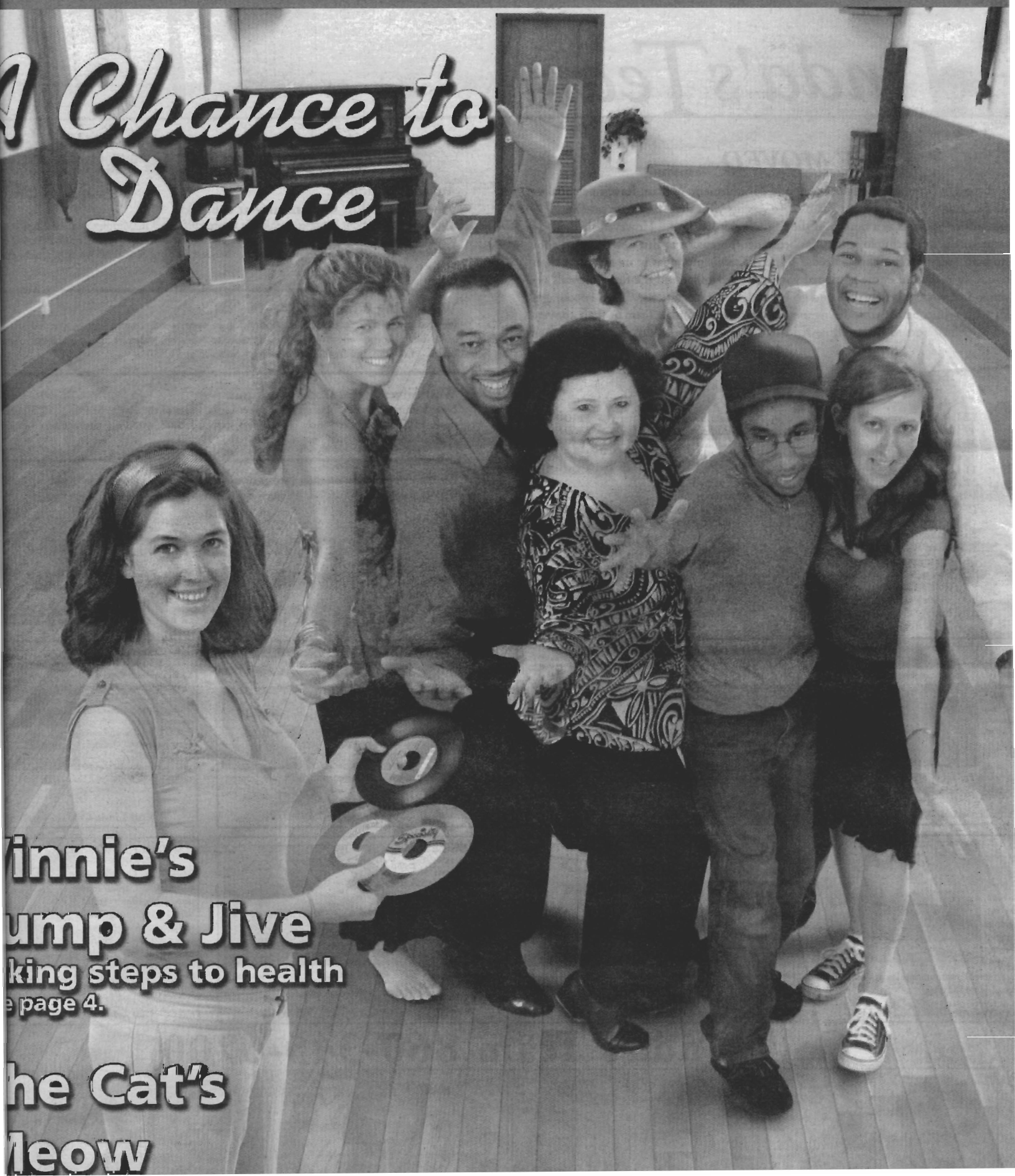




A Chance to Dance



**Winnie's
Bump & Jive**
Taking steps to health
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**The Cat's
Meow**

Vinnie's Jump & Jive promotes good health, community spirit through dance

By Pamela Wyatt

ington sang, "It don't mean a thing, if at swing!" Vinnie's Jump & Jive on downtown Middletown is the place to go. In the bright and airy studio, you'll find an experienced instructor, make sure you express yourself through dance. To they have swing, they also have B-Girl, belly dancing, Nia, salsa, and many others. But there is something more than meets the eye.

