

*"We believe everyone should have access to the arts,
regardless of the challenges they face."*

- Debra Jenkins
Merrimack Hall Co-Founder



2014 Annual Report

Merrimack Hall Performing Arts Center



www.merrimackhall.com

2014 Annual Report

Merrimack Hall Performing Arts Center

Merrimack Academy for the Performing Arts, Inc.
d/b/a Merrimack Hall Performing Arts Center

3320 Triana Boulevard
Huntsville, Alabama 35805
Phone: (256) 534-6455

EIN: 20-5413583

Our mission is to provide visual and performing arts education, and cultural activities, to children and adults with special needs and to provide quality professional entertainment to the community.



www.merrimackhall.com



Our Mission, Told Through Nathan's Story

When people ask what Merrimack Hall does, our mission can be difficult to describe in just a few words. How can we describe the transformation of lives? How easily can we put into words the profound affect that social and cultural inclusion can have on a life? The pages of this annual report contain not just numbers or statistics, but narratives about the lives being touched by Merrimack Hall, and the Johnny Stallings Arts Program.

Perhaps one of the most moving examples of the success of the Johnny Stallings Arts Program is through Nathan's story. We met Nathan in 2010, at the first summer intensive for Project UP. Nathan was non-verbal and shy, unaccustomed to taking center stage. He participated in the music, theatre, dance and visual art activities at the intensive, but only after a great deal of coaxing and only because of the support of a compassionate team of young adult volunteers.

Today, Nathan is a confident and accomplished performer, comfortable onstage in front of hundreds of people. He is one of Project UP's most trusted leaders, is confident, outgoing and loves being in the spotlight. In January 2014, Nathan led Project UP to a resounding victory at NRG Dance Project in Atlanta, one of the most competitive and prestigious regional dance competitions in the country. Nathan and his teammates in Project UP competed on an even playing field with their typical peers and received The High Impact Award, the most coveted prize offered at the competition.

In this Annual Report, you will meet five other students who's remarkable personal journeys tell the real story of Merrimack Hall and The Johnny Stallings Arts Program. Nathan, Elianna, Carolyn, Savannah, Amelia and Jeffrey are six of the 403 children, teens and adults who are actively involved in the arts through The Johnny Stallings Arts Program. All of our students teach us every day that we are all more alike than we are different and that normal...well, normal is a dryer setting.

Merrimack Hall Performing Arts Center is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization. Our mission is to provide visual and performing arts education and substantive, inclusive social activities to children, teens and adults with special needs through The Johnny Stallings Arts Program. Since opening to the public in 2007, Merrimack Hall has given back more than \$1.5 million to the community, a staggering amount in such a short time period.

As we enter our seventh year of operation, we are focused on the continued expansion and improvement of the Johnny Stallings Arts Program. We have seen the restorative power of the arts at work in the lives of the people we serve and their families. We stand firm in our belief that everyone has the right to participate in the arts and in meaningful activities that connect us to one another. Every day, the participants in The Johnny Stallings Arts Program prove that people with special needs are only limited by the labels society chooses to impose on them.

"The program is top notch and the kids are handled with great respect, love and care. They are totally accepted by the staff and treated in a manner we can only wish the rest of society understood."

- Valerie Jones
Mother of Darby, age 14

2014 Outreach

\$484,210.56

Funds given back to the community through the Johnny Stallings Arts Program in 2013-14 program year.

\$1,519,600.56

Funds given back to the community since Merrimack Hall opened its doors in 2007.

403 Students Enrolled

268 Active Volunteers



The Johnny Stallings Arts Program

Founder Debra Jenkins was trained as a dancer and taught dance for many different organizations during and after college. In November 2007, as she was searching for just the right mission for Merrimack Hall, Debra was inspired to create a dance class for children with special needs. She had no experience with special education, had never worked with kids who have special needs and had nothing in her background to indicate that she might be successful in creating such a class. What she did have was a love for dance and the belief that every child deserves the chance to participate in the arts. She began asking questions, taking guidance from pediatricians, nurses, special education teachers and physical therapists as her inspiration moved from the inspiration phase to a plan of action.

In May 2008, Debra hired Hayley Henderson to collaborate with her. Hayley received her BFA in dance performance from Oklahoma City University and performed professionally for several years after graduation before moving home to Huntsville. Like Debra, Hayley had no experience with kids with special needs to guide her.

Debra and Hayley worked with a physical therapist to create a movement curriculum and recruited 10 students who ranged in age from 3 to 12 and who had a variety of diagnoses including Down syndrome, autism spectrum disorders, cerebral palsy, mitochondrial disease, cancer and others. Several of the students in the first class were medically fragile and all of the children had been denied access to arts activities in the past.

These first 10 students and their parents were true pioneers. As one mother put it, "I had been praying for a chance for my daughter to be part of a dance class but because of her condition, I never thought that prayer would be answered. I had been struggling with how to tell my daughter that she would never be able to take dance, something she had been begging to do for a year. When I heard about this class, I knew my prayers had been answered."

Recognizing that each child would require one-to-one assistance, Debra and Hayley recruited 10 teenage volunteers to work with each student and hired a physical therapist to train those volunteers on

the basics of working with children who have physical or intellectual disabilities. In a brainstorming meeting, they decided on a name for the class - Dance Your Dreams! and on October 15, 2008, one little dance class was started.

