

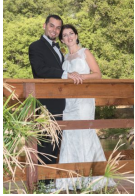
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JHS ~ One Look Back, Two Looks Forward

## Celebrating 30 Years Of Dance



Griffin is shown in 1987, with her first dance class. Photo Courtesy of Ramona/Julian Academy of Dance

By Angela McLaughlin - Ramona Home Journal • Thu, Jun 15, 2017

An art form, a method of expression, a fun way to work out — dance means different things to different people, and the diverse styles of dance allow for an individual's creativity and imagination to come alive.

Established in 1987 by Kristi Griffin, Ramona/Julian Academy of Dance will be celebrating 30 years of bringing dance to Ramona and Julian. It was originally established in Julian as the Julian School of Ballet, and the Ramona location opened a few years later.

Griffin began dancing at the age of four, starting with ballet. With extensive experience in dance and theater, she decided to turn something she loves into a career.

"I just fell in love with it — it's my passion," she says. "If it's your passion, it's never a job."

RJAD offers classes in many styles of dance, including classical ballet, tap, jazz, pointe, hip-hop and many more. With 27 instructors, the academy educates students ages two through adult, and presents several group fitness classes in addition to dance.

The studio recently welcomed two new teachers, Tanya Durbin and Cathy Kiefer.

Durbin is a former professional ballerina from Orange County who comes with a long list of credentials. Griffin says she is "hailed as one of the best and most sought-after ballet/pointe teachers in Southern California."

Kiefer has extensive ballet training from both San Francisco Ballet and American Ballet in New York City. She taught at RJAD before she relocated, and Griffin says, "Cathy is thrilled to be returning to RJAD where her teaching journey began!"

The studio has been honored with many awards, including a California State Senate Certificate of Recognition in honor of best dance studio in Ramona, and Disneyland's "Most Spirited" studio at Summer Dance Classic. It has also earned multiple regional and national dance competition awards, such as Grand Champion, Top Studio, Top Choreographer, Sportsmanship, Show-manship, Most Entertaining, Outstanding Technique and Kindness awards.

"We hope to keep growing and giving these kids good technique training," says Griffin. "We do competition for the experience and for the fun, and we never thought we would win like we've been winning."

Besides participating in dance competitions, RJAD maintains a strong community presence through its non-competitive performing group, directed for the past 27 years by instructor Gwen Hernandez.

"We feel it is so important to give back to our community," says Griffin. The group regularly performs at senior citizen homes and centers, community events, school assemblies and more.

RJAD will celebrate its milestone anniversary with a recital July 1 at Poway Center for the Performing Arts. Tickets and information may be found at [www.powaycenter.com](http://www.powaycenter.com).

The recital's two shows, entitled "30 Years Long, 30 Years Strong," will feature more than 120 dances, including the ever-popular Daddy/Daughter dance. This dance was instituted 15 years ago and inspired by Griffin's younger brother, who passed

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away in 2008.

"The first one had five brave dads and their little girls," says Griffin. "Throughout the years, it has continued to grow, and our 30th has 50 to 60 dads and their daughters opening our two shows — such wonderful memories for these little, and big, girls and their dads."

Due to the number of performances at this year's recital, preschool-age dancers will headline at their own performance on June 17 in the Olive Peirce Middle School Performing Arts Center. Contact RJAD at 760-789-1711 for information.

Ramona/Julian Academy of Dance, located at 1530 Main St., has undergone an array of changes over the years.

"We survived the total destruction of our business in 2015," says Griffin of the rain that damaged their building. "We reopened with beautiful, state-of-the-art facilities and a fresh, new look to the three studios and dancewear boutique."

Throughout the years and the changes, one thing has remained constant — the studio's commitment to sharing the art of dance with kids of the community.

"It is so fun to instill the love of dance in them — they're always so happy," she says. "They feel safe here and it's a good place for them to be. It keeps them off the streets. It builds them up and gives them something that's fun.

"The coaches are just wonderful, and they are so loving to these children," she says. "We are a dance family here."

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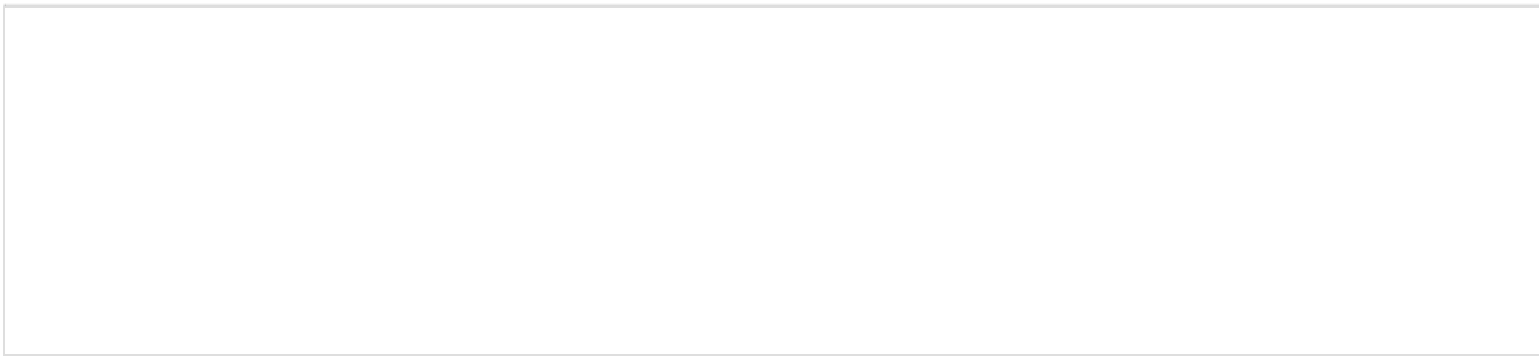
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