story or the ballet version.”

Each ballet is choreographed to showcase the talent of that particular cast, from the tiniest dancers to the advanced, who have the lead roles.

Preparation is a year-long extravaganza with auditions for the advanced dancers, costume fittings, portraits, prop building, not to mention hours and hours of rehearsals.

Smith said the production is not only a product of her dancers, but also of numerous volunteers and parents who make a commitment to see it through until June.

For the last several years, former dancers, who are now adults, have returned to be part of the production.

Clarissa Galindo, 23, danced for Smith from age 5 through high school, and she’s returning to the production for the first time this year.

“This was home for me,” she said.

Galindo described Smith as encouraging and said she offers constructive criticism in a loving way.

“There’s something about the way she encourages people, even if it’s not in dance,” she said. “I just remember being told how smart I was and how she thought I was going to do great things.”

It’s a sentiment echoed by almost every student, which reflects Smith’s consistent style and true love of the art.

When she slipped on those ballet shoes for the first time as a little girl, the curtain opened on her career. Little did she know so many would follow her to the stage.

In their own words...

“I love Ms. Karen’s ability to pick out the good in everything. She’s very patient, and she has such a sweet heart. I also love her wonderful cackle.

One of my favorite things about her teaching is her ability of constructive criticism. She’s really mastered that talent.”

— Cara Solis

“When you’re injured, she makes sure that you are 100 percent OK before you do anything that will hurt you. Ms. Karen is a great ballet teacher because she can push you to the limit.”

— Megan Griffith

“I love her patience with not only me and my friends, but with all the younger kids who are trying. I also love that she puts up with all the ridiculous things we put her through.”

— Miranda Blaylock

“My favorite thing about her is her passion for dance and all of her kids. How she loves each and every one of us is encouraging and pushing us to do better even when it seems all odds are against us. Karen is a wonderful mother figure and even better teacher.”

— Hannah Solis

“We’re in a small town but she brings us the education that people in bigger schools get every day, and that’s just really special to have in a small county. It’s an awesome thing.”

— Mallory Middleton

“She doesn’t always focus on one person. She focuses on all of us. The goal is with each combination for all of us to look the exact same. She sees more potential than we see in ourselves.”

— McKenzie May

“She cares about our dancing skills, but she cares more about how we’re doing. She cares about our feelings and if we’re hurt. She cares, and she doesn’t tell you that you have to keep doing it no matter what. “She would put all of her dancers before herself at any given moment.”

— Sara Lowry

Photos courtesy of Portraits by Renitta

I put on those pointe shoes, and that’s all it took.

— Karen Smith

Becoming a ballerina

Shortly after trying on those slippers for the first time, Smith began taking ballet classes at age 5. She briefly took jazz and tap dance lessons but became more serious about ballet when she turned 11 and her family moved to Pennsylvania.

Smith reluctantly admitted to quitting ballet “for a boy” while in high school but returned after a year because she missed it so. A few short years later she landed a dance scholarship at TCU, and although she had never been to the Lone Star State, she and now husband, Robert, set out on a grand adventure in 1976.

“We drove down in a Ranchero, mostly full of plants and records,” Smith recalled with a laugh. “I remember being in shock when I moved here.”

She loved the university, but the heat, humidity and bugs tested her tolerance.

“It came down to a short list, and TCU gave me a scholarship,” she said. “That was good incentive, and I think I wanted to get as far away from Pennsylvania as possible.”

It didn’t hurt that TCU was known for its dance program either. Fernando Schaffenburg, who danced with the American Ballet Theater in New York City, the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and the Ballet of the City of Mexico, was department head. According to his 2009 obituary in

mance. She also danced for the Fort Worth Opera.

About the time of her graduation, she became pregnant with her first son, Austin. She continued taking class until the day before she delivered and over the course of the next two years, prior to the birth of her second son, Coleman. Schaffenburg hired her to teach, and upon his resignation as director, she was preparing to audition for the new director when tragedy struck.

Devastating injury

On July 4, 1986, Smith suffered injuries in a car accident that ended her professional dancing career.

She and her husband were hauling horses into Chico from their nearby home for a Fourth of July parade.

“At the last minute the truck we were taking wouldn’t start, and he had to change trucks, change the horses in the trailer to adjust for the weight ... we weren’t that far from our house,” she said. “The horses started kicking each other, and the trailer started fishtailing.”

Smith and a friend were riding in the bed of the pickup. Her husband and boys were riding in the cab.

The pickup and trailer overturned with the pickup landing upside down over a ditch.

“I landed with the tailgate across my spine, and if I wasn’t in that ditch, I would have been cut in two,” Smith said.

Her friend suffered a

no longer perform professionally, she took comfort in the fact that she could still teach.

Her recovery was slow and painful, but over time her broken body was restored.

Putting students first

Smith had begun teaching in Wise County the year before her accident. She taught classes in daycares before opening her own studio, now Wise Ballet and Music Academy, in the late ’80s.

Her favorite part of teaching is watching the children grow.

“I have a unique job in that I get them when they’re 3 and have some until they’re 18,” she said.

Jessica Browning, who teaches with Smith at her studio, is one of those students. She began taking classes from Smith at age 4 and continued until she graduated Boyd High

Wise Ballet and Music Academy and the Wise Performing Arts Guild presents “Sleeping Beauty” 7 p.m. Saturday, June 11, and 3 p.m. Sunday, June 12, at the Decatur High School auditorium.

The cast includes: Kirsten Shaw as Princess Aurora, Mallory Middleton as Carabosse and Omar Bojorquez as Prince Désiré.

Fairies are Sara Lowry, Hanna Huya, Blayke Kent,

Miranda Blaylock, Claire Hutchison, Sahara Verner and Cara Solis.

Tickets can be purchased online at tututix.com/WiseP-AG. They will also be available at the door.

Dancers present ‘Sleeping Beauty’



KIRSTEN SHAW AND OMAR BOJORQUEZ
Photo courtesy of Portraits by Renitta