



JAMES RAGLAND
jragland@dallasnews.com

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Their dancing shoes are cash-strapped

Small nonprofit organizations are like many Americans. They live paycheck to paycheck.

And when an unexpected expense crops up or an expected donation doesn't arrive, they find themselves in a bind.

Such is the case with Imagine the Impossible, a Dallas-based group that teaches inner-city kids the art of classical ballet.

Founded and directed by former classical ballet performer

Mary Johnson, Imagine the Impossible is almost seven years old. Ms. Johnson uses the discipline required to learn and perform classical ballet to transform the lives of economically disadvantaged kids.

Watching her work with the kids is a work of art itself.

I visited Ms. Johnson and her dancers three summers ago and was blown away by the youthful

See **NONPROFIT** Page 2B



NATHAN HUNSINGER/Staff Photographer

Nonprofit Imagine the Impossible, which teaches inner-city kids the art of classical ballet, is in need of contributions.

Nonprofit school needs a leg up

Continued from Page 1B

enthusiasm of the participants. Parents told me the after-school ballet classes were helping to keep their kids focused and out of trouble.

Some of the students are too young to get into much trouble now. Like the innocent lass who told me she'd been dancing for seven whole years.

"Wow," I said. "And how old are you?"

"Five," she snapped, drawing a robust laugh from yours truly.

You can see why Ms. Johnson is still having fun after all these years.

And you can understand why I wanted to do something when Ms. Johnson told me that an end-of-the-year party she was planning for Saturday is in jeopardy because a big donation fell through.

"So here we are at the ninth hour, trying to get support," Ms. Johnson said. "This was going to be a one-time thing for the children."

The \$10,000 donation she had expected was going to cover the party at the Women's Museum at Fair Park, allow her to buy each student a gift and support scholarships for some of the approximately 600 students involved in the program.

"We're not able to give bicycles and gifts like that," Ms. Johnson pointed out. "But we would like to be able to give ballet shoes or something ballet-related to all of the kids."

A lot of nonprofits, especially smaller ones, find themselves in the same financial crunch as Ms. Johnson's dance troupe. And this is the time of year when they're most likely to find a willing donor, said Trent Stamp, president of New Jersey-based Charity Navigator, which evaluates the financial health of America's largest nonprofits.

"Roughly 60 percent of all [donations] are given between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day," Mr. Stamp said. "It's the time of the year when people feel most altruistic."

It's also the time when most companies and individuals know how much money they have left in their budgets, and when some start looking to make tax-deductible gifts.

Organizations such as Ms. Johnson's often face more difficulty than usual this time of year because many people turn their attention to "more altruistic" causes such as food banks and



Photos by NATHAN HUNSINGER/Staff Photographer

Rosa Momzon teaches schoolchildren ballet in an Imagine the Impossible class. Mary Johnson, the nonprofit's director, says, "These are the ones you're keeping off the streets, you're keeping from getting pregnant. These are the ones you're keeping off drugs."



From left: Jose Angel Deantes, sister Candy Deantes and Emely Puebla dance at Sudie L. Williams Elementary. Some nonprofits have a harder time raising funds at year-end, because many people turn attention to other types of charities.

homeless shelters, Mr. Stamp said.

And all of the groups are trying to take advantage of the short-season of giving by raising money to help get through the first quarter of the next year, when donations traditionally subside.

Ms. Johnson understands all that. She knows she's tugging at

people's heartstrings at a time when they may already have extended generosity to other charities.

But she also knows that she's pushing a good cause: 96 percent of her students are "at-risk" inner-city kids, and most of them attend Dallas public schools.

"These are the ones you're

keeping off the streets, you're keeping from getting pregnant," she said. "These are the ones you're keeping off drugs."

Ms. Johnson wants folks to know that their donations will last far beyond Saturday's party and the one-time gifts.

In short, she said, "You're changing these kids' whole life."