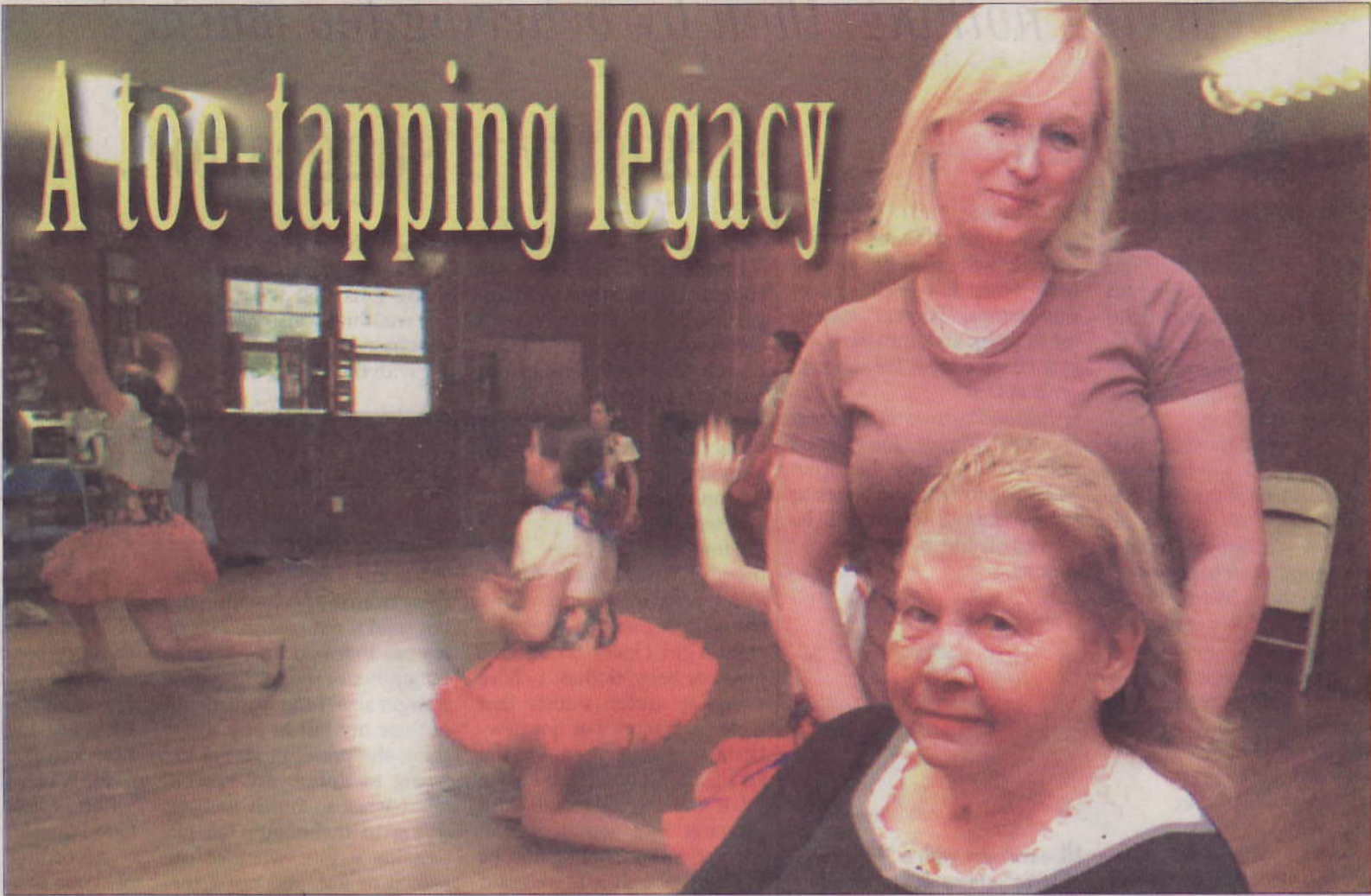


A toe-tapping legacy



CECIL WHIG PHOTO BY MATT GIVEN

"In my day, I guess you kind of had one goal in life. There was no Internet or cell phones, so you became more creative. What you did do, you became good at," said Bobbie Ann's Dance Studio founder Barbara Smith, shown with her daughter, Susie, and dancing students.

