

Ballet star opens dance school in Port Credit

By DAVID PATERSON
Staff

As a second soloist at the National Ballet of Canada, Alexandra Golden pirouetted, pliéd and jetéd her way around stages from New York to Vancouver. She danced in *The Nutcracker*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Sleeping Beauty* and worked with some of the country's finest choreographers.

And then, at the age of 32, the Mississauga-born star had to face what had previously been unthinkable: retirement.

Two decades of intense ballet training had created stress fractures in her feet that forced her to bring her on-stage career to an end.

"My body was telling me to stop before my heart wanted to," she said, recalling how her feet were in such rough shape that she would be "limping like I was 100" just walking to the shower in the morning.

"I didn't want to be 40 years old and have to have a cane or not be able to chase after my kids if I had kids one day," she said. So she decided to take her final bow.

But hanging up the tutu isn't so easy when ballet has been the centre of your life since childhood. Two years after she left the

National Ballet stage, Golden is now setting up a ballet school in Mississauga to nurture young talent in her hometown.

On Tuesday, Golden will open Positions School of Ballet at the First United Church in Port Credit, catering to both adults and children.

Although Golden, who grew up in Meadowvale, also began her career in a church ballet class, she said her aim is not necessarily to set kids on a path to a career in ballet. She just wants to give people a healthy alternative to sports and introduce them to the fun of recreational dance.

Golden expects the majority of her clients to be children and said ballet was a good way for youth to get out their extra energy.

"It gives them a focus and teaches them the discipline and beauty of classical dance."

The school will also give Golden a new focus. Admitting that dancers live in a "wonderful land of denial" when it comes to the brevity of their on-stage careers, Golden found retirement a culture shock.

"It was a very difficult time," she said. "Your

friends outside the dance world are really just starting their careers in their late 20s. They're just starting and yours is ending."

After stopping dancing completely and taking a desk job at an accountancy firm, Golden decided that she needed to head back to the barre.

She took some recreational classes, taught a little at some friends' schools and finally decided to open her own.

"I really needed to find my own path again," she said. "I was employed by the National Ballet, but you don't do a job like that unless

you love it 1,000 per cent. So when I stopped I felt like I wasn't doing what I was supposed to be doing anymore."

Golden will be holding a registration session for her new school at First United Church tomorrow. Call 416-882-6290.

