

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Hi Res photos available upon request

**SHINING STARS ADAPTED DANCE CAMP:
CHILDREN WITH PHYSICAL CHALLENGES EXPERIENCE THE JOY OF DANCE**



West Chester, PA - (July 11, 2011): The Samantha Zajac Memorial Fund will sponsor its fifth annual Shining Stars Adapted Dance Camp for fifteen girls and boys with physical challenges, so that they may enjoy and benefit from a dance experience. The camp takes place August 8th -11th from 4:00-5:30 p.m. at the Diane Matthews School of Dance Arts in West Chester and is offered free of charge for all participants. The dancers will be instructed by a highly experienced team of professionals including Diane Matthews, Director, The Diane Matthews School of Dance Arts; Gretchen Studlien-Webb, Associate Professor and Dance Program Coordinator, West Chester University Department of Theatre and Dance; Carolyn Giles, Physical Therapy Assistant, AI duPont Hospital for Children; and Program Advisor, Dr. Monica Lepore, Professor and Coordinator of Adapted Physical Education, West Chester University Department of Kinesiology.

A unique collaboration of the Samantha Zajac Memorial Fund, The West Chester University Departments of Kinesiology and Theatre and Dance, and The Diane Matthews School of Dance Arts, the camp serves children who have an interest in dance yet cannot participate in a typical dance program because of their physical disabilities. The fifteen dancers this year range in age from 6 to 13, which is the largest turnout to date for the camp. While the children have a variety of diagnoses, such as cerebral palsy, spina bifida, spinal cord injuries, and developmental delays, they all share a common love of dance, music, and the camaraderie of their fellow dancers. Some of the dancers use wheelchairs, gait trainers, walkers, or canes or wear braces. Occupying all 3 studios at the Diane Matthews School of Dance Arts, the 3 instructors and 15 volunteer coaches will work with the 15 dancers to adapt dance movements to maximize the individual abilities of each dancer. Samantha's sisters, Lindsay (age 19) and Rachel (age 14), have served as coaches for several years and have benefited personally from the program.

At the end of last year's camp, parents provided the following feedback about their children's experiences:

"Helen loves to dance. Shining Stars gives her the opportunity to fully participate in a program that is fun, current, and focused on dance – not disability. Your volunteers are wonderful. I love to watch them greet the campers with smiles and enthusiasm. Helen thought her volunteer coach was terrific!"

"Tomasina is much more accepting of her limitations and has been so much more accepting of other children's differences and open minded and tolerant. It was wonderful for her to feel not so different."

"I think the camp was well organized, supportive, and a great experience for Devon. As her first introduction to dance, Devon benefited from the socialization, and it increased her confidence and movement repertoire. She received great one-on-one and encouraging feedback."

"Shining Stars made Kate feel special! It helped her express herself through music and dance. Dance is not something she usually gets to do. She had fun. The socialization with other kids with special needs is great. This camp is also a great opportunity for parents to share experiences and advice."

All of the children who are photographed and whose parents are quoted will be returning to this year's camp. For additional testimonials and footage from the Shining Stars Adapted Dance Program, please view our video posted on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkq4F7HduV4> and visit our web page at the Chester County Community Foundation: [Samantha Zajac Memorial Fund](#).

If you would like to cover this year's camp, please e-mail thezajacfamily@aol.com or call 610-399-3066 or 484-459-3982.



For additional testimonials and footage from the Shining Stars Adapted Dance Program, please view our video posted on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkq4F7HduV4> and visit our web page at the Chester County Community Foundation: [Samantha Zajac Memorial Fund](#).

Located in downtown West Chester, the Chester County Community Foundation leads, inspires and encourages individuals to contribute to lasting philanthropic charitable legacies. The Community Foundation holds over \$30 million in trust and annually awards \$2 million in grants and scholarships. For more information, contact www.chescocf.org or (610) 696-8211.

The Samantha Zajac Memorial Fund is a charitable endowed fund of the Chester County Community Foundation. A copy of the official registration and financial information for the Chester County Community Foundation may be obtained by calling the PA Dept of State at 1-800-732-0999 (toll-free in PA.) Registration does not imply endorsement. EIN #23-2773822.

