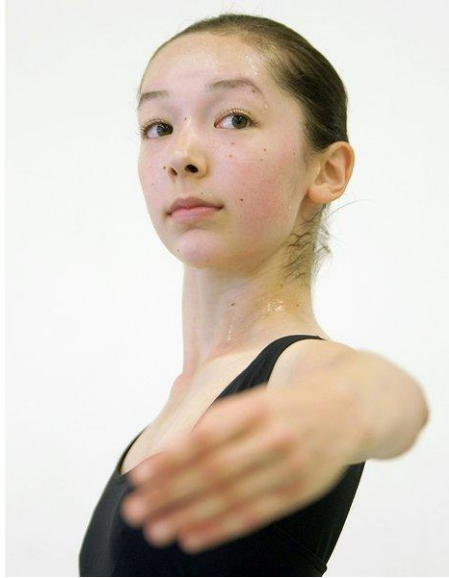


## Teen ballet dancer to train in Russia



Ballet student Hana Lethen practices at Tulsa Ballet on Tuesday. MIKE SIMONS/Tulsa World

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**Ballet dancer Hana Lethen's passion brought her to Tulsa, but by the end of the summer, it will have taken her halfway around the world and back.**

Lethen, 16, was one of 16 students nationwide chosen to train at the Bolshoi Ballet Academy in Moscow as part of the National Security Language Initiative for Youth Program, which is funded by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs within the U.S. Department of State. The youth program sends high school students to countries including China, Egypt, India, Jordan, Korea, Morocco, Russia, Tajikistan and Turkey to learn less commonly studied languages, according to its website at [tulsaworld.com/nsli](http://tulsaworld.com/nsli)

"I'm looking forward to how different it will be," she said. "I don't know exactly what to expect, so I think that's part of the excitement." Lethen, who will be a junior at Booker T. Washington High School in the fall, has been dancing since before kindergarten, and she spends between 15 and 18 hours in dance classes each week.

"She's a very talented girl," said Stephanie Murrish, Lethen's longtime ballet teacher. "We've enjoyed working with her for all these years. We've enjoyed watching her grow up and mature." Lethen moved to Tulsa to study with Murrish and her husband, Daniil

Gaifullin, after they joined Tulsa Ballet, but Lethen first began working with the pair in Amarillo, Texas. They parted ways briefly when Lethen left Texas to attend school in New Hampshire, but she moved to Tulsa in fall 2010 with a renewed focus on ballet. "I love how it covers athletics and arts at the same time," she said. She also loves the discipline involved - thinking about every muscle in her body, Lethen said.

Lethen will leave June 26 for the Russian American Foundation's Bolshoi Ballet Academy Summer Intensive in New York City. While there, she will double the time she spends practicing. The summer intensive prepares dance students visiting Russia for the ballet training they'll receive. Program participants will leave for Moscow in mid-July.

"It's such a prestigious place," Lethen said of the academy. "Few dancers get that experience." She said this will be the longest she's been away from home, but she's confident she's mature enough to handle it. The lengthy interview process she underwent made sure of that, Lethen said.

She completed an application, wrote two essays and passed a phone interview with program directors at the Russian American Foundation, which selects students and organizes the language initiative trip. She also auditioned for the summer intensive, which was required for dancers to participate in the language initiative program.

Lethen's teacher is proud of her and looks forward to seeing what she's learned when she gets back. "It's a wonderful opportunity," Murrish said. "We just wish for her the best and to use that opportunity and to come back and continue to blossom."

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