

Gutz

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ly elementary school, but she said dancing as a trio was a new challenge.

“It was definitely a different dynamic than anything I’ve ever done,” Gutz said. “It was awkward trying to choreograph with a different group of people. The lifts can sometimes go wrong, so we all had to be super focused, but at the same time, they’re like the funniest people I’ve ever met. There’s a lot of laughs that go into our rehearsals.”

Gutz said the faculty from Larkin helped them get through the show. The group began learning as much choreography for different routines a month before the show began taping because of the grueling tight schedule.

“I think we were even prepping for the second round [routine] before we went out, because they told us you’re not going to have much time if you do make it through, so have one ready. It was a lot of planning ahead,” Gutz said. Even that planning ahead had its bumps, as some of their song selections didn’t clear copyright use for the show.

“I think we learned four routines before we actually got one that we could bring for the first round,” Gutz said.

Memories on and off stage

Gutz is no stranger to high-pressure environments, having competed in dance since she was 6 and having gone through many auditions, but dancing on the show was on a different level.

“It was definitely unlike anything I’ve ever done before,” she said. “I was so nervous. I’ve probably never been that nervous in my life, especially with the three judges that are like such inspirations and idols to so many people watching you.”

The crunched rehearsal time before show day added a stressful element.

“You have a quick rehearsal, and it’s stressful if they don’t go as planned. When we first rehearsed on the stage two days before show day, it was super stressful, because if anything went wrong, you’re like, ‘What if this happens on show day?’ It was just a lot of stress, but it was



Photo by Hannah Davis

Sara Gutz takes a ballet class at Larkin. Dancers in the senior line are required to take five ballet classes per week.

fun, too, at the same time,” Gutz said.

During the show’s taping, Sara would have to work on homework in between dance rehearsals and other technical rehearsals for the show.

“We got time on set, usually every day, to do school work, which was pretty helpful, but there was a lot going on. You have rehearsals and stage blocks and camera blocks,” Sara said. “It was hard to catch up when I got back. I was really behind.”

Sara worked hard upon her return to complete the quarter with a 3.9 GPA.

“To keep up the amount of dance that she does seven days of a week competitively and all these opportunities and to maintain those good grades, we’re pretty proud of her,” said Cindy Gutz, Sarah’s mom.

Sara and the members of The Trilogy joined fellow Larkin dancers Ellie and Ava Wagner in Los Angeles for the taping of the show, which took place from October through December. Seeing so many familiar faces helped her in the process, but it was especially helpful to have the Wagner sisters there.

“I was just thankful to have two people I am best friends with by my side through the whole experience, because even though it was in a competitive environment, we were there for each other and we gave each other pep talks. It was nice to

have them in the same kind of premise as [The Trilogy].”

“It was nice to be on that journey together,” Cindy added. “I’m really good friends with [Ellie and Ava’s] mom and we got to all experience it together.”

Despite the competitive nature of the show, the junior division bonded together to become good friends.

“We all instantly — something clicked and we all just became friends, the whole junior division,” Sara said. “Everyone was super supportive of each other, and they’d give you hugs when you’d come off stage. We have Snapchat group chats now with everyone, and we text each other.”

Keeping the secret

Even now, Sara can’t share much about what happens on the show until the episodes air, but it was not being able to say anything leading up to and during the show’s taping that proved most difficult, especially since Sara was gone more than usual from school.

“I definitely got a lot of questions from students. I know we couldn’t tell teachers exactly what was going on, because it was confidential,” Sara said.

“I had to talk to the [school administration] because she missed a lot of school for this,” Cindy added.

Cindy also had to request a unique work schedule and work

remotely when needed, as she had to be with her daughter for the tapings. She said it was hard to relay the importance of the opportunity without saying anything specific, but she was grateful to have a supportive manager who allowed her the flexibility she needed. That also meant her husband held down the fort with Sara’s younger sister, who also dances at Larkin but couldn’t attend any of the tapings because of age restrictions.

“He was able to come down a couple of times for some tapings,” Cindy said.

It wasn’t until just a month ago that Sara got to share her secret with the world.

“I was actually at school when I got to post it on my Instagram, and I think that post got hundreds of comments, and there were a lot of them from [students] at this school and some people I don’t even know. It was cool to see the support from everyone I go to school with every day,” Sara said.

