

# Rockin’ choreography

Cori Callahan has been dancing since the age of 3—her passion taking her all the way to Radio City Music Hall and now to Grosse Pointe as a choreographer

By Michal Ruprecht & Zoe Graves  
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From working as a Radio City Rockette to founding her own charity dance program, school choreographer Cori Callahan has created a lifestyle around performing.

Callahan first stepped foot on the dance floor 35 years ago, and it was seeing “Funny Girl,” that spurred her dream to become a professional dancer.

She continued dancing throughout high school and took an interest in choreography when she started teaching some of the younger dancers at her studio.

After attending the University of Michigan for a year, she dropped out to move to New York and started her seven-year stint as a Rockette at Radio City Music Hall.

“It was probably the highlight of my dance career, my performance career,” Callahan said. “Performing is my passion, and I think that’s why I do choreography and teach now because with a family and stuff, you can’t really be a full-time performer anymore, so it keeps my passion in my life by being able to choreograph and teach.”

After returning to Michigan, Callahan took a job teaching at Grosse Pointe Dance Center. Since she began her formal teaching career, Callahan found a way to spread her passion for dance to an even wider audience through volunteer service. To lift the burden of expenses for families with children who have neurodevelopmental disorders, Callahan instituted a program called Adaptive Dance that gives them free dance lessons.

“I would say my most proud accomplishment for teaching and choreography is to be able to give these dancers an opportunity to dance and perform,” she said. “Just realizing that they have enough money to spend on their therapy and everything else, and I wanted them to not have

that be an issue. I just wanted them to be able to dance and enjoy that, and it’s amazing to see how much they’re growing from that.”

Even though she generally stays behind the curtains, Callahan is vital to the creation of North’s musicals. She has participated in North productions for five years.

Callahan helps with musicals at both Parcels and North, and senior Lolly Duus, who participated in productions at both schools, said Callahan has had a lasting impact on her because of her positive vibes and innovative teaching.

“I think our musicals are a lot more energized with the dancing and the choreography that she has set out for us because she’s really original with what she does, and it seems like the cast every year has really liked what she’s given us,” Duus said. “I think it’s just made everyone excited to perform and dance and sing at the same time, and that really shows through with our performances.”

While teaching others, Callahan believes she has grown as a choreographer by adding to her repertoire of more complex productions. She said she hopes to continue to participate in school productions to keep pursuing choreography and dance.

Sean Kifer, director of North’s musicals, said that Callahan has helped students improve their acting skills.

“Cori brings a high level of professionalism and creativity to the dancing within the musicals,” Kifer said via email. “We are very lucky and blessed to have Cori working with our students at Grosse Pointe North.”

Callahan does her best to instill motivation in her students and help them realize that there isn’t always one straight answer when trying to achieve their goals.

“I think especially as high schoolers, there always has to be a specific plan,” Callahan said. “(But) it’s not always so black and white of what you want to do, so I think if you just keep following your passion, it’s gonna happen one way or another, and it might be in a twisted way, but it’ll get there.”



**DANCING WITH THE STARS** | Cori Callahan and assistant teachers, freshmen Mackenzie Driscoll and Emme Simpson, pose with a group in the Adaptive Dance program.



**RED AND WHITE** | Cori Callahan poses with one of her musical theatre classes at a competition in the First English Evangelical Lutheran Church.



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