

ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Connecting dancers past, present, and future

News and Features

How can we promote Highland Dance?

As life has gotten busier, there has been less participation in the Scottish Arts. This could be due to a few factors. What can be done to change this?

Where Are They Now?

Learn about past highland dancers and what they are doing now in life, post dance.

Finding Your Family

Ancestry research has become a popular pastime. Read to find out tips and tricks on finding out your family's story.

Hello Dallas!

The next championship will take place in Dallas, TX in 2026!

Welcome

Welcome back to the latest edition of our alumni newsletter. Here you will find exciting updates and events, but also stories, memories, and achievements of alumni like you.

We would love to hear from you if you have stories, photos, or ideas to share. Let's keep the spirit of Scottish dance alive together.

Contact Info

email: alumni@scotdanceusa.com
find and follow us on
[facebook](#) and [instagram](#)
sign up for alumni connections by
clicking below



ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Connecting dancers past, present, and future

How Can Alumni Promote Highland Dance in this busy world?



Do you remember when you first started dancing?

From the 1970's thru the 2000's, many people were participating in traditional Scottish events such as dancing, piping, and drumming. Dancers formed special bonds with each other and looked forward to seeing each other at the next competition. Unfortunately, since that time there has been a decline in these events. These Scottish cultural activities were popular with families settling in the United States and Canada during those early days. Family members joined organizations such as the Masonic Kilties, Daughters of Scotia, and got involved in Family Clans. These people were the volunteers who started and put together Highland Games and festivals which have lasted for many years. As time has gone on, these volunteers have gotten older and the younger generations have not become as involved as their predecessors. We can probably all agree that today, families are offered many more activities. Sports, technology and even online activities are more popular with these younger, growing families.

ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Connecting dancers past, present, and future

How Can Alumni Promote Highland Dance in this busy world?



In some areas there are fewer teachers available to continue the growth of the sport. As for Highland Games, the volunteers are getting older and they are having difficulty recruiting new younger volunteers. Rising costs, such as insurance and permits adds to the difficulty of hosting these events. At times, there is an overlap in dates of when these few events occur.

Unfortunately, Scottish arts do not get the coverage needed to grow. Many people are not even familiar with highland dance, piping, or Highland Games. The Scottish identity may be limited to genealogy, music festivals, or whisky. Recovery in all these areas has been slow since the Pandemic. Fortunately, there are signs of growth. Demonstrations, with trial classes, invite new members to give it a try. Online classes allow students to take lessons comfortably in their own environment. It also allows students who may not live near a teacher to take lessons. Today, Highland dance is now blended with modern music, theater, and fitness. Choreography has brought back an added excitement to dance.



ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Connecting dancers past, present, and future

How Can Alumni Promote Highland Dance in this busy world?

With Highland dance, Alumni Connections is just one of those groups who are trying to rebuild the ties between former and present dancers. We would like to encourage our alumni to do their part in continuing our beloved Highland traditions.



How can you help?

- Do you have an active teacher's card?
- Start up a class for fun
- Teach family and friends highland dances for fun and exercise
- Team teach with a nearby teacher

Volunteer at a local dance competition or Highland Games
Many organizations are happy to train you

Go to our Scot Dance USA website to look of dates and locations of competitions

Link: <https://www.scotdanceusa.com/calendar/scotdance-usa-events/>

Support Scot Dance USA with a donation

Make a cash donation: <https://www.scotdanceusa.com/support/>

Sign up if your company matches donations of time or money

ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Connecting dancers past, present, and future

Where Are They Now? Featuring: Madhuri Vasudevan



The Power of “I Can”

At the age of ten, standing in my knee-high socks, pigtails, and Highland shoes, I faced a moment that would quietly shape the rest of my life. During Scottish Highland dance class, I struggled to execute extension high cuts. I looked at the senior dancers soaring effortlessly and blurted out the words that felt true in that moment: “I can’t.”

Mrs. McPhee stopped the class. Her face went blank, and after a pause she said, “Excuse me, what did you say? I don’t understand that word.”

Turning to all of us, she declared, “My dictionary does not have the phrase ‘I can’t.’ It only has ‘I can,’ because only when you believe you can do something does it become possible.”

That brief moment of counseling resonated deeply. Those words followed me through childhood and into adulthood, shaping how I approached school, dance, and life. I later recognized that same defiant confidence echoed in pop culture—like Kate in *The Cutting Edge*, who snaps, “Nobody tells me what I can and cannot do.” The message was the same: only I get to decide my limits.

ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Connecting dancers past, present, and future

Where Are They Now?

Featuring: Madhuri Vasudevan



The Power of "I Can"

I carried that mindset into my undergraduate years, volunteering with battered women at the Houston Area Women's Center, helping children with hearing disabilities at Texas Children's Hospital, and supporting patients in the deaf community as they learned lip reading and American Sign Language. Through medical school, residency, and fellowship, I persisted with the belief that only I set the bar for what I could achieve. In my personal life, I learned that optimistic honesty and self-love were essential to living fully.