Expectations are flying high

While the fate of The Trilogy on the show cannot be made known to the general public, Sara teased some incredible stunts and routines.

“From The Trilogy, you can expect really big lifts, because [the boys] are super strong and athletic and they can throw me up in the air super high,” Sara said. “I think that was pretty much known for on the show.”

“She kind of drags them around the stage, too. They’re very powerful, very dramatic,” Larkin added. “Sara is a little actress on the stage.”

While the show and homework kept her busy, Sara did get to view a handful of other dancers during the tapings, as well.

“I enjoyed watching other people and see what they do and what they’re made of. There’s some crazy things I’ve never seen before, and different styles I got introduced to,” Sara said.

“It’s gonna be amazing to watch,” Cindy added.

The NBC show’s season premiere episode took place at 8 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 26, and will run on Sundays at 7 p.m. for the rest of the season. The

Trilogy’s first appearance on the show was on Sunday, March 3. The trio made it through the qualifying rounds and will begin competing in the divisional rounds later on in the season.

“It was definitely a lot to take in, but I had a really fun time doing it,” Sara said.

Back to a relative normal

Life has returned to normal for Sara, who is back in her regular schedule at school and continues her seven-days-a-week training and competition schedule at Larkin Dance Studio as a part of the senior competitive line. But Sara knows that a new normal is likely to be coming following the show’s release, which showrunners said could include Instagram fame. At a recent dance competition, Sara noticed some people had been a little shy to approach her. Even at the studio, Sara gets asked to sign autographs. Larkin said Sara has always been a role model for the dancers around her, especially those younger dancers.

“Everybody loves her,” Larkin said. “The little kids all look up to her. She’s an incredible role model for all the kids here.”

It’s a role Sara takes seriously. “It’s so cool I get to share this journey with everyone and inspire young kids, because I know whenever I watch ‘So You Think You Can Dance’ or ‘World of Dance,’ I’m super inspired by those older kids. I’m grateful I get to give back and share my love of dance with other kids,” she said.

At school, it’s a similar story about shared excitement for the young dancer.

“Everyone’s super curious, and I like to tell them as much as I can, because I think it’s cool they’re interested and I’m thankful they want to be a part of it,” Sara said.

At 16, Sara still has some time to figure out what she wants to do, but she knows one thing for sure.

“I want to keep dance in my life for as long as possible because that’s just what I love to do and I haven’t found that love for anything else,” Sara said. “Anything that involves that, I think I’d be happy with.”



Submitted photo

Sara and The Trilogy take some time to rest on set with Larkin choreographer Shelby Feddema.

Scandia offers help with recreation programs

Sewage system ordinance also changed

Alyson Sood  
Scandia Reporter

After talking about the idea at multiple meetings, the Scandia City Council approved a financial assistance fund for Parks and Recreation programs on Feb. 19.

Available only to Scan-

dia residents, eligible families will be able to receive up to \$50 per person per year with a family maximum of \$200. Families that qualify for free or reduced-price school meals will be considered eligible, though the council will also take into consideration families that have experienced financial hardship in the past year. The council approved allocating up to \$2,000 per year for the program, to

be used on a first-come, first-served basis.

Sewage ordinance

The council also amended the ordinance regulating the community sewage treatment system. The ordinance now requires users to allow the city access to inspect any portion of the community sewage treatment system and any connection to the system, including portions that are within

private structures. If problems with the system are found, residents will have 30 days to make repairs.

Other items discussed at the meeting include the following:

- Christina Morrison, land use and permitting coordinator for Tiller Corporation, met with the council to present information and answer questions about the 2019 annual operating plan for the Tiller Corp Scandia

mine. The council will revisit the issue before the 2018 operating plan expires at the end of March.

- The council signed a letter of agreement and allocated funds for a stormwater study in the Bliss Addition in partnership with the Carnelian-Marine St. Croix Watershed District. The city originally planned to contribute half of the cost of the study. However, the watershed district received

a grant that will cover the majority of the project, reducing the city’s contribution to \$3,700, or 10 percent.

- The council discussed bids by recruiting services to replace City Administrator Neil Soltis after he announced his resignation. After reviewing the two bids that were received, the council decided to extend the bid deadline, allowing firms more time to submit proposals.