



Jim and Elizabeth Cunningham, Dr. Michael and Chris Cunningham (he's honorary event chair; chancellor of the National University system), Kathy West (Epilepsy Foundation executive director), Art and Lori Barter, Jennifer Barter, Denny Sanford



Bill and Carla Bacon, Darwin Fishman, Buki Domingos, Drs. Carla Stayboldt and Jim Grisolia



Drew Moyer, Beverly Scarano, William Bradley (event host chef; executive chef of Addison's at the Grand Del Mar), Kristi Pieper, Cheryl and Bob Scarano



David and Diane Archambault, Phyllis Parrish, Bradford Benter, Maureen and Charlie King



Trevor Blair, Dale Yahnke, Phil Blair, Dan Novak

Key to Gingerbread City

STORY AND PHOTOS BY VINCENT ANDRUNAS • SPECIAL TO THE U-T

EPILEPSY FOUNDATION OF S.D. COUNTY GALA

Today, an estimated 3 million Americans are affected by epilepsy, including about 50,000 in San Diego County. This neurological condition disturbs the brain's electrical activity, causing seizures. Since 1954, the Epilepsy Foundation of San Diego County (EFSDC) has provided free services to people struggling to overcome the challenges of living with epilepsy, while also working to educate the public about seizure disorders and erase the stigma once associated with this condition.

A festive annual "Gingerbread City" gala helps support EFSDC's work. Its 24th iteration drew 350 guests to the Fairmont Grand Del Mar recently. There, executive chef William Bradley of the Grand's famed Addison Restaurant hosted ten other celebrity chefs from the region's finest eateries, each creating fabulous dishes served from booths around the ballroom. Each was unique, but none more unusual than Galaxy Taco's tasty tostadas, made with kale guacamole, orange, pickled onion — and fried Oaxacan crickets. (Chef Trey Foshee assured appreciative eaters that neither Jiminy Cricket nor any members of his immediate family were involved in any way.) Several chefs also generously offered dinner-party packages that were sold during John Curly's particularly entertaining live auction.

On display were 13 amazingly-detailed gingerbread masterpieces imagined and crafted by highly-talented artists. Guests marveled at them while sipping champagne

and placing silent-auction bids. First-place winners "A Magical Dance" in the "Grand" Category and "Wonder World" in the "Petite" group sold for \$5,000 each.

Entertainment included Benjamin Jaber (San Diego Symphony principle horn) on flute and Irish Uilleann pipes. EFSDC's "Winning Kid," Emily Eshoo, was diagnosed with epilepsy at age 7. Now 14 and an outstanding young advocate and inspiring leader in the epilepsy community, she spoke eloquently of living life to the fullest. Working toward a ballet career, she danced to "Let It Snow," earning a standing ovation.

The event program honored Art and Lori Barter for their longtime support. National University System chancellor Dr. Michael Cunningham served as honorary gala chair. His own mother died from seizure disorder complications back when it was something seldom spoken about and few support services were available. He thanked everyone for making this EFSDC's most successful fundraising gala ever, saying "It was such an honor to raise awareness about the incredible work being done by the Epilepsy Foundation of San Diego County on behalf of people who suffer from epilepsy and seizure disorders."

The Foundation feels that the record-breaking event met its goal to raise \$400,000 for EFSDC's free programs and services.

ONE-ON-ONE WITH TOBY BATLEY

U-T profiles of notable local people

Making leap from dancer to director

STORY BY LISA DEADERICK ■ PHOTO BY EDUARDO CONTRERAS

Toby Batley got an admittedly late start in his training for an ultimate career as a professional ballet dancer. He took it up at 14, after being told he was good at it, and the discipline and creativity of the form hooked him. The England native trained at the Royal Ballet School in London, going on to eventually dance for Northern Ballet in England, where he became a principal dancer.

"As dancers, our careers are very short-lived. The rigorous training and demanding schedule take their toll on your body and mind, especially after 13 years. I always thought that I would like to be an artistic director and I was always imagining how things could be done differently," he says of the recent role he's taken on as co-artistic director of the Southern California Ballet, with his wife, Martha Leebolt. "So when the opportunity came along for us to take the helm of the studio where Martha trained, we jumped at the chance."

Batley, 33, lives in Rancho Bernardo with Leebolt, and has had various roles created for him as a dancer, has been nominated for national dance awards, and named among the top dancers in his field. Now, with this leadership position he took on this past September, he and his wife have been focused more recently on their company's upcoming performance of the holiday classic, "The Nutcracker," at 1 and 7 p.m. Saturday and again at 1 p.m. Dec. 17 at the Poway Center for the Performing Arts. He took some time out from rehearsals and planning to talk about his journey from full-time dancer to co-artistic director and what's in store for audiences at Southern California Ballet's "The Nutcracker."

Q. You and your wife are both artistic directors for Southern California Ballet. Is working as co-artistic directors a common thing at ballet companies?