Through every phase of my life, dance remained my constant joy. Whether ballroom dancing with my husband and children, sharing Indian classical and Scottish Highland dance with my daughter, or simply moving to music from Metallica to Madonna, Bollywood to Scottish folk, dance was my language and my refuge.

Then, at 48, everything changed.

ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Connecting dancers past, present, and future

Where Are They Now?

Featuring: Madhuri Vasudevan

I developed a debilitating condition that brought me to my knees—literally. I lost the use of my hands and feet, dropped 25 pounds, and became too weak to lift a pillow or hold a glass of water. I couldn't open cupboards, tie my shoes, or walk without pain. Tightness gripped my ligaments and tendons, and no one could explain why. Fear and anger crept in as I wondered if this was my new baseline. My spirit flickered as months of frustration, tears, and uncertainty followed.

Throughout that year, Mrs. Donna Cusack and Mrs. Diane McPhee watched as my condition worsened and supported me with their love and kindness. My husband remained unwavering—certain that answers would come and healing would follow. Between sobbing and screaming, I found moments of silence and prayer. Through Divine grace, I was guided to a functional medicine specialist who identified the cause and set me on a path to recovery. That path required discipline: a healthy diet, hydration, and daily physical, occupational, and pool therapy.

During my first physical therapy session, Dr. Pace explained that much of my knee pain stemmed from weakness in surrounding muscles. She instructed me to use a leg press machine. I could barely walk, let alone imagine pushing weight with my legs. Fear flooded me. "That's impossible," I said. "I can't."



ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Connecting dancers past, present, and future

Where Are They Now? Featuring: Madhuri Vasudevan

She helped me onto the machine and stood beside me, completely calm. When I hesitated again, she looked at me gently and said simply, “You can.”

Trusting her, I pushed—once, then again, and then a third time. My legs trembled, but they held. I looked up in disbelief, and her knowing smile said it all: I had proven it to myself. I burst into tears—not of pain, but of joy.

That moment reignited something deep within me. It reminded me that the power of the mind is immense. Once you decide you can do something, the path opens. My message to dancers—and to anyone—is this: believe first in the perfect version of yourself that already exists. Challenges will test you, but they are meant to bring you back to your center.

I am profoundly grateful to my physical therapists for helping me rediscover that belief.

Today, I am back to full-time work at the Houston VA Hospital, teaching physicians in training at Baylor College of Medicine. I am walking again. I have realized that every movement in life is a dance step—and I get to practice dance every day.

I am forever thankful to my parents, my first teachers, and to Mrs. Diane McPhee Krugh and Mrs. Donna Cusack. You taught me then, and you continue to teach me now, that lessons learned in the dance room are lessons for life. I carry those lessons forward as a mentor, guide, and grateful student of life.

“I Can...”

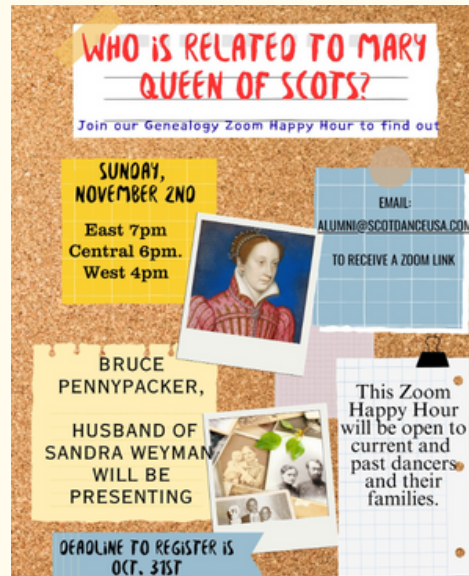
Thank you to Madhuri Vasudevan for sharing this inspiring story with us. She started her dance journey at St. Thomas Episcopal School in Houston, TX. During her competitive career, she began her dance journey and proudly represented the Southwest Region several times at the United States Inter-Regional Championship (USIR), earning the title of 2nd runner up in her age category. In 1993, her dedication also took her overseas to compete at the renowned Cowal Highland Gathering in Scotland, where she placed 3rd in the Reel. She was the only American to place at Cowal that year.

In addition to Highland dance, Madhuri trained extensively in classical Indian dance. Her passion for this art form gave her the opportunity to tour nationally with her teacher, showcasing a versatile and rich dance background. Madhuri credits her many years of dance training for laying the groundwork for her academic success. The discipline, resilience, and focus she developed through dance prepared her well for both college and the rigorous demands of medical school.

ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Connecting dancers past, present, and future

Finding Your Family's Story



Bruce Pennypacker, husband of Sandra Weyman, recently presented an engaging Happy Hour session on genealogy, sponsored by Alumni Connections. This session allowed participants to connect with others who share a passion for uncovering family stories and heritage.

