

The New Mexican/Local News 1-29-06

FOOT WORK

At size 12 wide, Matthew Ortiz arguably has the biggest shoes among the performers at the National Dance Institute. The 16-year-old has dancer's feet: They're hairy, blistered and maybe even a bit oafish when bare. But in their black tap shoes-special ordered at a price of \$230- Matthew's feet are at home.

When he took the stage during NDI's annual Dance-A-Thon on Saturday evening, his large feet became light. He stepped and clicked across the stage gracefully with his fellow tap-dancers, who are among the oldest students at NDI.

The three-hour recital to raise money for NDI featured jazz, hip-hop, tap dancing and a 70-minute dance marathon.

Before the first performance, hundreds of students and teachers scrambled to get ready, creating a commotion backstage.

In a hallway off to the side, Matthew claimed he never gets cold feet before a performance. "My feet are pretty durable," he said.

Meanwhile, in the girl's locker room, 12-year-old Kate Norskog asked her friend Emily Arasim, 12, to stretch her feet. Kate sat on the ground and Emily who was standing, braced and pushed her feet against Kate's bending them backward.

"Ah, that feels good," Kate said. Kate broke her ankle about a year ago and still does exercises to keep it nimble. Like most of the kids at Saturday night's performance, Kate, who wore jazz shoes, had been at the Dance Barns since midmorning.

"I'll trade you shoes laces," said her friend Natalie Vold, also 12.

"They might not fit," Kate said. Kate wore traditional jazz shoes, while Natalie wore bigger shoes called jazz tennis shoes.

"Actually, that might be kind of weird," Natalie said.

A few minutes later, word starting spreading that it was just about time to take the stage. The girls rushed out, one after the other, stopping briefly to check their hair in the mirror.

In the hallway, Matthew gathered half a dozen of his fellow dancers around him in a huddle. He put his arms over their shoulders, "OK guys," he whispered, "XCel; don't suck."