

Medill Coverage by Jennifer Tabet
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After 20 years of existence, the renowned Actors Gymnasium in Evanston has selected students for its very first Professional Circus Training Program.

Located at the Noyes Cultural Arts Center -927 Noyes Street in Evanston- the Actors Gymnasium has taught arts and theatre through kids and adult classes, as well as camps and workshop since it was founded 1995. This year, it will be the first time that it will be finally offering a Professional Circus Training Program. The Actors Gymnasium waited 20 years to do so.

“The idea for a professional training program has been in the works for many years but a few key resources needed to fall into place before we could do so, including resources in staff to support the program and training space,” said Michelle Higgins, The Actors Gymnasium’s marketing manager. “We also wanted to make sure that we could offer something special to the circus community before moving forward.”

The school’s annual show “Circus in Progress: An Evening of Daring New Work” has sold out for the past three years, confirming that it’s quality of work is recognized and appreciated in Evanston. The Actors Gymnasium has also gained a national and international renown. Among the applicants from its program, some tried their luck from Canada, Australia or Mexico, according to Higgins. Four out of the 11 admitted came from outside of the state of Illinois. All of them are willing to pay \$8.500 for this training.

“Each circus training program offers its own strengths that makes them an excellent place to train,” said Higgins. “One of the strengths of Actors Gymnasium's program is the emphasis on physical theatre. Students here will have access to world class instructors from Lookingglass Theatre and Lucky Plush Productions.”

Lucky Plush Production’s interest for this project came from their Artistic Director, Julia Rhoads, who has known about and admired the Actors Gymnasium for years through its relationship with Lookingglass, one of the school’s other partners.

“Julia (Rhoads) has been a choreographer for Lookingglass, participated in development workshops for the company, and has longstanding friendships with members of its ensemble,” said Kim Goldman, Lucky Plush Production’s Company Manager.

“The Actors Gymnasium reached out to Julia and Lucky Plush Productions because of our shared interest in devised ensemble work, and in fostering and creating hybrid forms of performance –equal parts movement and theater.”

Goldman confirmed Lucky Plush Productions was being paid as independent contractors for the partnership, but was not willing to communicate budget numbers.

The 11 students recently selected for this new 9-month-long intensive 27h-a-week program will be trained in circus arts, dance and physical theatre, and be prepared for professional circus performance. Their classes will begin on Sept. 14, 2015.