Today, that one little dance class has grown into five distinct programs that provide comprehensive, year-round activities in arts education, a day habilitation program for adults and a monthly series of social events that is serving 403 people who range in age from 3-65, and 268 volunteers. Debra says, "That one little dance class created a chain reaction that caused an entire community to be formed - a community of parents, children and volunteers who never would have met if it hadn't been for that one little dance class."

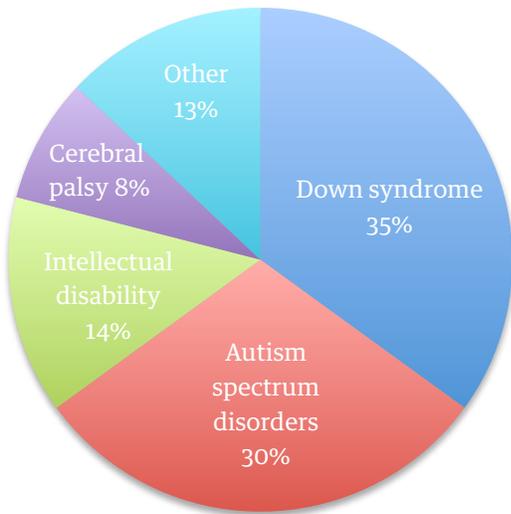
New programs have been added to The Johnny Stallings Arts Program at a rapid but sustainable pace and in response to needs that we see as our students face new hurdles in their lives. Camp Merrimack was created because of a lack of summer activities for kids with special needs; Project UP was created when our first group of students outgrew Dance Your Dreams!; Inspired HeARTS came about because some of our students expressed a desire to participate in an art form that did not require performances; and The Connection was developed as our first group of students graduated high school and were faced with a diminished quality of life due to lack of employment and educational opportunities. We are committed to continuing to expand and enhance The Johnny Stallings Arts Program because we believe people with special needs deserve opportunities to fully engage in the life of our communities.

On June 5, 2010, legendary Alabama football coach Gene Stallings came to Merrimack Hall to help raise funds for the program, which at the time consisted of Dance Your Dreams! and Camp Merrimack. With permission from the Stallings family, the program was officially named The Johnny Stallings Arts Program, in honor of Coach Stallings' son, Johnny. Johnny had Down syndrome and lived a full and rich life that touched thousands of people across the country. Merrimack Hall is one of hundreds of organizations with programs that proudly honor Johnny's life.

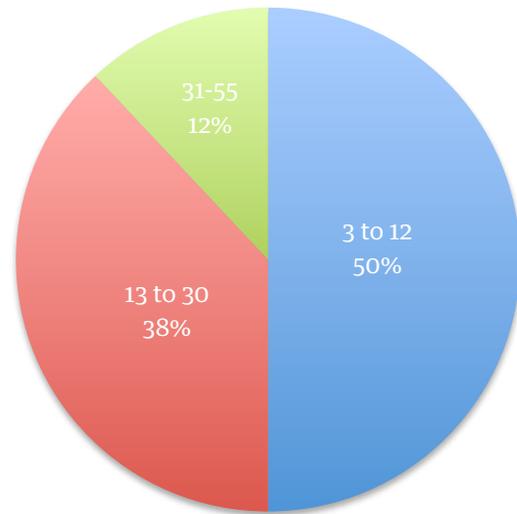
Program Demographics

Since launching in 2008 with only 10 students, the Johnny Stallings Arts Program now serves 403 children, teens and adults with special needs. Our students range in age from 3 to 65 and live with a variety of physical and intellectual disabilities. Currently, JSAP includes 12 weekly classes, two sessions of Camp Merrimack, two summer intensives for Project UP, a day habilitation program that meets year-round three days a week, and monthly social and cultural events for adults.

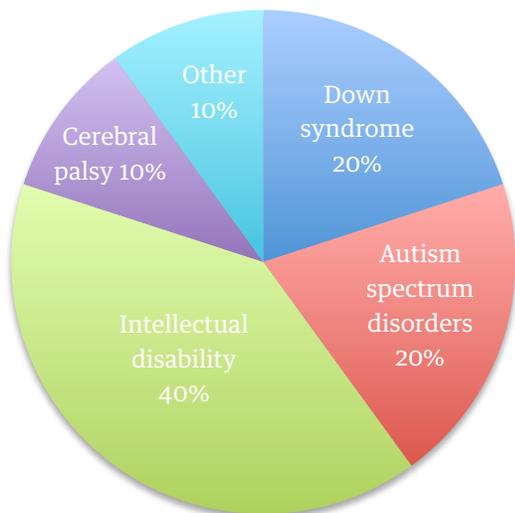
Weekly Classes: Students' Primary Diagnoses



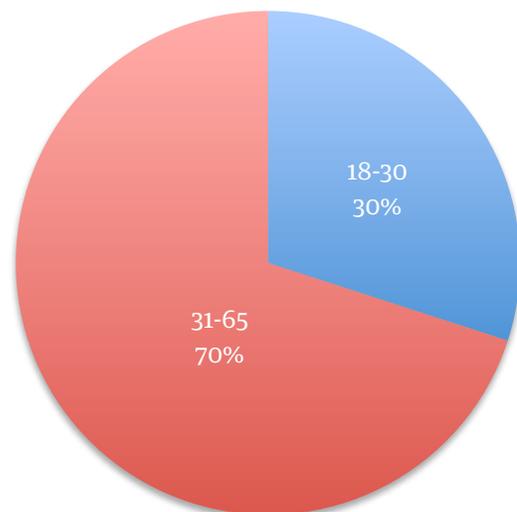
Weekly Classes: Student Ages



The Connection: Primary Diagnoses of Consumers



The Connection: Consumer Ages



Dance Your Dreams!



