



Jill and David Hoggard of Academy of Dance located at 255 22nd Street SE, Owatonna.

Jill Hoggard

Academy of Dance

Since 1980, dancers of all ages have had the chance to hone their skills and pursue their passion at the Jill Hoggard Academy of Dance in Owatonna. At the end of every dance year, after months of preparation, the Academy hosts an end-of-the-year concert in May, which acts as both a student showcase and a major fundraiser. This year, though, COVID-19 meant that the Academy couldn't host its most important tradition for the first time in 39 years.

"When they closed school down, they closed down everything—all of the aerobics, and gym, and dance studios," said David Hoggard. "We couldn't even teach at all."

Hoggard said they had to stop offering in-person classes in the spring, though they were able to at least keep paying their employees through the Payroll Protection Program grant. Now they're able to have students in their studio once more—but the numbers are limited. Instead of typical classes of 16-18 students, each class can only have 10 students total, which severely cuts into the Academy's bottom line.

"Even though we're back, we're not really back," Hoggard said. "Obviously, you're go-

ing to fill up to the point where there's not enough hours in the day, teaching 8-9 kids at a time. You can't get enough hours to get everybody in there. It's real complicated."

Hoggard said that the Owatonna Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism was vital during this difficult time, especially through the JumpStart Owatonna grant program. The Academy used its grant funds to purchase a wide-angle camera for its studio, a computer and a big screen TV so that they could start offering online classes, which they're still offering now. "We wouldn't have been able to do that if it wasn't for the JumpStart program," Hoggard said. "It was a real blessing."

The Chamber also donated a box of hand cleaner, gloves and masks, as well as connecting the Academy to other businesses that could help.

"There are a lot of benefits that came with that JumpStart program," Hoggard said. "I'd like to thank everyone who helped everyone in town. A lot of people were hurting worse than we were, and helping those people get back up and running is paramount."

by Grace Brandt, special project for the People's Press

jump start!
Owatonna

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