

Injury leads ballerina to business degree at BC3 @ Cranberry

“I put my schooling and education on hold for quite a few years,” performer says

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(Cranberry Township, PA) Ballerina Elizabeth Stack has performed on stages in Austin, Charlotte, Chicago, Nashville, New York City, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

But the most important stage the 24-year-old will cross is at Butler County Community College, where the Zelienople resident Wednesday night will receive an associate degree in business administration she has sought since 2014.

“BC3 has given me a chance to pursue my second career,” the graduate of BC3 @ Cranberry said, “and for that I am truly grateful.”

For most of her life, classical ballet represented her first career.

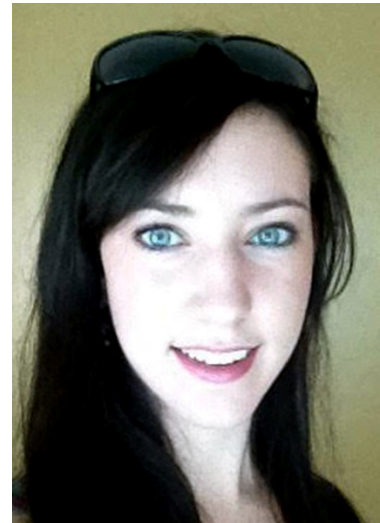
By age 14 she had already studied for a decade with the Laurel Youth Ballet in Greensburg. Vaganova master classes with Mansur Kamaletdinov and training with the Pittsburgh Ballet House followed.

She then accepted a scholarship to attend The Rock School for Dance Education in Philadelphia and left her father, Charles, mother Rosalind, and younger brother, Jordan.

“It was the first time living away from my family,” Stack said. “I was inspired by the caliber of dancing at the school. It felt amazing to take dance classes and live with so many people who shared the same goal.”

The Rock School represented the 14-year-old’s first encounter with an affiliated professional company.

“It was very interesting to come into contact with so many different cultures,” Stack said, “because there were students in attendance from around the world.”



Ballerina Elizabeth Stack, 24, of Zelienople, who attended BC3 @ Cranberry in Cranberry Township, plans to receive an associate degree in business administration during Butler County Community College’s 49th commencement exercises Wednesday in the Field House on BC3’s main campus.

“I danced from 9 to 6 most days”

Within three years, she earned a high school diploma from Mother of Divine Grace, a distance-education program based in Ojai, Calif., and joined the Joffrey Ballet’s Training Division in Chicago, which served as a springboard to dancing internships in Charlotte and Nashville.

“I danced from 9 to 6 most days,” she said. “My education took a back seat as I focused entirely on dancing.”

She didn’t know in February 2014 that a turn during her audition for Ballet Austin in Texas would mark a turning point in her life.

Her observers were taking notes as she attempted a petite allegro – “small jumps,” she said. “Not very high. Only inches off the floor” – and landed awkwardly on her left ankle.

“It was numb,” she said. “I continued through the audition, but on the plane back to Nashville, my ankle swelled. I thought, ‘Uh-oh.’”

While recuperating, Stack missed auditions for the Nashville Ballet’s “Serenade.” With an injured ankle and no contract in hand, she began to consider the future. She knew the differences between the Vagnova method of ballet’s rigid techniques and the more free-flowing Balanchine style, but not what to do with her life.

“What would I do for a living?”

Even her parents wondered whether their daughter had a backup plan.

“If I became debilitated in the future,” Stack said she thought, “what would I do for a living?”

Within six months, she had her answer. She relocated from Nashville to Zelienople in August 2014 to live with relatives, and immediately enrolled at BC3 @ Cranberry in Cranberry Township.

“I had heard great things about BC3,” she said.

BC3 @ Cranberry offers associate degree programs in business administration, business management, criminology, digital audio and visual production, early childhood education, general studies, graphic design, photography, psychology and social work.

Stack, whose father works as a materials manager in a mining safety company and had taken a mathematics course at BC3, chose business administration.

“She impressed me right away”

The first person she met at BC3 @ Cranberry was Alex Gladis, who served as director from 2005 to March 2017.

“She impressed me right away,” Gladis said. “She had a true passion for dance and for being a ballerina, but business administration seemed to fit her goal and direction.”

Gladis helped her to schedule her classes, Stack said, “and make my transition smooth. The classes were flexible enough to allow me to work part time, and small enough to receive personal attention from the teachers.”

Stack worked up to 30 hours a week in the restaurant industry while attending BC3, which has an 18:1 student-to-faculty ratio.

“She’s enthusiastic, and she knows what she wants,” said Lauren Buchanan, director of BC3 @ Cranberry, a site attended this spring by 294 students. “It took her a little bit of time to get there, from ballet to business administration.”

BC3 @ Cranberry is where she has become a better student, Stack said, and has learned to “genuinely” apply herself to understanding subject matter that did not come easily to her.

“The teachers,” she said, “were very engaging and encouraged success. Studying so many different subjects has also made me a more well-rounded person. I think that every class connects to the others. Recognizing and exploring these connections forced me to think in new and exciting ways.”

Stack will walk across stage at BC3’s Field House on Wednesday night and into a future that includes her pursuit of a bachelor’s degree at a four-year institution.

“My experience at this school has been great”

Students who complete an associate degree in business administration, criminology, early childhood education, psychology and social work at BC3 @ Cranberry can transfer with junior standing to any Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education institution, such as Clarion, Edinboro, Slippery Rock and Edinboro universities of Pennsylvania.

“My experience at this school has been great,” Stack said. “It has been amazing to be able to take such good classes at an affordable rate.”

BC3’s tuition is less expensive than that of 24 regional colleges and universities, the Pittsburgh Business Times reported in January.

“I have a lot more to learn about how businesses operate,” she said. “I put my schooling and education on hold for quite a few years. I was afraid I had forgotten how to learn, and wondered if I could still do well in classes. But I definitely have a sense of accomplishment. I am proud.”

In addition to its main campus and Cranberry, BC3 also has sites in Brockway, Ford City, Hermitage and New Castle.