Dance Your Dreams!: Elianna's Story

*“Dancing is beautiful.
It’s like dreaming
with your feet.”*

- Elianna Stanners, age 10

Component Statistics

43 Students

Enrolled in the 2013-14 program year
who attend weekly classes.

\$89,881.87

Budget for DYD expenses in 2013-14.

Elianna was the first student through the doors at the first Dance Your Dreams! class in 2008. Sprinting to the registration table on her walker, Elianna announced, “I am five and a half years old and I’m ready to dance!” At the end of the first class, Elianna whispered to her volunteer, “I had a lot of fun, but next time, I could use some glitter and a crown.” After a few months of class, Elianna told us that she wants to be a ballerina when she grows up because, “Dance is beautiful...it’s like dreaming with your feet.”

For the first eight years of her life, Elianna worked diligently with physical and occupational therapists with the goal of one day walking independently. That goal became a reality when, four years after starting dance class, Elianna stood unassisted for the first time in her life. A few weeks later, she took her first consecutive steps in our dance studio. And today, Elianna can execute all five feet and arm positions in ballet, can complete the barre work in each week’s class and is an exuberant performer in every production.

Her parents have called her progress, “stunning and amazing” and say, “She loves dance and this program so much that she tries that much harder each week.” Elianna says that her ability to walk is thanks to Miss Hayley, who “Encouraged me to stand on my own and...I could do it!”

Dance Your Dreams!



About Dance Your Dreams!

Dance Your Dreams! is offered four times each week following the academic calendar. Class size is 10-15 children per class, with each child paired one-to-one with a trained teenage volunteer. Three of the classes are co-ed and one is designed just for boys. Children in Dance Your Dreams! have a variety of diagnoses, including Down syndrome, autism spectrum disorders, cerebral palsy, spina bifida and others. The total enrollment for Dance Your Dreams! for the 2013-2014 year was 43.

Merrimack Hall provides Dance Your Dreams! free of charge to its students, including all dance attire for weekly class and costumes for frequent performance opportunities. 52% of parents report they would not be able to participate if there were any fees attached to the program, as they live with staggering out-of-pocket medical expenses and other situations that pose a financial hardship. Dance Your Dreams! students are featured in an annual holiday production, a spring concert, Merrimack Hall's Evening of Dance and other events around the community. These performances offer most of our students their only opportunity to earn a trophy, to be acknowledged by an audience and to receive recognition for their achievements.

We witness remarkable progress in our student's social, emotional

and physical development on a weekly basis. Students who's parents thought might never walk have taken their first unassisted steps in our dance studio; students who experience discomfort with sensory stimulation are singing and dancing in front of audiences; students who are routinely marginalized and left out of mainstream after-school activities are included in a group activity that improves their self-esteem and confidence. Parents who are often deprived of the opportunity to celebrate their child's accomplishments bask in the pride of seeing their children reach personal milestones. In the words of one parent, "This dance class is actually therapy in disguise."

Dance Your Dreams!'s amazing volunteers are equally impacted positively by their participation. According to one volunteer, "Being a part of Dance Your Dreams! has changed my life. I will never complain about anything again since I've watched children live with problems I will never have to face." Volunteers are asked to commit to one semester at a time but 87% of all volunteers complete both semesters each year. 74% of our volunteers serve Dance Your Dreams! for more than one year. To date, 15 volunteers have graduated high school and started college with an intended major of physical therapy, special education or music therapy because of their involvement with Dance Your Dreams!.



Project UP: Carolyn's Story

*“Dancing is beautiful.
It’s like dreaming
with your feet.”*

- Elianna Stanners, age 10

In the special needs world, a diagnosis is an important thing to have. It’s a diagnosis that insures a person has access to programs and services that are imperative to their growth and development. But our students are so much more than their diagnosis... and so much more than the stereotypes that sometimes accompany a diagnosis.

Like Carolyn, who was diagnosed with autism at the age of three. Carolyn is not her defined by her diagnosis, nor does that diagnosis begin to describe who she is. Carolyn is a vibrant young woman who is about to celebrate her 21st birthday. Carolyn came to Merrimack Hall in 2010, one of the original members of Project UP. She is a talented singer and dancer, has had lead roles in our original productions and can always be counted on to remember choreography and lines even when our teachers forget them. Carolyn has performed with Project UP in Birmingham, Nashville, Atlanta and on the stage at the Music Center in Los Angeles, where she represented her teammates in Project UP at the National Dance Day Gala 2013. Carolyn is an Olympian who finished 7th in the world in figure skating at the International Special Olympics Games in Seoul, South Korea in 2013. She graduated from Grissom High School and has a huge circle of friends who join together for bowling tournaments, Miracle League ball games, dances and outings.

