

FOR RELEASE AUGUST 25, 2010
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**HOUSTON BALLET AND HOUSTON AREA PARKINSON SOCIETY
DANCE FOR PARKINSON PROGRAM ENTERS ITS 2ND YEAR**

*Program Helps Improve Muscle Memory
and Improves Quality of Life for those Living with Parkinson's*

HOUSTON, TX - Each Monday from 12:45 to 2 p.m. Houston Ballet and the Houston Area Parkinson Society (HAPS) offer a weekly dance class for people with Parkinson's at Houston Ballet's studios at 1921 West Bell. The class features live music with a piano accompanist and incorporates various types of music and dance. Participants not only do ballet but line dancing, square dancing, and strengthening exercises. Individuals interested in participating in the HAPS dance program, or any of the HAPS programs may contact the HAPS office at 713-626-7114 or visit www.hapsonline.org. Beginners are welcome, no partners required -- just a willingness to have fun!

The goal of the class is to override the muscle freezing that occurs with Parkinson's where the patient's brain tells them to move but their muscles won't let them. The class helps develop participants' muscle memory, making it easier for them to regain control and movement.

The Houston program started in the spring of 2009 with only a handful of students but has grown to more than 25 individuals with Parkinson's and their care partners who attend class weekly.

Kathleen Crist, LMSW, director of social services and program development, for HAPS observed of the classes, "The greatest and most common feedback we receive from students is that they find this class normalizing. When they are here dancing and singing for 90 minutes every week, they forget about the Parkinson's disease. They forget about their daily challenges and limitations. They forget about how their lives have changed. They feel normal and they leave with such a wonderful feeling that carries them through the rest of their day."

The idea for the program arose when Ms. Crist attended a meeting at The Methodist Hospital's Center for Performing Arts Medicine, where specially trained doctors provide care to performing

artists. There she met Houston Ballet's General Manager James Nelson, whose father has Parkinson's. The two put their heads together and the dance class for Parkinson's patients was born.

Kristine Richmond, a former Houston Ballet principal dancer who appeared with the company from 1980 to 1993 and went on to perform on Broadway, leads the weekly classes. "Not only is great to be back at the ballet studio, but I get to do something more to give back to the community," observed Ms. Richmond.

Five months ago, the program expanded with the addition and leadership of Jo Ellen Hubert. Ms. Hubert provides the live piano accompaniment and has included a monthly ParkinSING. The goal for this class is to give the students the opportunity to use singing as a fun and practical method of expanding their breathing, maintaining and increasing their voice projection and working their lips, tongues, jaws and soft palates all in the context of singing Broadway songs they know, love and are inspired by.

The class starts with a seated exercise for warm up. Participants sit in a circle, greeting each other, and performing various hand and leg motions to the music. The live music helps participants get the feel of a real dance class. Then, the class moves to the barre where a series of ballet steps are executed for more agility training and organized movement.

Ms. Richmond states, "We have seen improvement and growth much faster than we ever expected. As the class continues we feel very comfortable really challenging these students because they are eager and ready for it. The class is fun and uplifting and inviting. New comers have no trouble joining in and catching up. The spirit of the group makes that possible."

Mr. Nelson explains, "Houston Ballet and Houston Area Parkinson Society's Dance for Parkinson's is the perfect pas de deux for the two organizations, and it fits perfectly into Houston Ballet's mission of inspiring a lasting love and appreciation for dance. We're so proud to be honored by HAPS in receiving the Roy H. Cullen Quality of Life Award in 2009. It is a wonderful validation of the impact our outreach program has on the Houston community."

HAPS serves and advocates for those affected by Parkinson's disease in our community. HAPS, a non-profit organization founded in 1974, is one of the oldest independent, local Parkinson's disease support groups in the United States. HAPS provides comprehensive services to the eight-county Houston Metropolitan Area, with a combined estimated population of more than 5.5 million people.

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DANCE FOR PARKINSON'S FACT SHEET

WHAT: Houston Ballet and Houston Area Parkinson Society Dance for Parkinson's Program

ABOUT THE PROGRAM:

Dance for Parkinson's is brought to Houstonians by Houston Ballet Foundation and Houston Area Parkinson Society (HAPS). Dance for Parkinson's helps participants gain muscle memory and agility.

WHEN: Every Monday from 12:45 to 2:00 p.m.

WHERE: Houston Ballet
1921 West Bell
Houston, TX 77219

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Contact HAPS at 713-626-7114 or online at www.hapsonline.org