

Heartland Chapter 2014 Volunteer of the Year – Anna Kovalyova

Written by Efim Kolesnikov and Larry Gogel

Anna has been a Heartland Board member since 2012. She is very sociable and she works hard to make people feel welcome at the chapter events, thus contributing to the Chapter's success.

Anna's most important contributions:

- **Making people feel welcome.** Anna has a smile and a kind word for everyone. She has been taking dance lessons for over 12 years, and she takes the time to show the basic steps to beginners and to make the newcomers feel welcome. She also initiated a Volunteers' page on the Heartland's website that praises the work of volunteers; and she urged the Chapter to have a Volunteer Appreciation party that is now held every November.

- **Organizing public exhibitions.** As a Special Events Coordinator, Anna contacts local organizations who might benefit from dance exhibitions. Some also contact Heartland via website or through the word of mouth. Anna's belief is "If people are having a good time, they will keep coming back".

In 2013, Anna organized and took an active part in 8 charity exhibitions, including United Way campaign celebration and exhibitions at several nursing homes and retirement communities in Central IN. For the first 10 months of 2014, Anna organized 8 additional exhibitions, including Marquette Manor retirement center, Westfield Retirement Center, a fellowship group at St Luke's United Methodist Church, and others. Due to their popularity, the Chapter's semi-annual Arts Garden exhibitions in Indianapolis Circle Centre Mall were expanded to 3 times per year; and several exhibitions to retirement homes became annual events.

Some of the responses that Heartland performers got this year: "Thanks so much for coming! We enjoyed the dancing very much! Terrific! We really appreciate the amount of work you put into the performance."

Anna has broadened the Heartland's performers to a large, talented and very active group of dancers who are eager to share their passion for dance with others in the community. The performers represent different dancing skill levels, ranging from beginners to seasoned social dancers to competitors and National Amateur Champions.

- **Building Strong Ties with other Organizations:** Recognizing that the art of dance comes in various forms and that the boundaries between various dance styles are often blurry, Anna began working with other dance groups in Central Indiana. Heartland ballroom dancers themselves often belong to several dance clubs, including Salsa, Argentine Tango, Kizomba, etc. By becoming more inclusive, Heartland is able to attract more people to its monthly dance parties and special events. In fact, the Heartland exhibitions are no longer restricted to Chapter members only. Anna expanded our pool of performers by inviting members of other ballroom dance clubs, as well as Argentine Tango, Salsa, Cabaret and modern dancers. She also invites singers to Heartland exhibitions, many of whom do both singing and dancing. Presently, Anna is working on attracting musicians who can provide live accompaniment to our performers in the future.

- **Promoting Heartland Chapter and Strengthening its Image.**

In 2012, Anna launched the annual Heartland exhibitions at the Indiana Roof. Now in its 3rd year, the exhibitions allow Heartland members to demonstrate their dance skills and to promote the Chapter mission to other dance clubs in the area.

Anna also secured a videographer and a photographer for the Chapter who post their updates on the Chapter's website. The website stores pictures of numerous Chapter events, including charity exhibitions and dance celebrations. In addition, Anna suggested and implemented posting video summaries of the monthly dance lessons and special events. The Board got many compliments from its members on the ability to watch lesson summaries at their own leisure from the Heartland's webpage.

Anna also writes articles documenting the Chapter's success. Several of her articles were published by the American Dancer magazine (including the Sep-Oct 2014 issue of AD).

- **Fundraising for a Homeless shelter.** Earlier this year, the Rotary Club of Greenfield, IN came up with an idea: to organize a dance contest and fundraiser that would benefit the Hope House, a shelter for homeless families and individuals of three Indiana counties.

Whereas the Greenfield Rotary Club secured several sponsors, found a facility and lined up many volunteers, the event organizers needed help in attracting dancers. Anna learned about the event and made a contact with the Rotary

organizers. By utilizing her ties with the local dance studios and clubs, Anna recruited a total of 47 contestants from 10 dance studios and clubs and put together a 3-hour program. The dancers presented 27 gorgeous routines. Keeping in line with her passion to bring together all forms of dancing, the event was open to performers of all ages and all levels of proficiency (pro, pro-am and am dancers), and encompassed a variety of dance styles (ballet, ballroom, Latin, modern, etc). Routines ranged from solo dancers, to couples and formations.

Anna was also involved in promoting the event and selling spectator tickets.

The dance fundraiser took place on June 7, 2014. The participants, the audience and the organizers all enjoyed the experience and decided to turn this into an annual event. In fact, the Greenfield Rotary Club is considering approaching other Rotary Clubs and expanding the event to other parts of Indiana.

- **Co-organizer of the Chapter's annual Ballroom workshops.** Anna became involved in the Heartland's second annual workshop. With her help, the workshop was attended by over 40 dancers. Anna worked on securing instructors and developing the theme for the lessons offered. Her goal was to bring in top instructors who customarily do not offer group lessons. The workshops serve as a means of bringing together both the Chapter's social dancers and its amateur competitors, and are also open to the general public. Anna is in the process of organizing the 3rd annual workshop which will take place on Jan 17th 2015.

The Chapter will recognize Anna's numerous contributions by awarding her a Certificate of Appreciation at its "Volunteer Appreciation" dance party on November 8, 2014.



Anna receives flowers from Jim Snellenberger, Greenfield Rotary, the organizer of Dancing for Hope