More importantly to Merrimack Hall, Carolyn joined our staff in the fall of 2013 and has become an invaluable and instrumental member of our team. You will find Carolyn greeting students and volunteers at the sign-in table each day. You can also find Carolyn hosting donors in The Cotton Club, organizing our files, writing thank you notes to our donors and performing a multitude of other administrative duties. Not only is Carolyn our co-worker, she is our friend. Carolyn has taught us to value the diversity that each person brings to work each day and to look beyond a “diagnosis.”

Component Statistics

42 Students

Enrolled in the 2013-14 program year who attend weekly classes.

\$72,942.87

Budget for PUP expenses in 2013-14.



About Project UP

Project UP is a performing company for teens and young adults with special needs. Launched in June 2010 with a summer camp for 9 teens, the program now meets weekly with 43 students in either the Junior (ages 12-14), Teen (ages 15-16) or Senior (ages 17 and up) companies. Project UP follows the academic calendar and company members have numerous public performance opportunities throughout the year. Each week, these students are taught music, dance and theatre by their instructors. They are assisted by college and high school students who commit to a year of volunteer service. Students have performed at festivals, community events, corporate events, and with local high school choir and dance departments.

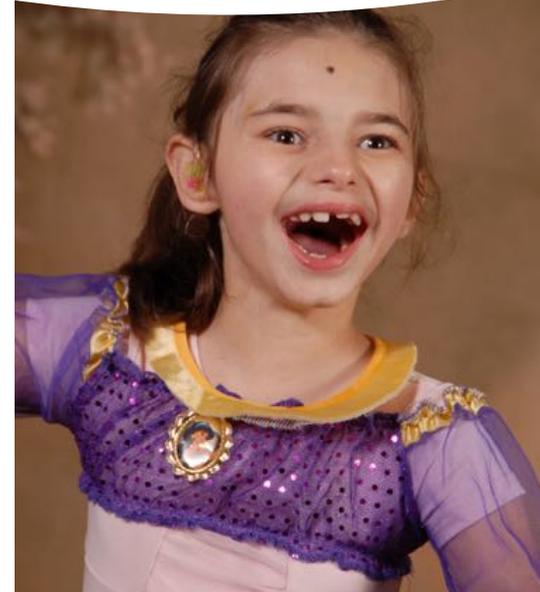
Project UP has a modest monthly tuition. Scholarships are available to anyone who requires financial assistance. Approximately 40% of students in Project UP receive annual scholarships.

In 2011, Project UP was invited to perform at the Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama tenth anniversary celebration. The students performed for more than 600 Toyota employees and dignitaries including Governor Robert Bentley and executives from Japan.

In January 2013, Project UP members performed in a showcase at the NRG Dance Project in Atlanta and were featured in a live news segment on “Making It In America” with Vinnie Politan on CNN’s Headline News.

For three consecutive years, Project UP has won the Alabama State Dance championships in Bessemer, Alabama, competing on an even playing field with their typical peers. They also won high honors at dance competitions in Atlanta and Nashville in 2014.

Five dancers from Project UP performed with five of their typical peers from local dance studio Element Huntsville, were featured performers at the National Dance Day Gala in Los Angeles in July 2013. Their performance of the dance piece “Change the World” received a six-minute standing ovation from the sold-out audience of 3,100. They were joined onstage during the ovation by Dizzy Feet Foundation founders Nigel Lythgoe and Adam Shankman.



Camp Merrimack: Amelia's Story

"This is the first time we could be part of a dance class. As soon as I pull out her tights, she starts swaying back and forth.

She really is excited. That means everything in the world to me."

- Brandy Grapperhaus,
mother of Amelia

Component Statistics

60 Students

Attended Camp Merrimack in 2014.

\$83,407.55

Budget for camp expenses in 2014.

Meet Amelia, the inspiration for our summer program, Camp Merrimack. Amelia is a member of the "Original Posse," our nickname for the children in our first Dance Your Dreams! class. Amelia comes through the doors each week wearing her beautiful smile, a smile that gets bigger and brighter as class progresses. When her mother told us in 2009 that Amelia had limited opportunities to participate in summer activities, we realized that Amelia probably wasn't alone and set out to create our own summer arts experience.

Amelia loved every minute of our first Camp Merrimack and has been a camper every summer since. She has performed in every original production since 2008 and was selected as The Johnny Stallings Arts Program "Artist of the Month" in April 2014.

Amelia is non-verbal, so when it was time to record her award acceptance speech, her younger brother and sister told us what they thought she would say: "The Johnny Stallings Arts Program is so much fun! I love having friends like me! When I'm there, I feel loved." Her mother says, "Every day, Amelia finds her tights and ballet skirt and brings them to me in hopes that I will take her to Merrimack Hall that day. We love being part of a community that sees past physical limitations and speaking abilities to the heart of a person and values them for who they truly are."

Every volunteer who has the honor of working with Amelia is forever changed by the experience. Without words, Amelia expresses an abundant joy that is contagious. Amelia doesn't understand the word "no" nor does she understand barriers. She is unafraid and never lets challenges get in the way of trying something new. Amelia is a trail-blazer who ignores limits, steps over boundaries and approaches life with an gratitude that we believe is the definition of what it means to be an artist.