Some suggestions for getting started included:

- Talking with family members to see what they know.
- Creating a timeline of events from your family members as compared to what is/was going on in the world at the same time.
- Checking sources such as; birth and baptismal records, yearbooks, death and marriage certificates, as well as military records.

If you are interested in starting your search be sure to check out these sites-

Ancestry.com
Familysearch.org
Newspapers.com

"And who is the most surprising ancestor Bruce discovered?" Well it turns out that little Pennsylvania Dutch boy is actually related to Mary Queen of Scots. Have some fun and find out who you are related to.

ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Connecting dancers past, present, and future

Thank you West Region!



Thank you to the Western Region for hosting a wonderful USIR this past summer. The 2025 event was held July 9th through the 13th at the Hyatt Regency in Santa Clara California.

"A round of congratulations goes to our amazing dancers—you did it!"

The 2025 USIR Champions are as follows.....

7 & Under 10 Champion - Rose VanSteenkistie

10 & Under 12 Champion - Jacqueline Ritchie

12 & Under 14 Champion - Riley Vinson

14 & Under 16 Champion - Isla Higgins

16 & Under 18 Champion - Morgan O'Connor

18 & Under 22 Champion - Reese Mackey

22 & Over Champion - Beret Dernbach

One last thank you to the National Championships Committee as well as the teachers and parents who all helped make the weekend a success.

Check out a video from the amazing week below!

2025 Champion Fling

**See you next year
in Dallas, Texas!**

July 22nd to 26th



ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Connecting dancers past, present, and future

Upcoming Competitions

East Region

February 6th, 7th, 8th - MRM Workshop Valley Forge, PA

Midwest Region

February 28 - Chicago Open Championship Wheaton, IL

Northwest Region

January 24th, 25th - SHDA Winter Competition- Shoreline, WA

February 13th to 15th - Heart of the USA- Salt Lake City, UT



Southeast Region

January 17th, 18th, 19th - Central Florida Classic- Winter Springs, FL

February 28th - Northeast Florida Highland Games- Green Cove Springs, FL

Southwest Region

March 21st/22nd Sherman Celtic Festival - Pecan Grove East Park, Sherman, TX

March 28th/29th San Antonio Highland Dance Competition

Helotes Festival Grounds, 12210 Leslie Rd, Helotes, TX

West Region

January 17th - Redwood Empire Indoor- Berkley, CA

Check ScotDanceUSA for additional details.

ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Connecting dancers past, present, and future

Get Featured in our Newsletter

We Want To Spotlight YOU!

The United States has so many amazing Scottish Highland Dance Schools across the country. We'd love to hear from you! Please send information about your dance school so we can feature you in our next newsletter. Share your school's story, achievements, and anything that makes your community special—let's celebrate the rich diversity of Scottish Highland Dance across the country together!

[Click here to add your awesome school!](#)



Send us pictures!

Everyone has a collection of memorable photos from competitions, Burns dinners, festivals, dance classes, and more. Send us your photos—old and new—so we can create a historical archive that showcases our incredible Highland dance legacy!

Email: alumni@scotdanceusa.com
or send on Instagram or Facebook

ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

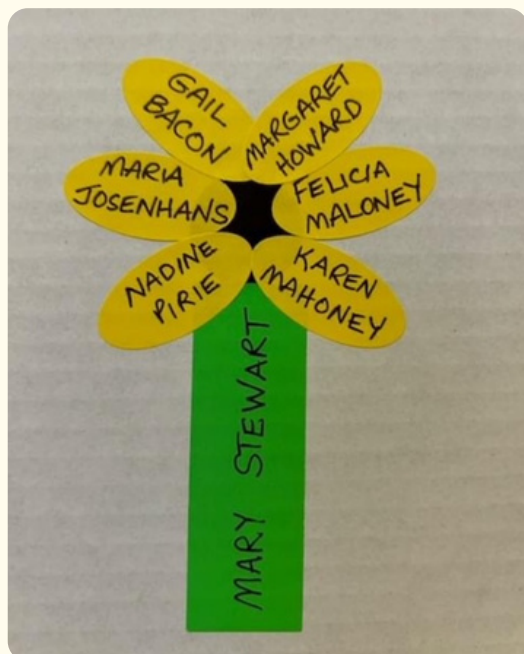
Connecting dancers past, present, and future

Seeds of US Scottish Dance



The Seeds of Scottish Dance Project launched itself one year ago at the 2024 USIR in Boston, Massachusetts. The purpose is to trace past and current professionals who became dance teachers, honoring those men and women who brought Scottish Dance to the United States. We need the names of your teacher and your teacher's teacher to help complete this ongoing project.

Over 500 names across the six regions have been added to our lists thus far.
Let's keep it growing!



How can you help the project grow?

Send us any information you have about teachers past and present.

- Who inspired *you* to teach?
- Who did *you* inspire to teach?
- Do you know who taught your dance teacher?
- Any other information you can send!

[Click here to send us information](#)