

Mamaroneck Business Rebuilds After Storm

After being severely damaged by the floodwaters of Irene, Danse Elite Limited decided to reopen its studio on Monday.

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- September 28, 2011



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Melanie Hodges (front) with some of Danse Elite's students.

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Three and a half weeks after Tropical Storm Irene severely flooded [Danse Elite Limited](#) on Mamaroneck Avenue, Owner and Artistic Director [Melanie Hodges](#) Malone decided to reopen the dance school's doors to her devoted students.

"We had six and a half feet of mud within the entire studio," said Malone of the estimated \$20,000 in damages incurred by Irene.

"We lost all our walls and all the dance flooring had to come up; all the mirrors had to be taken down," Malone explained.

Nearby, the Hess gas station and [A&P](#) supermarket experienced flooding, as well as many neighboring homes on this side of Mamaroneck Avenue.

Many of the costs of rebuilding the studio are not immediately refunded, said Malone, who struggled to get her business up and running as quickly as possible.

"What you have to do when you have these kinds of situations and you're a business is I have to put out the money first and then see if I can get reimbursed through the insurance," Malone said, noting that she is fully registered to receive Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) aid as well.

Malone's husband, Jim, as well as the owners of the Danse Elite building, Linda and Ken Wiltsek, assisted Melanie with the arduous task of rebuilding quickly.

Danielle Tardio, 15, has been with Danse Elite for three years now and is fully immersed in studio activities, taking up to 10 classes, including [Pointe Ballet](#), Modern Contemporary and Tap Jazz.

"I was here when [the flooding] first happened and I've been here every day since, rebuilding," Tardio said. She has helped with tasks such as painting, putting down carpeting and washing mud-caked furniture.

Melissa Ramondelli, 10, is in her fourth year with Danse Elite. She is currently involved in Hip Hop, Lyrical Jazz and Ballet classes at the studio.

"I come here three times a week and I'm friends with everyone here. It's a big family," Ramondelli said. When asked about the flooding and repairs, she replied, "When I found out what happened my heart was broken."

Ema Jovanovic, 10, is in her sixth year with Danse Elite. She takes ballet classes twice a week and is thinking about getting involved with Danse's Jazz classes.

"I'm really happy, because we can be with everyone again, especially Melanie," said Jovanovic, of the studio reopening.

Even more dedicated than the students are the parents and Melanie thankfully acknowledges their involvement in helping to get the studio back in action.

"The day after the flood came and the hurricane, we [parents and staff] were out in the parking lot cleaning everything that we could salvage," said Melanie.

Different families even kept pieces of the studio's furniture in their homes, while the studio struggled to rebuild.

Danse Elite offers a wide range of classes including: Ballet, Pointe, Tap, Jazz, Hip Hop and Creative Movement, among others.

Many of Melanie's students go on to become involved in college or other dance programs.

"I have seven seniors this year and they're all applying to college dance programs, which is very exciting," Melanie said.

When the 2007 Nor'easter flooding completely destroyed the building space on 715 Mamaroneck Ave., Melanie seized the opportunity and began working on the building, eventually converting it into a dance studio.

Her faithful students from New York Dance in Harrison, where she previously taught, followed her to the new locale.

So, like many other businesses, Danse Elite is slowly getting back on its feet after being devastated by Irene. What sets this business apart from the rest though, is a close-knit community of dedicated and fun-loving students.

"I'm happy to be back; I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. If I didn't dance, I don't know what I'd do," said Tardio.

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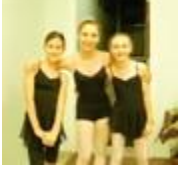
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