About Camp Merrimack

Camp Merrimack is Merrimack Hall's annual half-day performing arts camp for children with special needs. Camp Merrimack is open to students with a wide range of physical and intellectual disabilities including autism spectrum disorders, Down Syndrome, cerebral palsy and others. The first camp was held in June 2009, with 30 students participating. Today, over 60 children participate in Camp Merrimack each summer, with nearly 100 volunteers providing assistance.

Camp Merrimack is open to any child, whatever their diagnosis may be. At Merrimack Hall, we believe our students are only limited by the labels society chooses to assign them. We have never turned away a student because of the nature of their disability and are committed to welcoming students of all ability levels into the arts.

Camp Merrimack was conceived after a conversation with a parent who mentioned the lack of summer activities for her child. Activities in Camp Merrimack include music, theater, dance and visual art. Each day features classes in all four disciplines. Each session ends with a showcase attended by parents and friends.

With a positive approach, engaging philosophy and 1:1 staff-to-camper ratio, our overall experience is different from any other. Camp Merrimack provides our students with opportunities to build social skills and creates an environment where they are sure to succeed!

Classes are limited to 15 children per age group and spaces are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Each day of the week, children ages 3-7 attend camp from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and children ages 8-12 attend camp from 1 to 4 p.m. Camp Merrimack is provided at a minimal cost to the families involved.

Brandy Grapperhaus, mother of student Amelia, says of Camp Merrimack, "Amelia loves Camp Merrimack! It offers her a chance to see her friends at Merrimack Hall and to do her favorite activities with them during the summer break."



The Connection: Jeffrey's Story

*"I used to be lonesome
but not anymore!"*

- Jeffrey, age 27
participant in The Connection

Jeffrey is 27-years-old and joined Project UP in 2012. He loves being part of our productions, traveling to dance competitions and being a valued member of the team. But since completing his formal education at the age of 21, Jeffrey's life had been lonely. While his parents were at work, Jeffrey spent his days with his aging grandparents, confined to their home for hours at a time. Jeffrey had few opportunities to make new friends or engage in the sorts of meaningful activities that every young adult should enjoy. His mother says that The Day Connection has been the answer to a prayer she's been asking for the past six years.

Jeffrey is a charter member of The Day Connection. Since the program was initiated in August, Jeffrey has been able to do things that have significantly improved his quality of life. He met his girlfriend in The Day Connection. He and five other men in The Day Connection have shared their love of football by spending Saturday afternoons watching games at Jeffrey's house and eating the game day food his parents cooked for them. These are just a few of the unexpected results of his participation in The Day Connection!

During the regular program hours, Jeffrey has learned to plant and tend a vegetable garden. He has learned how to play new card games. He's practiced important life skills like ordering his own lunch from a menu and making purchases in a store with his own money. Jeffrey has taken photographs, painted pictures, been in a fashion show, sung in a concert in front of an audience of 200, learned some chords on guitar and has developed a love for yoga. His parents report that his overall happiness and self-confidence are improved and that he reports that The Day Connection is his favorite place to be.

Jeffrey also looks forward to the monthly social events that The Night Connection features, where he meets up with even more new friends in an inclusive environment. Whether he's dressing in costume for a sock hop or playing partner Bingo with his friends, Jeffrey participates with enthusiasm in every party. His life is more rich and his days are more full because of The Connection.

Component Statistics

228 Students

Attended a 2013-14 Day or Night
Connection event.

\$90,718.86

Budget for The Connection expenses
in 2014-15.



About The Connection

The Connection is a social and cultural program designed to create lasting, meaningful relationships between people with special needs and their typical peers.

In January 2012, Merrimack Hall was the only organization in the state to be selected by the Alabama Council on Developmental Disabilities to launch a new program that provides social and recreational activities to teens and adults with special needs. Activities are planned eight times per program year, beginning each May. Activities include workshops with visiting artists, dance parties, game nights, and more. At each event in The Connection, Merrimack Hall has an equal number of participants and volunteers in our unique "Buddy Program." These volunteers have been asked to attend The Connection's events and to interact with the participants in a meaningful way. We are also encouraging volunteers to interact with their buddy partners outside of Merrimack Hall. We have seen meaningful relationships form organically and program participants have had the opportunity to form new friendships with others who are disabled and with their typical peers.

Since hosting our first event in May 2012, we have welcomed more than 300 people with disabilities into our facility for one of these eight annual events. According to the Council, Merrimack Hall was selected to receive this grant because of our proven track record in launching and sustaining programs that serve people with special needs and because of our innovative approach to creating activities for our clients.

In September 2013, Merrimack Hall will expand The Connection to include a regular schedule of daily activities for adults with special needs. These activities will include life skills classes, recreational and fitness activities, visual art projects, theatre classes, field trips and more. Working in conjunction with a large number of organizations and service providers, Merrimack Hall will open doors across our community for adults with special needs, allowing them to more fully participate in the community.



Inspired HeARTs: June's Story

"I cannot thank you and Merrimack enough for allowing me to volunteer. When I am around those children, I forget there is a world outside those walls."

