

BUSINESS



The 2022-23 Dynamite Dance Factory class poses for a group photo. Photo courtesy of The Dynamite Dance Factory

Dynamite Dance Factory epitomizes owner Kyri Hayes' vision for youth dance

BY MADGIE ROBINSON

When you step inside the dance studio — the first thing that catches your eye is pink. Pink coats each wall with pictures of owner Kyri Hayes and those of Black and brown little girls.

Open black doors welcome you from the lobby into the main studio, featuring a classic barre and wide horizontal mirrors that line the walls alongside decorative pictures of Black ballerinas and inspirational quotes. As you glance above the mirrors, huge lettering spread across the top reads, "Dynamite Dance Factory aka The Pink Palace."

One can't help but notice the R&B and Hip-Hop music booming through the speakers as little girls warm up for their ballet, jazz, or hip-hop routine. Mary J. Blige's "I'm Gone Shine," bounces off the walls as they stretch with Hayes assisting each girl to reach and touch their toes.

When dance class begins, all eyes are on Hayes as she teaches— instructing the girls in a firm yet warm tone. While class is serious and for the purpose of learning and instruction, fun conversations still loom in the air.

Four years into her business, 27-year-old Kyri Hayes is the owner of Dynamite Dance Factory — the only Black-owned studio in Kennesaw, Georgia. There are currently 135 dancers enrolled at the studio, many of them Black and brown girls led by Black women instructors who teach alongside Hayes.

"You don't see this every day in Kennesaw

—Black-owned, [majority Black students] — you don't see it," Hayes said.

White people make up about 62 percent of Kennesaw's overall population, with 38 percent representing non-white racial groups, including Blacks or African Americans, Asians.

"The diversity that is in dance now is really evolving," said Tamara Irving, part-time professor of dance at Kennesaw State University and owner of TMI Design and consulting LLC. "It's way more than what it used to be [and] it still has a long way to go."

Hayes' ended her first season with the studio in 2019. She only had 12 students. Three years later, she had 135 dancers, 15 in each class and a waitlist.

Hayes says when parents tour Dynamite Dance Factory for the first time, they instantly fall in love with the energy it encompasses. The music, representation and family atmosphere are what captures people when they step foot inside the studio. "You don't walk into a studio every day in [Kennesaw] and hear the instrumental of Lil Baby playing," Hayes said. "You don't come into a ballet class and it's a violin version of a Drake song."

Dance parent Bianca Owens said she searched for local dance studios for her daughter to join and couldn't find any that met her needs based on the reviews she read online. Then she came across Dynamite Dance Factory. After a quick phone call to Hayes and an in-person visit to the studio, Owens signed her daughter up.

"I [was] talking to her [one] day on the phone, and she's like, 'come by' and I came by

and was like, oh yeah, I'm signing my daughter up — like the first day I met her in person," Owens said.

Not only did the studio catch Owens' attention, but it was Hayes' personality and energy that caught the mom off-guard — in a good way.

"Her voice just catches your attention, the girls' attention and it's just like — woah," Owens said. "I mean the studio, she just brings a whole different feel to it."

Browsing the pictures decorating the walls, you see a 6-year-old Hayes and her former dance instructor, Deanna Baskerville. Baskerville taught dance for more than 25 years before retiring in 2009 with over 30 years of experience under her belt. Hayes and Baskerville kept in contact throughout the years and met for lunch one afternoon.

During their meet-up, Hayes told Baskerville to come out of her 11-year retirement and teach at her studio.

"She said no, you can't retire, because you have to come to teach at my studio," Baskerville recalled. "I said, but I retired, and I had back surgery last year." Hayes responded: "but you could teach."

Despite Baskerville's reservations, Hayes' persistence resulted in her coming out of retirement to teach in August 2020.

Baskerville's first memory of Hayes was watching her dance at a studio in Cartersville, Georgia. She spotted her out of the whole group, noticing how Hayes danced with her head down.

"She danced her heart out looking at the floor and my daughter was the same way, so that's why [I] noticed," Baskerville said. The dance veteran described the younger Hayes as bubbly, yet quiet and shy.

Owning a dance studio was always an aspiration for Hayes, she said. She frequently taught dance classes in her hometown at the Cartersville School of Ballet, as well as The Georgia Ballet, Decatur School of Ballet and the dance department at Woodland High School's fine arts program.

While still teaching dance on the side, she attended a community college and worked as a dental assistant. Hayes said during the week, she would leave her eight-hour workday and go teach at the dance studio. The daily cycle weighed on her heavily.

Hayes never pictured herself owning her own studio, often rejecting the idea when co-workers, friends and peers suggested it to her.

"You don't think that you could open up a business, [you] get so hooked to get in that paycheck and knowing what you're going to have in the bank every two weeks," Hayes said.

She eventually gave in to her dream despite her doubts.

Following the recent unrest due to police violence against Blacks, Groupon and National Black Chamber of Commerce survey found that seven out of 10 customers actively pursued ventures to buy from Black-owned businesses, with an equal number planning to continue their efforts.

Dynamite Dance Factory benefitted from this with an influx of Black and brown students from Cartersville to Smyrna.

"It was ever since COVID [with] everything that was happening, [people] wanted to show support for who we were," Hayes said. "Because at the time, you know, a lot of people weren't."

Hayes' original vision for the studio did not match the final result. Coming from teaching at a predominately white studio, she never guessed her dancers would be primarily Black and Brown girls.

"I did not think that we would turn into the Black ballerina capital of Kennesaw," Hayes said.

When she first started advertising, her flyers did not feature pictures of Black and brown students with the mindset that her lead clients would be white. Parents like Owens said they wanted their child to be around girls who look like them to connect and build friendships.

"Black families and Black kids don't go through the same things as other cultures do," Hayes said. "We deal with a lot within our culture, and I feel like the dancers can connect on that same level."

The present studio exceeded Hayes' previous expectations, but she is still pushing for more growth in the future and hopes to add another studio location to match the enrollment demand.

"I told her you're going to need a bigger space or another space because you are growing," Owens said. "Not just the classes are growing — the girls are growing."