Born to dance: Teenage ballerina living her dream  
By Lauren Gilde

The lights shine down and the music surrounds her as she spins across the stage into the arms of her partner. The audience roars its approval as the music slows and the curtains begin to close.  
  
It's the end of just another workday for teenager Chelsea Rittenhouse.  
  
At 18, the Howell resident is the youngest member of the New York Theater Ballet, which describes itself as the most widely seen chamber ballet company in the United States. The professional group also tours abroad.   
  
"I cherish every moment on stage with the lights in your face, being surrounded by the music, performing for an audience and hearing their applause," Rittenhouse said. "It's something most people will never feel, but it's one of the best feelings anyone could ever imagine."  
  
As exciting as it is, it can also be overwhelming.  
  
"It is surprising that I was able to go straight into a company at 18 years old," she admitted. "But it is also more work and more pressure being young because everyone else has so much more experience."  
  
Not that Rittenhouse doesn't already have plenty of experience.  
  
At age 4, she began dancing at Denise Danielle School of Dance in Brick. Since then, she has attended the Academy of Dance Arts in Red Bank, The Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet school and the Fine and Performing Arts Center at Howell High School.  
  
She also has performed with the Company of Dance Arts, a preprofessional ballet company in Red Bank, starring as Clara in "The Nutcracker" and playing the lead in "Tangoed."  
  
"Chelsea was an outstanding student," said Lisa Twamley, a dance teacher at Howell High School's Fine and Performing Arts Center, where Rittenhouse last year won the rising star award. "She demands a lot from herself. She will not accept anything that is not excellent. She is very easy to work with, and because she is, you want to work with her."  
  
Rittenhouse's success hasn't been without sacrifices.  
  
"Sometimes I miss being a regular teenager because, growing up, I missed school dances or I'd always be the last one to arrive at parties," she recalled. "But it was something I had to be dedicated to and it wasn't a chore to me. It just became a part of my life."  
  
She added, "I always told myself that I wouldn't be one of those people who had a dream and never followed it."  
  
Last spring, her 14-year commitment paid off. After reading on its Web site that the New York Theater Ballet was hosting an open audition in April, she tried out.  
  
"I was hired on the spot the day of call-backs," she said.  
  
Following her high school graduation in June, Rittenhouse took a two-week intensive training course at the Miami City Ballet.  
  
"Every day we would take gyrotonics, which is similar to pilates, a two-hour technique class, an hour of pointe or partnering, and an hour-and-a-half of rehearsal for the end of (the course) performance," she said.  
  
From there, it was off to New York to train and rehearse with her new employer six days a week. So far, Rittenhouse has performed in front of audiences at the ballet's studio in Manhattan and in Massachusetts at Jacob's Pillow, America's first and longest-running dance festival.  
  
Her schedule is about to get a lot more hectic. This month, her troupe is performing "The Nutcracker" 25 times.  
  
But Rittenhouse is ready. This is what she's trained for for most of her young life.  
  
"My love for dance keeps me going, even after a hard day or a disappointing one," she said. "I just think about how much I love it, and it's my dream. And I have never been one to quit or, trust me, I would have quit already. Dance is very demanding, and you have to be a strong person to take the criticism and hard work."

-Direct Quotes

-Told a story with a timeline

-Author used MUGS—writing conventions

-Describes her

-Her talents

-Quote from the teacher

QUESTIONS:

-What is your biggest success so far in your life?

-When did you start?

-When were you born?

-Where do you live?

-What do you like to do most?

-What are your hobbies?

-Are you into any sports?

-What’s your pet peeve?

-What’s your favorite color?

-What is your life story?

-What does a day in your life look like?

-What’s your favorite movie?

-What do you like about the FGCS?

-Would you rather go to a different school, why or why not?

-What’s your favorite, band, song, type of music?

-Who are your closest friends?

-What would you like to be when you grow up and why?

-What’s your favorite subject?

-What do you like to do after school?

-Do you have any pets, what types?

-Do you have any siblings, how many, ages?

-Do you like pizza?

-What’s the craziest thing you’ve ever done?

-What’s your favorite number, why?

-What’s your favorite food?

-Do you have any after school activities?

-Do you have any emotional challenges?

-What’s hard for you?

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