

# PalmBeachPost.com

## Delray dance instructor helps students take next step

Faran Fagen – Special to The Palm Beach Post

12:00 a.m. Wednesday, Nov. 15, 2017



Laura Pucker, head cheer and dance coach at Keiser University, strives to inspire her students to realize both their academic and personal goals through her teaching. "Trials and tribulations of life is what we go through, but we also need to see the light versus the dark. I try to encourage that with my students," Pucker said. (Contributed)

**MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR:** Laura Pucker, 40

She began practicing hip-hop, freestyling and break dancing with friends on a piece of cardboard at a post office near her house in Minnesota.

From there, she was self-taught through high school and college, as well as professionally.

Now, as head cheer and dance coach at Keiser University in West Palm Beach, Laura Pucker uses her position to inspire young dancers to not only realize their dreams on the dance floor but in their lives.

“My goal is to foster an environment where everyone feels safe, has fun and learns from their journey,” said Pucker, of Delray Beach. “I strive to help my students develop moral character for life objectives. I do what I do because the reward in it is the kids, and how they become amazing adults.”

Pucker, 40, is originally from Minnesota but moved to Florida 12 years ago.

In addition to her coaching job, she’s also international director for World’s Perfect Athlete, which champions an international competition for kids from 3 years to 29 in cheer, dance, martial arts, gymnastics, baton twirling and archery. This program, held in Delray Beach and at Keiser, is in its sixth year.

For her team at Keiser, the goal is to win an NAIA national championship.

“I want to develop a program that brings tradition and school spirit,” Pucker said. “I’m excited to be able to give scholarships to our school for cheer and dance. Most schools don’t have the same opportunity. As a nonprofit school, Keiser University is investing in these athletes, believes in the program, and also provides an education that many are not able to receive.”

The biggest obstacle she encounters in her position is helping the athletes manage life, school, and “understanding their worth so they think positive.”

“We have been in an overwhelming society of criticism and social media bullying where many view the glass half-empty, not half-full,” Pucker said. “Trials and tribulations of life is what we go through, but we also need to see the light versus the dark. I try to encourage that with my students.”

Pucker also encourages her team to be involved in charities such as the American Cancer Society and Relay for Life.

The most rewarding aspect of her job is the bond between teacher and student, and the bonds that are created between the students themselves.

“The positive memories that being on the team creates is beyond rewarding,” Pucker said. “It always touches me when my students tell me years later how they incorporated our team rules into their life both personally and professionally.”

## **Q & A**

**Who is your hero?**

My hubby, Jeff, is my hero. He is my biggest encourager. When we met I was struggling with direction and he gave me light, purpose and motivation to be who I am now. We are the best of friends.

**What is your favorite movie?**

“Pitch Perfect” 1 and 2.

**What are your hobbies?**

I am a huge DIY/crafter. I love being creative with my hands and I love bringing a smile to my friend’s faces when I can make them something from the heart. I also do pageants. I love feeding into the lives of others.

**What do you do to get away or take a break?**

My family and friends are my world. I make time to visit them in Minnesota. I go to see my sisters, my fellow cheerleader and dancer friends from high school and college, my cheer kids, and my nieces and nephew ... Seeing them grow up and playing with them is a highlight for me.

**If you could have dinner with anyone in history, who would it be?**

Elvis Presley, because growing up I loved his music. As a child, I thought I was going to marry him. His music inspired me and it was fun to dance to with my sisters. Great memories.

**What is the best advice you ever received?**

“If you stumble, make it a part of the dance.” Words I live by. Things always happen for a reason, and to embrace the stumbles and the successes is how I live my life.

**What event in history would you have liked to have witnessed?**

The 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary. That year showcased the famous Jamaican bobsled team, Katarina Witt defended her Olympic gold medal, and the “battle of the Brians” with Brian Orser from Canada and Brian Boitano from the U.S.

**What is your favorite childhood memory?**

In the winter in Minnesota, we would get like 10 inches of snow. My sisters and I would shovel the snow off the deck, make a huge mound, and jump off the deck into it. We would have so much fun, in the cold, and then after, drink hot chocolate.