

Something for Everyone

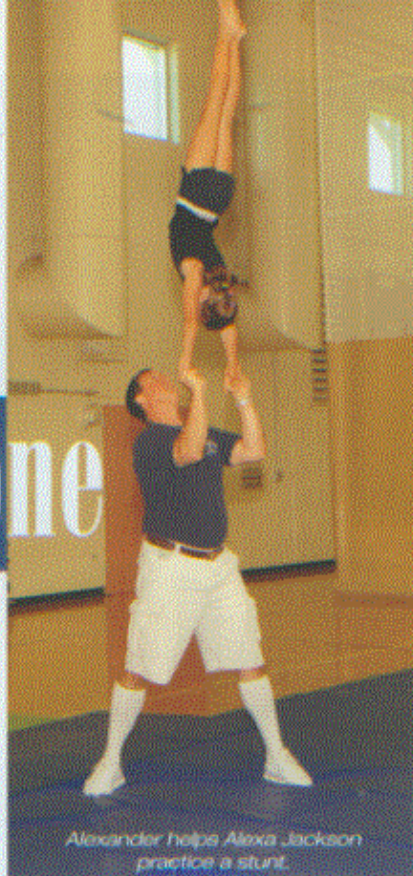
— By Mary Pritchard

On the bulletin board near the reception desk at the Cedar Hill Recreation Center is a large poster advertising Alexander's School of Acrobatics. Alexander Douglas of Cedar Hill teaches these classes three days a week. "Stunt (or acrobatic) gymnastics is gymnastics performed on the floor and on each other," Alexander said, "whereas Olympic-style, artistic gymnastics is performed on bars and other equipment."

"Stunt gymnastics is a team sport," Alexander continued, "so it has the advantage of helping kids learn to work together and to get along." This, in turn, helps prepare the young people for functioning well in the adult world.

Alexander got his start in artistic gymnastics as a high school student in Danville, California, where he grew up. After graduation, and while attending college in Seattle, Washington, Alexander was introduced to stunt gymnastics when he performed in various theatrical venues including The Floating World Circus. It was there that Alexander saw the potential in stunt gymnastics.

In 1984, Alexander went to New Jersey. While coaching acrobatics there, he saw Igor Ashkinazi, a Russian Jewish immigrant who had performed with the Moscow Circus, in his appearance



Alexander helps Alexa Jackson practice a stunt.



John Mark Moran and Seth Michael Moran learn to depend on their teammates as they perform stunts like this one.

on The Mike Douglas Show. Alexander called Igor, who was not interested in helping him then, but in 1985, when Igor started a new program in New Orleans, "He told me to come on down," Alexander related.

Igor trained Alexander as part of an elite, mixed pair in sports acrobatics for the 1986 Nationals, where Alexander was a silver medalist on the regional level. Igor, who had become a Jewish Christian, led Alexander to Christianity. In order to get his religious bearings, Alexander quit training and came to Dallas in 1990. "I attended Christ For The Nations Institute and got a degree in practical theology," he said.

Another life change occurred in 1992, when Alexander was invited to a Fourth of July picnic, where he met Linda Jerritts. They were married the next year and have made Cedar Hill their home.

Alexander decided that gymnastics was a more appropriate ministry for him, rather than the pulpit. "My goal was to be in theater acrobatics, but my priorities changed. The most important thing to me now is the kids," Alexander explained. "They are the next generation

of leaders. It is the responsibility of this generation to prepare the next one."

When asked to define success, Alexander said, "There is success in training to win and to make money; but for me, success is in helping kids to become healthy, wholesome, disciplined adults — ones who can get ahold of their destiny."

"The gymnastics industry has had some bad press — some of it legitimate," he explained. "Some coaches were abusive, especially in the 1980s, when they were more interested in what they could get out of it. Many more coaches understand the import of the sport on families. Indirectly, I am a servant to the parents. I am helping both [children and parents] to realistically understand what kids are capable of and keep their talents in perspective. Gymnastics is not a measure of their worth," Alexander continued. "I encourage kids to try different sports — one at a time — to get a sense of where their talents lie, then commit to that sport."

When asked what he expected of his students, Alexander said, "I expect faithfulness to the time they sign up for

Stunt gymnastics depends on partners showing up. I ask for a one-year commitment for competition gymnastics students. If kids can learn to commit, they are more likely to finish college or stay married. If you quit, you cannot succeed," he stated. "I'm always trying to get kids to see the positive."

Alexander began coaching with Trevino's in 1995, and left there in 2006 to come to the Cedar Hill Recreation Center. At Trevino's, he coached the first competition acrobatic team in Texas. "Carly Patterson's coach, Evgeny Marchenko, was a world-champion, mixed pair gymnast in Russia before he coached artistic gymnastics in the U.S.A.," Alexander said. "Now, a former student of mine, Brandy Lewis, coaches an acrobatic gymnastic team in a group overseen by Evgeny."

The enthusiasm of Alexander's bright-faced, young students testifies to his rapport with them. Kriscian Summers, 10, said, "Our mother asked my brother and I if we wanted to take a break for summer from gymnastics, but we said no, because we love it so much." Joshua Lyons, 11, and his 13-year-old brother, Daniel, of Grand Prairie, left the program they were in to come to Cedar Hill. "This program teaches more acrobatics and stunts," Joshua enthused. "It is more of what we had hoped for in gymnastics."

Sisters Alexa, 10, and Christa Jackson, 6, of Glenn Heights, said they started gymnastics during the summer and will probably continue into the fall. "I've learned stunts I can do with Christa at home," Alexa said. Linda Caster, mother of students Jade and Grace, is happy that Alexander offers a homeschool class that meets on Tuesdays at 11:30 a.m. "I like doing this in the daytime, when it is not as crowded," she said. Other students include cheerleaders wanting to improve their skills. It seems that Alexander's classes offer something for everyone. **STAY**

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