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EVANSTON

PERSONALITY



Sylvia Hernandez

Circus in town

A former circus acrobat, she is a co-partner and a teacher with Tony Adler, Larry DiStasi and Carl Coash in The Actors Gymnasium, a not-for-profit school founded last fall that has trained about 250 students since its opening. The school teaches physical-theater techniques including some favorite circus arts, such as the trapeze, juggling, teeterboard, stilt walking and riding unicycles. Based at the Noyes Cultural Arts Center, at 929 Noyes St., the school offers 28 classes throughout the year, 18 of them for adults and 10 for children. They also include dance, gymnastics, comedy and mime.

Three rings

"I started when I was seven with my family, the Hernandez Troupe. I did teeterboard with my family for about 20 years." They toured with various circuses including the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus. "It's like doing a Broadway show six days a week with a couple of shows a day." The troupe toured with lion tamer Gunther Gebel-Williams.

Back-breaking work

"One time I was competing in a circus world championship in England, and I over-rotated on one of my tricks and landed on my back. The doctor didn't think it was broken and I was asked to perform, and I did. The next day they said my back was broken and that I would never perform again — but I performed for 10 years more."

Looking ahead

"Two years ago I went on tour when a relative was expecting. Would I go back to the circus? I probably wouldn't go back for long, but you never know."

By: Marilyn Claessens

Photo By: Joe Cyganowski/Pioneer Press