A. It's very unusual. Art is so individual, and as artistic directors, artistic vision is inseparable from you and what you do. However, Martha and I have worked extremely closely for the last 13 years. We built a career together as dance partners and it became kind of symbiotic. It was a natural progression for us to continue our work together.

Q. How do you divide the responsibilities between the two of you?

A. We share the teaching as equally as possible and it's useful to have each other as backup, as finding substitute teachers can be a nightmare. Outside of the studio, we work together even more. If one of us does something, then the other will check it over. This is all new to us, so we need each other's support to make important decisions. I am more tech-savvy than Martha, so I tend to do all of that kind of thing, and I like design and to have things work well. Martha is much more organized, and she is a far better "people person," so she handles the people side, especially because sometimes my British personality doesn't translate well here.

What I love about Rancho Bernardo ...

We love pilates. It keeps us moving and strong, and our teacher at the pilates studio we go to is so good that we persuaded him to come teach contemporary dance for us at Southern California Ballet. We also love our local steakhouse restaurant, which is walking distance from where we live and makes us feel at home since everyone walks everywhere in Europe.

Q. Tell us about Southern California Ballet.

A. It is a ballet academy and pre-professional company founded by Sylvia Palmer in 1983. She moved here after a career as a dancer in the National Ballet of Canada and brought with her the cultural history of that company to found her own ballet school, in exactly the same manner that all the great companies of the world were founded. Martha and my careers have been rooted in full-length story ballets and it is our passion to speak through dance. This style is what we want to continue.

Q. How does a ballet company operate?



A. Every ballet company is different. For example, Martha and I danced in the United Kingdom for a large-scale, professional touring ballet company performing over 150 shows a year. We were very lucky to be part of one of the leading companies in England that was fully funded with a full-time staff of over 130 people. Southern California Ballet is much smaller and performs only a few times a year at the Poway Center for the Performing Arts. Ballet companies are led by artistic directors whose vision will make up a large part of the identity of the company. Sometimes, the artistic director is also a choreographer who will stage most of the work the company does, and other times, the director may be someone who mainly commissions works by other people.

Q. How long have you been artistic director?

A. I have been artistic director since Sept. 5. It was always a goal for me to run an artistic organization, I just wasn't sure what or where. We settled here because of Martha's connection with the Southern California Ballet.

Q. When did you know you wanted to become a professional dancer?

A. When I first started, I only enjoyed dancing because lots of people told me I was good at it. It wasn't until I joined the Royal Ballet School in London that I really became serious and understood that I could both make this my profession and do well. Not many people get paid to do what they love. For me, I didn't even realize it was a career until a few years after I had already been in a company. I was just doing what I loved.

Q. What is it about dance that you love?

A. It's the athleticism coupled with the artistry. Going somewhere onstage that is different from reality, the chance to pretend to be a character and inhabit a role that is as different from me as possible.

Q. And why did you focus on ballet?

A. Originally, I thought I was more interested in modern dance and tap because I started late and felt that they were more accessible to me.

However, deep down I always preferred ballet. I liked the control and the discipline that it demands.

Q. As a principal dancer, what was your training schedule like?

A. As a professional dancer, I was contracted for 33 hours of rehearsal a week, as well as nine hours of class a week, and then I would go to the gym and work out or do body maintenance for probably another three or four hours a week. There were also the 150-plus, full-length performances a year to do. So about 50 hours a week, 48 weeks a year.

Q. Your company is getting ready for your production of "The Nutcracker"? What can people expect from these performances?

A. They can expect a very authentic and cohesive production, which has a strong narrative and holds the audience. Sylvia, our founding artistic director, was adamant when she created this version 26 years ago, that the ballet have a strong, clear storyline and all the parts fit together and make sense. She didn't want to throw in random crowd-pleasing numbers, which don't fit in with the rest of the ballet. Instead, she relied on the magic of the story to keep people engaged.

Q. Everyone seems to do "The Nutcracker." What do you think it is about this particular story that has endured over the years?

A. "The Nutcracker" epitomizes this time of year, especially the music. Tchaikovsky was a genius. Even if you have never seen or heard of "The Nutcracker," his music will make you think of Christmas. I guarantee that everyone has heard at least some part of "The Nutcracker" (probably the "Trepak dance") even if they don't realize it. The magic of Christmas is apparent all the way through from the first time we meet Drosselmeyer to the snow scene and Clara's journey to the land of the sweets.

Q. What do dancers enjoy about performing "The Nutcracker"?

A. It has a lot of dancing. Most ballets showcase the principals, but "The Nutcracker" challenges everyone involved, from snow and flowers all the way up to the sugarplum Grand Pas de Deux. The divertissements (the many short dances in the second act) give many performers the chance to shine as soloists.

Q. What is the best advice you've ever received?

A. Do your best — that is all that matters.

Q. Describe your ideal San Diego weekend.

A. We love the Safari Park. I also love the beach and can make a good attempt at something resembling surfing.

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