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Background Information:
The Samantha Zajac Memorial Fund and the Shining Stars Adapted Dance Camp

Our daughter, Samantha Zajac, passed away 10 years ago at the age of 8. Sammy's death was sudden, and thus was an enormous shock and loss to us and our family and friends. Sammy was a completely delightful little girl -- she loved (and was loved by) her friends and family. Sammy beat the odds in many ways. She had a mild case of cerebral palsy, yet was a very active, enthusiastic, and playful child. Sammy's fierce determination and positive attitude helped her overcome her disability and be successful in all the activities she felt passionately about.

Sammy's godfather, Bob DiLullo, wrote this tribute about Sammy in 2001:

"Sammy loved all of the things an eight year old would love. She filled her days with friends, family, teachers, games, songs and laughter. She was imaginative and loved to perform, dance, and sing all sorts of music, have puppet shows, and draw. She loved spending time with her friends, telling jokes (often bad jokes) and giggling. And she amazed us with her dancing, swimming, horseback riding, soccer and basketball. It's hard to find the words to describe the joy Sammy brought to the lives of those she touched. With a sparkle in her eyes and determination in her voice and actions, she tackled every adventure and obstacle with joyful abandon and enthusiasm. Everything she did, she did with a passion and joy -- often making us smile and laugh in appreciation and admiration. Samantha's life was a gift to all who had a chance to share in it."

Very shortly after Sammy's death, our family established a fund at the Chester County Community Foundation to support some philanthropic ventures that were meaningful to Sammy and would allow us and others who loved Sammy to honor her memory. In 2002, working with the teachers and staff at Westtown-Thornbury Elementary School in West Chester, we built an outdoor classroom on the grounds of the school, called Sammy's Place. It is an innovative learning and gathering space for WT students and our daughters, Lindsay (age 19) and Rachel (age 14) while they attended WT.

About 6 years ago, our family explored a new direction with Sammy's fund. After reading about a dance class for children with special needs featured in the New York Times, we decided to develop a similar dance program to give children with disabilities in our community an opportunity to experience, enjoy, and benefit from dance as Sammy did. We have been collaborating with West Chester University's Kinesiology and Dance Departments on this project for the past 6 years. Our connection to WCU goes back about 13 years when Sammy first participated in the adapted physical education class that Dr. Monica Lepore has led at the University for nearly 30 years. Because WCU's program had such positive impact on Sammy and our family, we approached Monica with our idea, and she was extremely enthusiastic and supportive of our new project. Dr. Lepore reached out to her dance faculty colleague, Gretchen Studlien-Webb, to join our team. We successfully launched our pilot program in the summer of 2007 with 4 dancers.

Our vision is to provide our dancers a unique and special opportunity to experience dance in a way that will deeply enrich them while also giving our volunteer coaches and instructors rich, hands on educational experience working with and motivating children with special needs.

In 2008, the Diane Matthews, Director of Diane Matthews School of Dance Arts, opened her beautiful studio to our program and has generously hosted and instructed our dancers. As a result, a new and unique partnership between the Diane Matthews Studio of Dance Arts, West Chester University, and Sammy's Fund at the Foundation formed, becoming co-sponsors of our adapted dance camp for children with physical challenges.

This summer, we have our largest participation ever, with 15 girls and boys, ranging in age from 6 to 13. The camp, offered free of charge to participants, is financially supported by the Samantha Zajac Memorial Fund of the Chester County Community Foundation. The camp is staffed by a collaborative, experienced team led by our instructors, Diane Matthews, Gretchen Studlien-Webb and Carolyn Giles and 15 volunteer coaches. Our volunteers include WCU adapted physical education and dance majors and dance students from the Diane Matthews Studio and other local studios. Sammy's sisters, Lindsay and Rachel, have served as coaches for several years and have benefited personally from the program.

If you'd like more information about Sammy, our family's philanthropic efforts, and the community's supportive response, feel free to contact us. If you'd like to speak to Dr. Monica Lepore about her expertise and our partnership, she can be reached at MnMLepore@aol.com. Feel free to visit our web page at the Chester County Community Foundation: [Samantha Zajac Memorial Fund](#) or our Shining Stars Adapted Dance Program video posted on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkq4F7HduV4>.

Thank you.
Carla and Denny Zajac