

Ben Twingley/btwingley@pnj.com



ABOVE: Joseph Howell dances with Jeannine Miller Pritchett in the late 1940s.
AT LEFT: Young dancers rehearse a dance routine at Bernice's Starrstep Dance Studio in preparation for tonight's 80th Anniversary Celebration Recital.
BELOW: Bernice Burlingame, who founded the dance studio in 80 years ago, is shown in this photograph from 1943.



Photos special to the News Journal

LEGACY OF LOVE

Bernice's Starrstep Dance Studio celebrates its 80th year

Rebecca Ross
ross@pnj.com

In front of the long mirror, little girls twirled, watching each other instead of their patient instructor. Next door, a group of senior citizens shuffle-stepped through a tap routine, throwing out teasing remarks in time to the music.

Surrounded by the familiar bustle of her dance studio,

Starr Burlingame wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

"This is my home, and these people are my family," said the owner of Bernice's Starrstep Dance



Burlingame

See DANCE, 5E



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Senior tap dancers, from left, Anita Lehmann, Tom Lehmann, Martha Simpkins and Gordon Towne rehearse.

SUNDAY ETC.

Dance

FROM 1E

Studio on West Scott Street. "I can't imagine life without it."

Today, the studio will celebrate its 80th anniversary with a special recital.

Dancers from 3 to 83 will grace the Pensacola High School Auditorium stage in a rhythmic representation of Starrstep's long history.

Burlingame, 56, considers the dance studio — Pensacola's oldest — her legacy.

Her late mother, Bernice Miller Burlingame, founded it 80 years ago in the family's backyard garage. There, the 11-year-old taught her first ballet class to a group of neighborhood children.

"Bernice absolutely loved teaching," said Burlingame's 77-year-old sister, Jeannine Pritchett. "From a very early age, that's what she wanted to do."

Bernice Burlingame discovered her lifelong passion after contracting typhoid fever at age 7. Encouraged to take dance lessons to strengthen her leg muscles, the little girl proved to be a gifted performer.

Her backyard dance studio blossomed during World War II, when military families sought lessons for their children, and soldiers came looking to learn the latest dance steps.

"They wanted to learn how to dance with the girls," Pritchett explained, laughing. "Our place became a home-away-from-home for those young men. The pilots used to buzz our house to let us know they were coming for



dinner."

Eighty years later, more than 200 dancers of all ages learn everything from ballet to hip-hop at the colorful studio. Starr Burlingame, who grew up dancing at her mother's side, said that many are fourth generation Starrstep students.

"It truly is like an extended family," she said. "Grandparents who learned from my mother are attending their grandchildren's recital. Some who learned to dance here as children are now

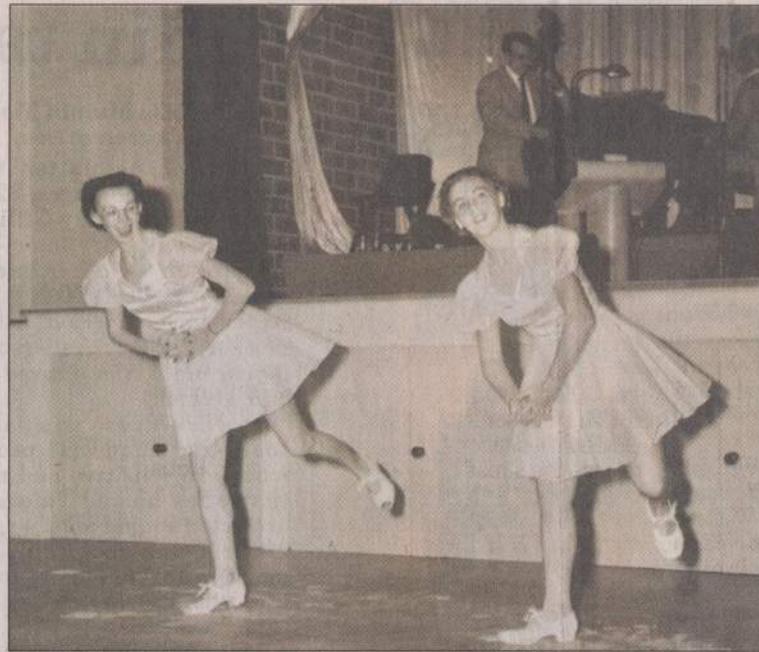


Martin

Bernice Burlingame, who taught her to tap dance, as "the most precious person you can imagine."

"My mother used to have to

ONLINE Visit pnj.com for more photos from Bernice's Starrstep Dance Studio.



Want to go?

■ **WHAT:** Bernice's Starrstep Dance Studio's 80th Anniversary Celebration Recital.

■ **WHEN:** 3 p.m. today.

■ **WHERE:** Pensacola High School Auditorium, 500 W. Maxwell St.

■ **COST:** Admission is \$6.50 per person.

■ **DETAILS:** 438-2010 or starrstepdancestudio.com.

LEFT: Bernice Miller Burlingame and Jeannine Pritchett dance. Burlingame started the studio in 1929.

Photo special to the News Journal

FAR LEFT: Young dancers rehearse a dance routine at Bernice's Starrstep Dance Studio. Dancers from the studio are preparing for their 80th Anniversary Celebration Recital on June 6 at Pensacola High School's Auditorium.

Photo by Ben Twingley/
btwingley@pnj.com

drag me out of the studio," Martin said, laughing. "I never wanted to leave. I still don't."

Bree Stewart, 26, can understand the feeling. The Pensacola resident began taking dance lessons at Starrstep at age 3, and will perform in today's recital.

"It's a great place," Stewart said, glowing after an energetic rehearsal. "There's

no competition or pressure to be perfect. Everyone is here because they love to dance."

For Starr Burlingame, today's recital is a way to celebrate the studio and her mother's legacy.

"She touched so many people's lives," she said of Bernice Burlingame, who died from cancer in 1989. "I'm very proud to carry on her work. It's my life."