- June Morgan,
Merrimack Hall volunteer

June Morgan became a volunteer at Merrimack Hall in 2010 and immediately became indispensable to our organization. There is no job too big or too small for June and she has never said "no" to any request we've made of her, even taking on volunteer shifts with less than an hour's notice. June has worked in every phase of the organization's activities but her favorite thing to do is help with Inspired HeARTS. June had never been a volunteer before Merrimack Hall and her experiences with our students have profoundly impacted her feelings about what's really important in life.

She takes great pride in her role as a facilitator in the students' participation in the arts, whether she is prepping materials for class or assisting someone who is blind or who has challenges with fine motor skills. Seeing the resulting artwork that our students create brings a measure of satisfaction to June that had been absent from her life before The Johnny Stallings Arts Program became an important priority to her.

In June's own words: "Spending time with the amazing students in your program makes me so grateful for my blessings. I am in awe of the students for their courage, their talents and their beautiful expressions of imagination. Those smiles, their joy, their attitudes, it touches my soul."

Component Statistics

30 Students

Enrolled in the 2013-14 program year who attend weekly classes.

\$75,309.41

Budget for Inspired HeARTs expenses in 2014-15 program year.



About Inspired HeARTs

Inspired HeARTs is a weekly visual art class for children and adults with special needs. A prototype program was developed in partnership with senior art students from the University of Alabama in Huntsville in February 2010 for 10 students ages 10-17 who live with both physical and intellectual disabilities. Today, Inspired HeARTs has three classes each week, serving 30 people ages 10-50. Our students are assisted by volunteer helpers in a 5:1 ratio. Inspired HeARTs follows the academic school year, and culminates with a gallery show of students' artwork in the spring. This program was created to allow our students to continue their experiences in the arts. Inspired HeARTs students inspire us with their artwork and creativity each week.

Inspired HeARTs uses an interdisciplinary approach to art education. Students learn techniques in numerous fine art and fine craft mediums, and are instructed in methods for accessing multimedia in order to express themselves and communicate with others. Students conceptualize images in two dimensions and three dimensions, each project allowing them to utilize line, form and color to effectively communicate their thoughts and emotions. As many of our students

are non-verbal, it is important that they are able to share their ideas no matter how concrete or abstract. Creating visual art can produce lifelong transformative effects on all students.

While in the visual arts classroom, they learn to work collaboratively as an art community to work toward a greater understanding of the world and their peers. The environment of the visual arts classroom prepares students with special needs to become more self-sufficient in the world and to better express themselves. Our interdisciplinary approach gives all students the chance to learn how to take direction, how to break tasks into digestible units and how to use higher order cognition to find creative solutions to the numerous and varied problems that arise when they are active in the creative process.

Community Impact

In the words of co-founder Alan Jenkins, “Merrimack Hall is not just about bricks and mortar, it’s about the arts revitalizing a neighborhood.” Merrimack Hall’s renovations have created a positive economic impact on historic Merrimack Mill Village and on the community as a whole in a number of ways.

- Patrons from a broad geographic area (primarily across northern Alabama and southern Tennessee) purchase tickets to the performances and workshops held at Merrimack Hall. Ticket buyers typically pair an evening of entertainment at Merrimack Hall with dinner at local restaurants, and out-of-town ticket buyers purchase lodging and attend other local activities.
- Since opening to the public in July 2007, approximately 130,000 people have attended an event or workshop at Merrimack Hall, giving people a reason to visit this previously neglected area of Huntsville.
- According to The Huntsville Times (Hannah, Gina. “Merrimack Village: Neighborhood Springing to Life Again.” The Huntsville Times. 15 February 2009: C1), property values in Merrimack Mill Village have increased more than 53% since Merrimack Hall’s renovations began in May 2006.
- Merrimack Hall worked closely with Merrimack Mill Village Organization representatives and the Historic Huntsville Foundation to secure passage of an ordinance changing the zoning for Merrimack Mill Village from multi-family to single family residences. The re-zoning of Merrimack Mill Village was a crucial step in continuing the revitalization that Merrimack Hall’s renovations began.
- The Huntsville/Madison County Convention and Visitor’s Bureau announced the selection of Huntsville as a “2010 Distinctive Destination,” an award presented by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Huntsville’s selection was based on five projects in the community: the U.S. Space and Rocket Center, Twickenham Historic District, Harrison Brothers Hardware Store, Constitution Hall Village and Merrimack Hall Performing Arts Center. This award is an honor for the city of Huntsville and an endorsement of the projects that were given as the basis for the award.

“Merrimack Hall is a tremendous addition to its west Huntsville neighborhood and to all of the Huntsville/Madison County area; its presentations and activities are providing an economic boost, are attracting patrons from across north Alabama, and are contributing to our city’s positive quality of life. The Jenkins’ efforts in renovating Merrimack Hall are a key factor in the revitalization of historic Merrimack Mill Village.”

– HUNTSVILLE MAYOR TOMMY BATTLE
November 14, 2009

In addition to the Johnny Stallings Arts Program, Merrimack Hall also gives back to the community by providing facility use to other nonprofit organizations, and reduced or free tickets to the underserved.

Since opening our doors in 2007, Merrimack Hall has given back more than \$1.5 million to the community.

