



Local Teenagers head to Russia for Ballet Academy

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By: Sherrie Johnson



15-year-old Miranda Wienecke of White Marsh has been dancing since she was 2-years-old. She enjoys ballet.

It's a release from society. Her years of hard work paid off. She is headed to Russia to the Bolshoi Ballet Academy. It is one of the oldest and most established schools for classical ballet. She was accepted into the National Security Language Initiative for Youth Program.

"It's a once in a lifetime opportunity. I don't think it will sink in until I am there dancing and exploring," said Wienecke. More than 2,000 people applied for the national program and 16 were accepted. Miranda lost her mother at a young age. She says her acceptance is dedicated to her mom. "She would be very proud and really excited that I get to explore and do everything," said Wienecke.

17-year-old Taylor Fikes of Bowie is also on her way to Russia. She started dancing when she was three years old and a hobby grew into a passion. She hopes this experience can propel her goal of becoming a professional ballet dancer.

"The Bolshoi is considered one of the greatest. It is the greatest company and Russia is where Ballet began so to go to a place that is in the history books is a huge deal," said Fikes.

The dancers will spend six weeks this summer studying Russian language, culture and ballet at the Bolshoi Ballet Academy in Russia on full scholarship. The program is not only an amazing opportunity for the dancers. It also promotes a cultural and language interest between the U.S. and Russia.

"It is an amazing opportunity. Little girls dream about it. They work so hard. For them to know they can walk through that building that is in the history books and the amazing dancers that have come from the Bolshoi, it is amazing," said Shannon Torres, Instructor for Miranda at the Mid-Atlantic Center for the Performing Arts.

The 16 young dancers from all across the U.S. left for Russia on July 16th. They will return on August 27th. The Russian American Foundation sponsored Intensive Ballet Training in New York before the dancers headed to Russia. The program is funded by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.