



Community Health Center And Vinnie's Jump & Jive

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Vinnie's Jump & Jive in Middletown has an interesting distinction. It's the only dance hall in the whole nation that is run by a community health center. They have a full schedule of classes throughout the week and weekend that cater to a wide variety of people.

In fact, the motto of Vinnie's is "All kinds of dance. All kinds of people." A lot of forms are offered such as Nia, NY Salsa, Yoga, Jazz, and many others. There are a few different Yoga classes available such as Hot Vinyasa and Yoga & Meditation. Some classes are drop-in while others are monthly or broken into sessions.

Vinnie's has been open for almost ten years. What was the idea behind it? It actually started with a question: Why don't people dance anymore? This was in reference to dance being a very social and physical activity many years ago and the popularity of it dying out of the mainstream. However, maybe it wasn't that people had no interest in dancing but instead they had nowhere to dance. That's where Vinnie's came in.

As Julie Deak, the program coordinator of Vinnie's and the Community Health Center, explains it, Vinnie Amato was a local business owner who got behind the dance theme. For many people it's been a great decision.

What does Deak think draws people in? Well, there are two parts to that answer. First, people have to know what is available to them at Vinnie's. It is accomplished mostly by word of mouth, ads, a Facebook page, and an e-mail list.

Second, is the retention of people who step in at least one time. Deak believes that Vinnie's does a good



job of retaining these people. The reason: the instructors. According to Deak, they have quite a lot of experience but more importantly, they are warm and welcoming. They draw people in and help bring them to where they want to be regardless of their previous experience with a given dance. This can be seen by the "die-hards" who come week after week and also by the people who start in one class and then try to perfect another form because they enjoy the atmosphere of the hall so much.

Deak should know what the community is looking for as she has been with the Community Health Center for eighteen years. She even points out that the word "community" is indeed a very strong part of the center as a whole. This is applied to Vinnie's as they have offered dance classes for the elderly, children, and people with Parkinsons disease among others with special needs.

While Deak provides a lot to the community, she also gets a lot out of it. She says that she loves bringing people into Middletown by creating opportunities for them and that she enjoys working with like-minded individuals.

One of Deak's favorite parts of working at the Community Health Center leads to other ventures of the center. She enjoys seeing people have fun and be healthy. That is where the Recess Rocks campaign comes in. It is now a national initiative to prevent childhood obesity that was started in Middletown. As Deak says, "Kids love it. They eat it up." She isn't referring to them actually eating. To the contrary, they are excited about learning to be healthy. Another factor leading to their enjoyment is that the campaign talks directly to them. It's not about assuming what kids want but instead getting it right from their mouths. They come up with ideas to stay healthy.

The campaign focuses on recess but is more than that. It's a whole lifestyle that is focused on. Continuous movement and eating healthy are encouraged. The campaign is working as evidenced by its national attention and by all the schools jumping on with the initiative.

Looking at Vinnie's and the Recess Rocks campaign it is easy to see that the Community Health Center has built up a big following. People travel good distances to dance at Vinnie's to practice a dance that isn't available elsewhere. Now, Recess Rocks has travelled even greater distances to have an impact on kids all over the country.

For more information on Vinnie's go to their website at <http://www.vinniesjumpandjive.com/>

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