Outreach Statistics

Outreach Statistics from June 2013 to May 2014

Scholarships:	\$ 1,000.00
Facility Use:	\$ 60,000.00
Tickets to the Underserved:	\$ 10,950.00
Johnny Stallings Arts Program:	\$ 412,260.56
2012-13 Total:	\$ 484,210.56

Outreach Statistics by Year Since Opening

July 2007 through June 2008:	\$ 60,925.00
June 2008 through May 2009:	\$ 101,860.00
June 2009 through May 2010:	\$ 71,433.00
June 2010 through May 2011:	\$ 109,396.00
June 2011 through May 2012:	\$ 330,049.00
June 2012 through May 2013:	\$ 361,272.00
June 2013 through May 2014:	\$ 484,210.56

Total Outreach to Date

\$ 1,519,600.56

Outreach Statistics

Johnny Stallings Arts Program 2014-15 Class Expenses

Dance Your Dreams!	
Total Budget:	\$ 89,881.87
Project UP	
Total Budget:	\$ 72,942.87
Camp Merrimack	
Total Budget:	\$ 83,407.55
Inspired HeARTs	
Total Budget:	\$ 75,309.41
The Connection	
Total Budget:	\$ 90,718.86

Total 2014-15 JSAP Program Expenses

\$ 412,260.56

The Completed Renovations



1930

Merrimack Hall, at left, served as the social center for Merrimack Manufacturing Company and the surrounding textile mill village. The building was home to a gymnasium, drug store, showers and pool hall, among other amenities. Today, Merrimack Hall's theatre is located inside the former gymnasium, and features the original wood floor and brick built on-site during construction of the mills.

2006

At right, a photo of Merrimack Hall when Debra and Alan Jenkins purchased the building in 2006. The Jenkins' goal was to bring the building back to its original splendor and replicate as much original architecture as possible.



2007

After \$2.5 million in renovations, Merrimack Hall is now home to a state-of-the-art theatre and 3,000-square foot dance studio. Debra and Alan were awarded the Neighborhood Revitalization Award from the Historic Huntsville Foundation in 2007 for their efforts.





The History of Merrimack Hall

In 1899, Merrimack Manufacturing Company, a large textile manufacturer based in Lowell, Massachusetts, purchased 600 acres in what was then known as West Huntsville for the purpose of building a textile mill. By July 1901, the first of Merrimack Manufacturing Company's two mills was open, construction on its second textile mill was underway, and a thriving mill village supported the needs of the initial 600 employees. Merrimack Mill Village included 296 homes, mostly identical duplexes, a hospital, fire department, cemetery, one-room classroom and a Company Store. In 1919, Merrimack Manufacturing Company decided that an expansion of the Company Store was necessary. Because of the need for an auditorium and gymnasium for Joe Bradley School, Merrimack Manufacturing Company decided to expand the existing company store to the 25,000 square foot building they named Merrimack Hall. From its opening in 1920, Merrimack Hall served as a central hub for all residents of the mill village. For more than six decades, community events were held in Merrimack Hall each week. The first floor of Merrimack Hall initially housed the Company Store, a café and barbershop, and has been home to a number of other tenants through the years.

Merrimack Mills became Huntsville Manufacturing Company in 1946 and, in its heyday, employed more than 1,600 people who worked three shifts a day, seven days a week. The mills produced 95 million yards of "gray cloth" annually. The mills ceased operation in the early 1980s and were demolished in 1992. Today, some 250 mill village houses and Merrimack Hall are all that remain of this important piece of Huntsville's history.

For the past seven years, Merrimack Hall has presented world-class entertainment to the community, including theatre, music, dance and special workshops with visiting artists. Past productions and performers include: Academy Award® winning actor Billy Bob Thornton, Emmy Award® winning choreographer Wade Robson, Grammy Award® winning drummer Simon Kirke, *Menopause the Musical*, *Defending the Caveman*, *Dixie's Tupperware Party*, Complexions Contemporary Dance Company, Motherhood the Musical, Ruthie Foster, Leon Redbone, Mandy Barnett, Victoria Shaw, Jim Brickman, Robin Meade, Dionne Warwick, Claire Lynch, Lisa Loeb, Karla Bonoff, the Popovich Comedy Pet Theater, Abigail Washburn, Bela Fleck, and many more.



About the Founders

Armed with a desire to leave a lasting legacy in Huntsville/Madison County - and with their experience in and passion for the arts - founders Alan and Debra Jenkins decided to create a new non-profit organization, donate the funds necessary to purchase and renovate historic Merrimack Hall into a theatre and to pair their continued financial support with their efforts as volunteers to oversee its activities. Merrimack Hall Performing Arts Center was granted non-profit status by the IRS in October 2006. After a 13-month renovation, but without a real mission or purpose, Merrimack Hall Performing Arts Center opened to the public in July 2007. Merrimack Hall immediately began presenting a series of professional touring productions that brought thousands of patrons to the venue. While there were ancillary benefits to the building's renovation, such as the revitalization of the surrounding neighborhood, the Jenkins feared Merrimack Hall would become nothing more than a presenting house until...