Bobbie Ann's Dance Studio still bustling after 60 years

By Rebecca Sewald
rsewald@cecilwhig.com

With a tune from Disney's "The Little Mermaid" playing in the background, 46-year-old Susie Smith glides across the old wood floor of her Elkton dance studio, her eyes fixed on the group of young dancers tip-toeing their way to the next formation.

The ensemble of 6- and 7-year-old girls, dressed in pink leotards, white tights and well-worn ballet slippers, are just her first group of students for the night. In the hours to follow, the studio will bustle with elegant dancers, many of who have attended regularly since early childhood.

Bobbie Ann's Dance Studio has been a longtime fixture in downtown Elkton, and

its 60th year of business in Cecil County.

Susie's mother, Barbara Smith, opened the studio in September 1947 when she was just 16. Now 77, Barbara has retired from teaching, but in her spare time she still peeks in on classes — an easy task since she lives in the same house that connects to the vintage studio.

"I used to not mind when the children of my students came in and the grandchildren, but the great-grandchildren bothers me. It's gone so fast, it's scary," Barbara said. "It makes me proud to be here so long, but it also makes you feel so old."

Susie now operates the studio, which continues to offer local dancers training in basic dance technique, including ballet, tap, jazz, ballroom and other traditional dance forms. The studio also incorporates acting into the school curriculum, producing one large-

years.

Barbara still remembers her first recital, titled "Talk of the Town," and has saved the original 1948 program. Many of the dancers from the production still live in Elkton, she said, and are now in their 60s and 70s.

A lifelong resident of Elkton, Barbara decided to open the dance studio after graduating from high school, where students only attended until age 16. Though she had an interest in TV production, years of dance instruction inspired her to open the business.

"In my day, I guess you kind of had one goal in life. There was no Internet or cell phones, so you became more creative. What you did do, you became good at. I guess I opened the studio because I just kept on taking (dance lessons)," Barbara said. "Now

At local dance studio, not much has changed but the mu

BOBBIE ANN'S, from page C1

I don't know what kids do. They have so many different things to think about. It's much better if you have a goal."

The business began in her mother's home, which now

stands next to the current studio. After several years, Barbara purchased another property on East Main Street, where she continued to teach before moving to the current location in 1958.

"I think it's great because there's not too many places

around that survive 60 years, especially doing something like this," Susie said, referring to the studio's continuing success.

Today, the business caters to about 80 students, some as young as 2 and others well into their 20s. Just as her

mother operated the business for decades, Susie prefers that class sizes remain small, enabling teachers to give each dancer individual attention.

"Not much has changed. We keep things about the same as they were in the 1940s," Barbara said.

Susie added: "We have incorporated a few of the more modern things, like hip-hop, but we are very traditional here."

Though the studio has resisted conforming to today's fast-paced standards,

that doesn't mean teaching is the same as it was when Barbara started the studio six decades ago.

Times have changed, she said. While music, dancing and the creative arts were once a highly respected part of culture for her generation, Barbara sees far less interest than there once was.

"What I hate now is I hardly know a child who takes a piano lesson or takes a singing lesson or plays the violin. There's so much culture lost here anymore," she said.

But with an energetic

group of young people learning around the studio, it's clear that the studio is still thriving in Elkton.

"You have to have a heart for this, and you have to know that education is something special," she said. "I've always known that a child can be a person in the world. You can bring them the right song and they've got to make it important, and it makes you want to do this."



CECIL WHIG PHOTO BY MATT GIVEN

Susie Smith, left, performs a dance routine while teaching an advanced class Thursday at Bobbie Ann's Dance Studio in Elkton.

Family Fun At Affordable Prices

Learn to Skate Classes Every Saturday

