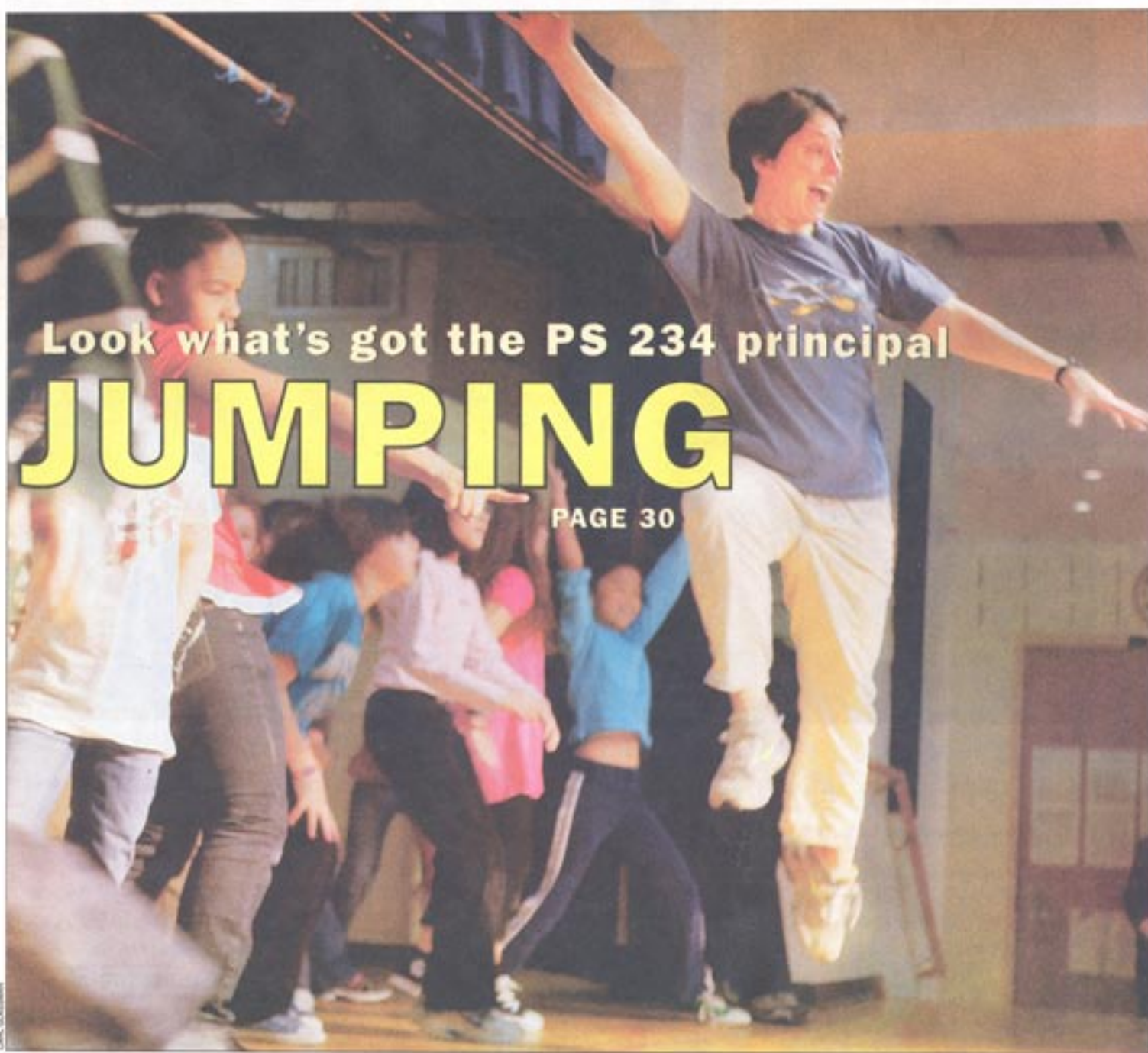

THE **TRIBECA TRIB**

Vol. 14 No. 5

www.tribecatrib.com

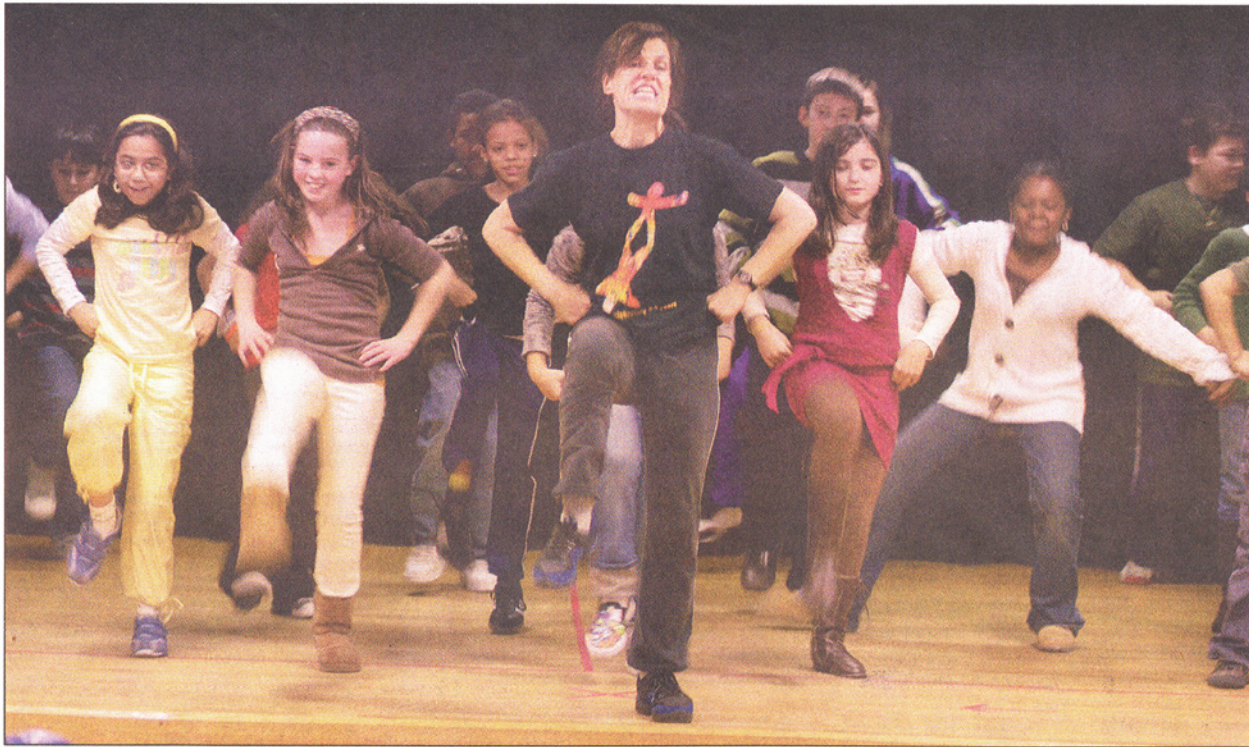
JANUARY 2008



Look what's got the PS 234 principal

JUMPING

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PHOTOS BY
CARL GLASSMAN

Left: Kay Gaynor rehearses P.S. 234 5th graders last month. The kids couldn't match the high stepping energy and enthusiasm, even as she ran through four 45-minute sessions each Wednesday morning. "I'm a million years old and you're young," she told the kids as she implored them to put her kind of pep in their step. Below: Laila King performs with her class before an assembly of children from the younger grades.

STEPPING OUT

P.S. 234 5th graders are introduced to the joy and rigor of bringing dance to the stage

"Which side has the crazier bugs? That's what I'd like to know," dance instructor Kay Gaynor asked. Before her on the P.S. 234 stage stood two groups of 5th graders who, in turn, were about to smack wildly at the air as though being attacked by a swarm of mosquitoes.

For all the flailing arms and twisting torsos, there was a precise rhythm and carefully choreographed method to the madness of those and the other energetic movements being rehearsed last month at the school.

Gaynor is a lead teacher of the National Dance Institute (NDI), a New York-based nonprofit group dedicated to introducing dance to children in the



