

COMMENTARY

Ballet countdown moving s-l-o-w-l-y

Ainsley has had a love-hate relationship with her ballet class this year.

There's been a little indifference mixed in as well, I suppose.

But we've been at the far right end of that spectrum for a few weeks now, and I made the egregious mistake of starting the ballet countdown too early.

"C'mon," I encouraged her one recent Tuesday. "It's almost time for your recital. You've got only eight more weeks of ballet."

I realized my error as soon as I opened my mouth. I might as well have said 18 or 80. Eight weeks sounds like forever when you're 8 years old. Even I, who am quite a bit older, was discouraged by that number.

Driving three second-graders to ballet has its enjoyable moments, like when they're all singing "Can't Stop the Feeling" as loud as they can. It also has its stressful moments, like when we're running late and there are no places to park in the lot outside the dance studio (basically every week).

It's gotten a little better as the Tuesdays have slowly ticked by. This week, we were down to four.

I'm not sure what Ainsley doesn't like about ballet, other than her vague complaint that it is "B-O-R-I-N-G." She's always excited to see her two friends when we pick them up and in a good mood when she comes home.

She started ballet and tap class in kindergarten, not because she asked or because we wanted her to develop discipline or get more exercise. We signed up because two friends were enrolling, and their moms agreed to drive to both ways of the car pool. (I dream of one day joining another car pool in which I am responsible for zero driving.) She seemed to enjoy her classes and being part of the recital.



Pamela Lannom

Then she wanted to take a year off. Fine.

Last fall, one of the moms from kindergarten, whose daughter also took a dance sabbatical, asked me if we wanted to give it another try. Ainsley agreed and seemed to be perfectly pleased with her

class until right after I wrote the checks for her June 10 recital.

Now every Tuesday — after I drop everything at work and rush to pick her up at her after-school program — she moans and groans and begs to skip ballet.

"You made a commitment to be in the recital," I remind her, adding, when the whining persists, that I have already bought the leotard and jazz pants and paid the recital fee.

Then, on Thursday or Saturday, out of nowhere, she'll get all excited about ballet.

"Mom! You're in first position!" she'll exclaim as I stand in the middle of the room, one foot pointed in one direction, one foot in the other, trying to remember where it was I wanted to go next.

And lately she's been leaping and twirling around the kitchen, too.

I have no idea what all this means. Does she like dance? Doesn't she? Do I care?

Maybe she's just ready for this school year to come to an end. After all, she's already on letter "L" in the ABC countdown to the last day of second grade.

I suppose I, too, am ready for summer and days of no homework and flip-flops and bike rides to get ice cream

Fourteen more days of school. Three more weeks of ballet. Oh — and the Friday dress rehearsal. She doesn't know about that yet. Maybe that will be my secret for now.

— Pamela Lannom is editor of *The Hinsdalean*. Readers can email her at plannom@thehinsdalean.com.



EDITORIAL

May is Mental Health Month — and the time for new beginnings

In September 2015, as we unveiled our new "Pulse" lifestyles section, we also announced plans to explore more deeply topics related to mental health.

Today, with the publication of Greg DiDomenico's "On mental health" column, that initiative comes to its unofficial end.

Of course that does not mean we will stop covering mental health issues or running columns about them. What shape that coverage and those columns will take has yet to be determined.

We'll make those decisions with the help of the ad-hoc advisory board we have been privileged to work with for the past two years.

Its members are Angela Adkins, executive director, NAMI DuPage; Greg DiDomenico, president and CEO of Community Memorial Foundation; R.J. McMahon, CEO, Robert Crown Center for Health Education; Alisa Messana, licensed clinical social worker; Jane Mitchell, director behavioral health and rehab services, Amita Hinsdale Hospital; and Ann Schreiner, president and CEO, Pillars. Kathy Ruffulo and Jennifer Geiter also were part of the group during their time with The Community House counseling center.

Hopefully you've seen their names and photos with the "On mental health" columns that have run over the past two years.

They've written about a variety of topics, from teenage stress and depression to bipolar disorder to the importance of social and emotional learning.

If you've missed the columns or would like to read them again, they are posted on our website at thehinsdalean.com. Scroll down and click on the "Mental health coverage" link on the left-hand side of the page.

Articles from the two series we published — one on suicide in 2016 and one on the digital age and its affect on mental health in 2017 — are posted there as well.

Our goal over the past two years has been twofold. We wanted to help inform and empower readers who are dealing with mental health issues themselves or in a family member or friend. DiDomenico's column on Page 18 of today's paper is a great reminder of all the services available in this community. The resource guide inserted in today's paper provides contact information for so many of the places that can offer help.

Community Memorial Foundation deserves special accolades for its work to improve mental health in the region. The foundation's efforts are what initially inspired our focus on mental health.

Our second goal, which was really more of a hope, was to prompt a conversation about mental health in the community.

Talking about mental health issues certainly won't make them go away. But it can help reduce the stigma around the topic and remind those who are facing such issues that they are not alone.

We have been encouraged by the people who have assisted us with this initiative over the past two years — those who are writing columns and letting us write about them — and the work they are doing to create a path toward better mental health for us all.

It seems a bit ironic that our effort is coming to its unofficial end in May, Mental Health Month.

But, as Ivy Baker Priest reminds us, "The world is round and the place which may seem like the end may also be only the beginning."