

About Town

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requirements and his athletic commitments.

"They (athletics and academics) do take a little away from each other, but I managed to handle both," he says. "I'm satisfied with what I accomplished." ...

The Ninth Annual Penn Family Reunion will be held July 4 to 6.

The reunion will begin with a picnic at Miller Park at 4 p.m. on Friday, July 4. Saturday's ac-

tivities will include a puppet show, a tour of Old Salem and Winston-Salem, a talent/fashion show and a disco at Beneath the Elms.

The public is invited to the disco (fee charged) and to the Sunday morning worship service at the Stouffer's Hotel.

The speaker for the service will be the Rev. James Wright, an associate minister at St. Stephen Baptist Church. The service will be held at 11 a.m. ...

The June meeting of the Effluent Club was held recently at the home of Estelle Belton.

Cara Brown, club president, presided at the meeting.

The agenda included a discussion of the picnic, which will be held Labor Day at the home of Rosa Mitchell.

The club will meet again in September. ...

A dress party was held recently at the home of Stephanie Frazier. The event was held in honor of

Marshall Jeffries, who will open Marshall's Boutique at the end of July.

His boutique will stock jewelry, handbags and other accessories. His fashions will include designer clothing from California, Paris and London. ...

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The Dancers Unlimited troupe pauses from practice for a group photo (photo by James Parker).

Close-Up

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pretive presentation of the inspirational "Jesus Christ Is the Way," to the upbeat, funky beat of "Outlaws' Dance," and back to a ragtime tap routine, it is easy to forget that they are young, amateur dancers and not seasoned products of dance schools. And that's just what Ms. Matthews intends.

As a young child growing up in one of the city's housing projects, Ms. Matthews says dancing was self-taught, and it was something that was learned by trial and error and by watching television -- not in a professional dance studio.

Because she is aware of the problems children in the projects have, Ms. Matthews opens her group to any child who cannot afford to go to dance schools.

Watching them start from scratch and develop into dancers capable of performing a two-hour recital is reward enough for Ms. Matthews, who is employed at Winston-Salem State University.

"I'm just giving the children what I wanted when I was growing up but didn't have," she says. "I didn't have any professional training while I was growing up. I looked at television, and most of mine is self-taught. Being black and brought up in the projects, dancing came naturally."

The dancers' talents are equalled and enhanced by their obvious enjoyment of what they are doing. Absent are trained, forced smiles during their performances. Instead, the members of the troupe seem to genuinely enjoy their routines. They seem to be having fun, which adds to their show, and their dedication is displayed in the precision that stands out during their performance.

This element of the recital is the direct result of the influence of one of Ms. Matthews' high school teachers.

"Mrs. Montgomery taught perfection," Ms. Matthews declares, recalling a teacher who taught dance. "She always stressed to me the importance of being precise in dance, and I try to pass that on to my kids. Mrs. Montgomery made you want to be a part of her group, and she made you explore talents you didn't even know you had."

When the recital all comes together at the end of the year, Ms. Matthews says the entire cast

is excited, but none of it comes without hard work during the year.

Although she has to work with a range of personalities and ages, Ms. Matthews says that she has had no discipline problems in her group -- nor does she anticipate any.

She runs a tight ship, but she has fun with the group and laughingly says, "They get to be my real good friends, and they come back year after year for the same punishment."

"I've never had any problems with discipline," says Ms. Matthews, who confesses that she may have a reputation of being just a little strict at rehearsals. "It takes just one time and they see me act crazy, and they know not to do it again."

"I call them all my children, and they are. Their parents can have them back after the recital."

Nor do her dancers find their way into trouble away from the dance hall -- partially, she says, because "my kids are too tired after dance rehearsals to get into any kind of trouble."

While she would love to see every child be able to participate in the classes, there are some, she says, who simply are not able to do the routines.

This year the cast even included a 2-year-old prodigy who followed an older sibling to the dance classes and ended up learning the routines so well that she was included in the recital.

"Why hold her back?" Ms. Matthews asks. "These dances are not as easy as they look. Many try out, but few make it. The group is open to everyone, and we give them plenty of time to learn the routines, and I try to work with anyone who needs help. Sometimes we find out they just can't do it."

Although she firmly believes that practice is essential to a successful recital, Ms. Matthews makes sure that dance work doesn't interfere with schoolwork. Students who receive failing grades at school are required to leave the group.

"The dance classes may not be the reason they're failing at school, but if they are failing there is a problem somewhere, and dancing will be one less thing they have to worry about," she says. "My policy is that if their grades are failing, they have to leave the group."

"This is very important to me. I believe in their getting an education, and when they are in the recitals they are often interviewed by the media, and I want them to be able to talk to anybody when they are asked questions."