schools. Throughout the school year, she and co-teacher Gina Carlette-Statile are conducting weekly rehearsals with P.S. 234's four 5th grade classes—more than

100 kids. They're preparing for a big show at school year's end. But even a rehearsal-show last month before kids from the younger grades was met with the cheers and applause that a polished performance might earn.

"You're not going to believe what they have accomplished in 8 or 9 weeks," Gaynor announced proudly.

Gaynor, 42, a veteran of off-Broadway plays and musicals, choreographed the performance in separate sec-

tions that can be danced in various combinations by different groups of dancers. What the audience sees is a colorful, and seemingly complex, variety of movement.

But it's the high energy that makes the dance a delight. "When beginners are dancing full out, 100 percent," says Gaynor, "that's what wins your heart over and makes it a joy to watch."

"The teachers bring such an unbelievable amount of enthusiasm and adrenaline to their work, it's infectious," says principal Lisa Ripperger.

She should know. Ripperger and the 5th grade teachers run and leap and dance right along with the kids. Not only is it fun, says the principal, "It sends the kids a message that what they're doing is important."



Left: From the back of the auditorium, Kay Gaynor gets the dancers to practice looking out at the audience by pretending to film them. Above: The 5th graders' performance begins with runs and leaps, like these by Allen Na and Claudia Payor.