

time out

Friday, November 21, 2014

Venture Out

'THE NUTCRACKER'

The Ventura County Ballet Company kicks off the local "Nutcracker" season with performances at 2 and 7 p.m. Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday at the Oxnard Performing Arts Center, 800 Hobson Way, Oxnard. The company also will perform the show at 7 p.m. Dec. 13, and 1 and 5 p.m. Dec. 14, at the Ventura College Performing Arts Center, 4700 Loma Vista Road, Ventura. Tickets are \$30 general, \$25 seniors 65 and older; and \$15 children 10 years and younger. For more information, visit venturacountyballet.com.

Oxnard dancer Jazmine Quezada, 14, has set her sights on a career in ballet. Playing Clara in "The Nutcracker," which she'll do this weekend with Ventura County Ballet, is "the first step to becoming a professional," she said.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Sugar Plum dreams

■ Ventura County Ballet's 'Nutcracker' star wants to dance professionally

By Robyn Flans
Special to The Star

When Jazmine Quezada, of Oxnard, takes the stage as Clara in the Ventura County Ballet Company's production of "The Nutcracker" this weekend, the young 14-year-old's life will have come full circle.

She was enrolled in a ballet class at 3 years old, and shortly thereafter watched the ballet company's performance of "The Nutcracker." She decided then to become a professional ballet dancer.

At age 11, Quezada began working with Ballet Academy Ventura, the official school of the Ventura County Ballet. She devotes about three to four hours each day to ballet while being home schooled and taking classes at Oxnard College.

She ultimately hopes to end up at one of the major companies such as the Royal Ballet, New York City Ballet, San Francisco Ballet or American Ballet Theatre.

In the meantime, starring as Clara — the young girl at the center of a magical tale full of enchanted forests, dancing snowflakes, a beautiful Sugar Plum Fairy and a handsome prince — is a good place to start.

"Playing the role of Clara is the first step to becoming a professional. Usually many people who are going to be professionals get the role of Clara in the beginning of their careers," Quezada said. "I was so excited when I found out I got the role. I couldn't stop jumping up and down when I heard the news."

Kathleen Noblin, who founded the school in 1992

and has directed "The Nutcracker," now in its 16th year, said Quezada brings great ability.

"Jazmine is a very strong pre-professional," Noblin said. "She is getting a lot of notice from professional companies."

Noblin said they began rehearsals for the ballet in September with a cast of about 110 including six professionals. Returning for his fourth season as The Prince is Aaron Smyth, from the Joffrey Ballet in Chicago.

"He has been dancing for me since he was a lad of 17 years old," Noblin said. "He loves to come out here for us."

Noblin said the big challenge of bringing this production to the stage is the \$154,000 cost each year.

"We decided many years ago that to be viable, we had

to stay in the black and not carry any debt, which is very different from most nonprofits," Noblin said. "We raise all the money beforehand. I have a very wise board of directors."

Each year, Noblin said, she attempts to give the audience something new. Mostly, she said, the additions come in the technical aspects such as costumes and lighting effects.

"We use video effects within our ballet," Noblin said. "When the transitions come and The Prince and Clara change into the dream characters there are a lot of sparkles and stars and such."

Noblin said Ventura County Ballet Company's production of "The Nutcracker" includes a full symphony orchestra.

"It's a very spectacular production," Noblin said.