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Title: Willowbrook choreographer and parent receives Suburban Life Magazine's Women of Distinction award



Pictured is Nancy Bocek, who has served as Willowbrook's choreographer for more than 15 years. On May 7, Bocek was honored with Suburban Life Magazine's Women of Distinction award for the class of 2015.

Willowbrook's theater and music programs are known for their high-quality productions and performances, filled with professional-level choreography.

For more than 15 years, Nancy Bocek has been the creativity behind the shows at Willowbrook – bringing stories to life on stage through combining the music with her dance steps.

And on May 7, Bocek was recognized for her contributions. She was honored with Suburban Life Magazine's Women of Distinction award for the class of 2015. Bocek received her degree in education from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and is thrilled to be living her dream of combining education and dance through working with Willowbrook students.

"I've always loved dance, even as a little girl," Bocek said. "As a choreographer, I love seeing my vision come to life on stage."

According to www.mysuburbanlife.com, Bocek has kept people in perfect step for 35 years. She has provided choreography for show choir programs in 85 schools throughout the country and has choreographed more than 100 musical theater productions. For more than 30 years, she has served as the staff clinician for the Naperville-based Showchoir Camps of America summer workshop, as well as the Wheaton-based Rising Stars summer showchoir camp, both of which

are considered premier programs. Bocek balances her dance work with her full-time job as an administrative associate at Mesirow Financial in Chicago.

Her passion is watching high school students discover their talents on stage.

“High school students are real,” she said. “You can talk to them like adults, and they respond when you do.”

Bocek has worked with Willowbrook’s CenterStage music group since 1999 and the school’s musicals since 2006. Although many performances stand out, she said her favorite was the 2010 production of “Peter Pan.” Through the years, she was even able to work with her three sons on Willowbrook’s stage. Her son Stephen Buhr graduated in 2007, her son Jackson Buhr graduated in 2012 and her son Matthew will graduate this year.

“We’re so fortunate Bocek lives in our community and is able to share her professional gifts with us,” said Karyn Wolcott, Willowbrook Music Department Chair. “She’s dynamic and charismatic, and the students learn more than just dance steps when they work with her – she teaches them life skills.”

Willowbrook senior Olivia Baumann and junior Mariana Martens have worked with Bocek as members of CenterStage and school musicals. Baumann has worked with Bocek since she was in sixth grade, and Martens has known Bocek since she was a freshman.

“Bocek creates a very high-energy environment, and she really pushes you because she wants you to do your best,” Baumann said. “She’s very well-known and respected in the dance community, and I always want to put my best foot forward for her.”

Martens agreed.

“Bocek doesn’t let you sit back – she expects you to give your all,” Martens said. “She’s not afraid to tell you what needs to be corrected, but she does it in a supportive and caring manner. She has made me into the performer I am today. I couldn’t be more thankful for everything she has taught me, and I will carry those lessons with me for the rest of my life.”