Somewhat discouraged by the responses she received from some of the established dance instructors and groups, Ms. Matthews says there was a moment when she doubted if she could keep the group going. But only a moment. Her determined nature prevailed, and Dancers Unlimited is now one of the longest-surviving dance groups in the city.

"I went to some of the instructors in the city and asked for help when I was trying to get a grant, and people asked me where I had danced before," she says. "I told them I haven't danced anywhere except at high school, but I just have something I want to give to the kids."

Her persistence paid off, and with some help from her friends Reggie Johnson of the Arts Council and County Commissioner Mazie Woodruff, Ms. Matthews received a grant, which has helped keep the group going. Still, she wants to give more and do more. She's also hoping to persuade more parents to join in the effort.

"With drugs and teen pregnancy and everything else, we need parents who can give these children something to remember from their childhood," Ms. Matthews says. "We need more parents who are willing to hang in there and say, 'I'll be a part of this.' Out of this group we're going to have some great dancers."

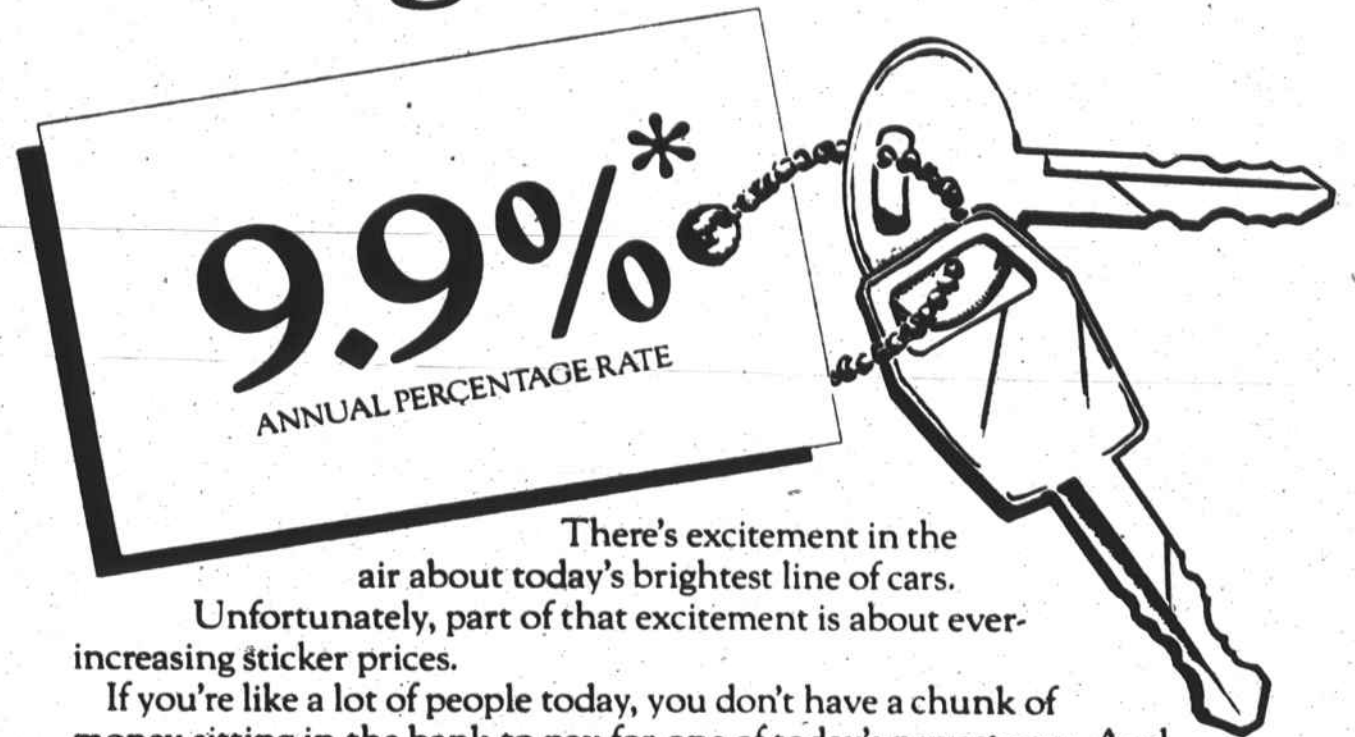
"I know there are some people in Winston-Salem -- college dance students, teachers -- who are more experienced than I am. An hour is not a lot of time to give to children. They need us, and one hour is not a lot for children who need us."

But with or without additional help, there is little doubt that Dancers Unlimited will survive and thrive with Ms. Matthews' untiring spirit at the helm. Especially since she has no intention of retiring from the group until her major goal is realized.

"I want to have a capacity crowd and have my kids perform at the Stevens Center," she says confidently. "I'm going to keep going until I get that capacity"

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