

Girlhood dreams mushroom into big business

Teaching...twirling...cheerleading. Those were the girlhood dreams of Barbara Plasket Prewitt.

She has succeeded spectacularly in all three.

Today she heads a staff of 35 to 40 employees as the busy owner-operator of Champion Studio, the Champion Supply Co. and the Champion Travel Agency, housed in a 22-room building on Montwood Drive. There is a large reception lobby centered with a fountain and a parents' waiting room.

THERE ARE three teaching ballrooms: one for dance and tap dance, another for ballet and a third for exercises and gymnastics. (Floors are constructed according to needs.)

There is a dance fashion shop and rooms where costumes are made and another where trophies are assembled, sold and engraved. Health foods also are for sale.

"If you work hard enough, anything is possible," she said.

Plays and shows in her parents' backyard drew neighborhood children to Barbara's house when she attended Cooley Elementary School. She was the guiding light.

"TEACHING," she said, "that's what I always wanted to do."

She began baton twirling at Ysleta High School, practicing in her parents' garage with a friend, Barbara McDonald. They were soon teaching ballet and twirling to others. She attended twirling clinics and her expertise grew.

After she enrolled at UT El Paso, she became a majorette and head Golddigger. After graduation with a degree in elementary education, she continued to work with the Golddiggers, taught third grade two years and instructed the drill team at Eastwood High School 18 years. She's had studios in Del Camino Center and a warehouse on Dale Road.



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THE STUDIO and its assorted businesses claim only part of her time. In the summer, she is busy all season as camp director for National Spirit Ambassadors' Camp of Champs, held at universities and colleges in Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Texas and California. Sessions range from two to three weeks. Young people are taught drill and dance routines, twirling, gymnastics, leadership, aerobics, partner stunts and pyramids, pom and jazz routines and other activities.

"The family goes with me in the summer — we have family vacations then," she said. The family includes David, 23, who's been accepted in Medical School at UT Houston next term; Steven, 21, who helps his mother at the studio and hubby Ted, who works at the Government Employees Credit Union. She takes advantage of trips to attend Jane Fonda and Richard Simmons exercise classes, and view the latest dance fashions.

Mrs. Prewitt directs the four-day Festival Pageant at Disneyland Hotel in California where young people from all over the United States and Puerto Rico gather to learn, participate, compete and be evaluated.

SHE'S DIRECTED the Sun Carnival Coronation entertainment . . . then there's the Sun Bowl halftime show, an activity she's directed for 10 years.

Like a general planning maneuvers, Mrs. Prewitt meets with the committee, tells her ideas, writes the script and charts the action on her field maps.

She teaches the routines to the head cheerleaders for the schools selected; the

cheerleaders in turn teach their groups and all gather for three days of mass rehearsing before the game.

Does she ever get butterflies before a performance?

"Yes," she admitted, "but not as bad as I used to."

"WHEN WE have practiced and prepared, I know we will do the best we can do, and I feel good about it.

"We always take a sewing kit and tool kit for the unexpected. We've had to sew girls up in costumes — and mend props — then I hold my breath during the performance, hoping nothing will fall apart."

Mrs. Prewitt's Shownettes Twirling Corps won National Corps, Dance Twirl and Parade honors in national competition. Her groups have performed for the Baltimore Colts, San Francisco 49ers, Los Angeles Rams, San Diego Chargers, Ol' Miss and Houston Oilers.

"My biggest thrill was working with Disneyland in the Sun Bowl 10 years ago," she recalled. "It was a learning experience. I provided the girls, designed the costumes and did the choreography. I met Bob Jani, who did the Superbowl halftime and who directs the Rockettes in New York City. He's a consultant for Disneyland's big projects."

SHE PURCHASED the property and built her studio, which included living quarters for her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Chet Plasket, some 15 years ago. Her parents lived there until their deaths four years ago within four months of each other. All rooms are now utilized for the ever-expanding business. She's planning some remodeling.

As a great deal of her time is taken up with administration duties, Mrs. Prewitt says she misses the close contact with the girls.

"I love the work," she said. "I only feel bad when the girls are troubled and confused with life for one reason or another. But working as a team they usually forget their problems."



Herald-Post photo by John Hopper

Barbara Plasket Prewitt

It's wonderful to see a shy, awkward girl enroll, then as she gains confidence, blossom. It happens all the time. I feel I am providing a service that's needed."

The Shownettes, made up of girls from all high schools, were accompanied by a live band. Les Stallings, a trumpet player who performed with the group 20 years ago, called Mrs. Prewitt when he was in El Paso playing in the band accompanying the *Evita* Civic Center show. He's living in Las Vegas where he's a professional musician.

"He said he just wanted to say thanks for the experience," Mrs. Prewitt said. "That's what makes this job rewarding."

Virginia Turner is a columnist for the El Paso Herald-Post.