Vinnie's Jump & Jive is a project of the Health Center, Inc. The CHC offers social and support services to those in Middletown.

She is the president and CEO of the organization, Jennifer Alexander, City Children's Museum, had been one evening and as they strolled towards, they thought how wonderful Middletown to have a dance hall. Vinnie's Jump & Jive was born shortly thereafter and they haven't looked back since.

She says that "we're more than a dance studio, we're a fitness club, social service provider, healthcare provider, nightlife club support organization all in one." Vinnie's Jump & Jive has been the director at the Health Center since 2005. She acknowledged, "Vinnie's Jump & Jive, they rarely realize it's part of a dance studio that has a great place to be." Vinnie's Jump & Jive work they have done in the healthcare prevention of several new obesity prevention programs throughout the state.

Vinnie's Jump & Jive also wears many hats. She is a member of the Community Health and Wellness Center, which includes the Mobile Dental Program, Vinnie's Jump & Jive Family Wellness Center, the Recess Rocks, and Recess Rocks. She complements the work done by the Health Center. "The CHC has been making a difference in the lives of 35 years and

and grow the downtown nightlife is a part of that mission."

"All kinds of dance. All kinds of people." This is the motto at Vinnie's Jump & Jive. In the past two years, they have had nearly 2,500 people participate in the programs. From B-Boy/B-Girl, line dancing and Nia, to tap, salsa, swing, jazz and belly dancing, Vinnie's truly has something for everyone. All ages are included, from pre-schoolers to teenagers to seniors.

The wide appeal is what Farnsworth is most proud of. She has a great group of teachers working with her and having worked as a dance teacher herself, is pleased to be able to use Vinnie's as a place where teachers can grow their businesses, get regular referrals and find support. This helps to keep the teachers and the classes at Vinnie's constant and stable, which is good for the students. That being said, they are also always trying out new things and are always trying to add to their existing repertoire of classes.

Lynn Agnew is a tap and jazz teacher at Vinnie's. She is very enthusiastic about the accomplishments of her students and feels Vinnie's "is a wonderful thing for the community."

Bryan Giles is the instructor of the B-Boy and B-Girl classes, and is proud that his students "take away a sense of confidence and pride" from his classes. Giles also feels Vinnie's enables the residents of Middletown to find a "common ground with each other even though we can be very different." B-Boy and B-Girl is a type of breakdance that combines a variety of dance forms with gymnastics.

Gia Khalsa likes to "foster the connection between women and their bodies, creativity and each other" in her belly dancing classes and feels Vinnie's is a very down to earth place that brings "dance, diversity, creativity and fun to the community." To learn more about the many offerings Vinnie's has, visit www.vinniesjumpandjive.com.

Online, you will find a full description and schedule of classes. There are also videos and pictures to give a good feel of the atmosphere and an idea of what to expect when you attend a class. They also hold weekly or monthly events. Most weekends, you will find either swing or salsa

Girl ciphers with DJs spinning the tunes.

These dances are very popular and usually start with a beginner lesson followed by the dance event. They usually have 60 to 100 attendees! You can also sign up for the monthly newsletter online which will keep you informed of all upcoming events.

In the past year, Vinnie's Jump & Jive has participated in a number of outreach programs, including running a dance social for the Kindergarten at Moody School. They also run a dance program called Recess Rocks at many elementary schools to help keep kids active during the winter. They have teachers and students who perform for events such as a DCF foster care family dinner in Middletown, Alex's Lemonade Stand fundraiser in Hartford and, in August, a swing performance at the Griswold Museum.

Vinnie's dynamic teachers are also preparing for a September fundraiser that will feature performances showcasing all of the different styles of dance they offer. More information on the fundraiser will be available on the Website.

The prices for classes and events at Vinnie's range between \$3 and \$15. The low prices help to make dance accessible to all. Community outreach events are almost always free of charge to participants. The dance hall is hosting an outdoor swing event on Aug. 23 at the Middlesex Mutual courtyard as part of the CHC's Summer Concert Series, which is sponsored in part by the Middletown Commission on the Arts.

"During that event we'll have performances and free lessons and a free live band," Farnsworth said about the swing event. She is committed to bringing the joy of dance to as many people as possible and said, "We always try and find a way to make it happen, regardless of financial restrictions. We are able to do that because we work hard to keep our costs low and our schedule full."

Being nonprofit, a part of the CHC and applying for grants also helps support the operations.

There are currently no plans for additional dance halls to be opened through the CHC, even though some people drive almost two hours to reach Vinnie's, but you never know what the