About 90 days after opening to the public, Debra was inspired to create The Johnny Stallings Arts Program, which today serves over 400 individuals with special needs, nearly 300 volunteers and which has been recognized locally, regionally and nationally for the unique nature of its elements. To date, the Jenkins have donated in excess of \$5 million to the organization and spend more than 80 hours a week as volunteers working on behalf of its mission.

Alan, founder and President of InterSouth Properties, Inc., is a real estate developer with the successful development, management and leasing of over 1 million square feet of commercial office space in his portfolio. Alan combined his expertise as a developer with his experiences as an accomplished musician to develop a state-of-the-art venue that has won rave reviews for the quality of its amenities. Alan is responsible for booking all of the professional artists who perform in the venue and oversees all of the organization's fiscal and management policies.

After a career in public relations and personnel management, Debra left the work force in 1992 to be a stay-at-home and community volunteer, serving on behalf of some of Huntsville's premiere arts organization. Since Merrimack Hall's opening, Debra has served as Chairman of the Board of Directors and as the de facto Executive Director, responsible for overseeing all of the organizations activities along with the development of The Johnny Stallings Arts Program. Debra has received local, state and national awards for her volunteer service including the 2007 Virginia Hammill Simms Award (awarded for local volunteer service to the arts), the Statewide Community Service Award from the Daughters of the American Revolution, the 2010 Delta Zeta National Woman of the Year and the 2009 Classic Woman Award, a national award that recognizes women for volunteer service, presented annually by the Meredith Publishing Company. Debra received a Certificate of Business Excellence (CIBE) from the Columbia University Business School's Social Enterprise Program in 2014.

Together, Debra and Alan have received many awards and recognitions including the 2012 Family Philanthropy Award from the Community Foundation of Huntsville-Madison County; the 2012 Humanitarian Award from the Arthritis Foundation of North Alabama; and the 2007 Neighborhood Revitalization Award from the Huntsville Historic Society.

Debra's blog - www.dreamingwithyourfeet.com - was launched in February 2014 and was read by more than 32,000 people in 90 days. Her weekly posts are about the challenges, joys, heartbreaks and triumphs that she witnesses through The Johnny Stallings Arts Program.

Advisory Board

Debra Jenkins, President - Mrs. Jenkins is a co-founder of Merrimack Hall Performing Arts Center and serves as the unpaid Executive Director. She has been instrumental in the development of the organization and all of its programs, services and activities.

Alan Jenkins, Vice President - Mr. Jenkins is a co-founder of Merrimack Hall Performing Arts Center, is involved in all aspects of its activities and has personally donated in excess of \$4 million to the non-profit organization since its founding in 2006 as his family's gift to the community.

Joe Ritch, Secretary - Mr. Ritch is an attorney at Sirote & Permutt, PC (Huntsville), is on the Board of Trustees of the University of Alabama, and serves as the Chairman of the BRAC (Base Re-Alignment and Closure) Committee. Mr. Ritch is a Founding Member of the Board and provides his legal and business expertise to the organization, as well as making significant financial donations.

Kay Harrington, Treasurer - Ms. Harrington is the Comptroller for InterSouth Properties, Inc., and has more than 30 years of professional experience in the field of accounting. She is responsible for overseeing the operational budget for the organization and managing its daily cash flow, receivables, payables, payroll and all other administrative duties associated with Merrimack Hall's finances. She has also been a major financial donor to the organization.

Ron Harris, Artistic Advisor - Mr. Harris retired in 2006 after a 30+ year career as an educator with the Huntsville City Schools. He has been a Board Member since 2008, and works on the development of new projects and productions.

Scott Schrimsher, Facility Advisor - Mr. Schrimsher is the owner and President of Whitney Construction, LLC. He was the general contractor for the renovations to the facility and has been on the Board since 2008. His primary area of responsibility is the upkeep and maintenance of the facility, oversight of future construction of undeveloped space in the facility, and coordination of the facilities technical amenities.

Ben Bender, Member at Large - Mr. Bender is the Director of Corporate Marketing for Synapse Wireless and father to Carly, a student in Dance Your Dreams!. Mr. Bender combines his business expertise with his experiences as a parent of a child with special needs to guide and direct the activities of Merrimack Hall.

Grant Funding

Alabama Council on Developmental Disabilities
Alabama State Council on the Arts
Alabama State Senate District 7
The Arts Council, Inc.
The Daniel Foundation of Alabama
Dizzy Feet Foundation

The Gothic Guild of Huntsville
The Jane K. Lowe Charitable Foundation
Publix Super Markets Charities
National Endowment for the Arts
Wachovia Wells-Fargo Foundation
Widow's Mite Foundation

Corporate & In-Kind Sponsors

Alexander's Jewelry
Bill Penney Toyota
The Boeing Company
Boeing Gift Matching Program
Bryant Bank
COLSA Corporation
Courtyard by Marriott
Dunagan, Yates & Alison Plastic Surgery
Holiday Inn Hotel
The Huntsville Times
The Hutchens Company
Jerry Damson Honda
Intersouth Properties
Landscape South

Lockheed Martin
Redstone Federal Credit Union
Redstone Recognitions
Renasant Bank
RSVP Direct Mail
Smith Barney
Smith Thornton Advisors
The Surgery Center
Synapse Wireless
Target
Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama
WAAY-31
WHNT-19
WLRH Public Radio