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Mesa College students dancing for their dream

By Patty Ducey-Brooks

With the Olympics nearing to an end, it's fresh on our minds that there are a lot of young athletes who have committed their lives to being their best. However, we don't often realize how close to home this can be.

Recently I learned of two Mesa College students who are among this group of dedicated and inspirational young adults, who want and expect more of themselves, and are up for the challenge.

Kassy Kova and Justin Ross, students at Mesa College, have developed a strong friendship and a bond that began with ice skating. Kova, who started ice skating at age two, and Ross, who took to the ice at age seven, live near San Diego Ice Arena in Mira Mesa.

"Both of us were raised by single moms who wanted to find something active for us to do that was close to home," said Ross, 19.

Little did they know that what was intended as a positive recreational activity would eventually become their life passion.

Kova said that even though they both ice skated at San Diego Ice Arena, it wasn't until 2005 that they decided to become an ice dancing team. Kova observed Ross, his style and techniques. Then she approached Ross' mom, inquiring as to whether he would be interested in ice dancing. As they say, the rest is history. Well, actually, history is in the making for Kova and Ross, one competition at a time, with the help of their school, family, friends and coaches.

Kova said that she and Ross are extremely grateful for their coach, Christine Fowler-Binder. She is a freelance, compulsory coach who drives to San Diego Ice Arena from Los Angeles twice a week to coach them. They treasure this relationship with Fowler-Binder, who is a choreographer, motivator and inspiration for them.

They are also grateful to their family, moms and siblings, who have an appreciation for their



Kassy Kova (left), and Justin Ross earned a Pewter Medal at Sectionals in November 2009.

Continued on page 1

INSIDE:

Youngsters learn the fun of science. See page 3



Young dancers perform at the annual St. Patrick's Day Parade. See page 12



Band of the Irish Guards/Royal Regiment of Scotland perform in San Diego. See page 16



Dancing for their dream

Continued from cover

commitment, which means they take to the ice weekdays at 4 a.m., perfecting their dance routines. Mesa College classes fill the rest of their weekdays, and weekends find them at the gym working out.

"To work this hard, you've really got to love what you do, which we both do," said a confident and accomplished, Kova, age 16, who graduated from high school at age 15. She is definitely focused, determined and mature for her age.

Kova is quick to acknowledge her mom, who she says has become the team manager.

"My mom has taken on two jobs to help us succeed. She handles the media, Web site and publicity, and other administrative tasks."

Also dedicated to Kova and Ross is Mesa College. Both are grateful for the support of staff and students who have shown interest in their competitive sport activity, including the president, Rita M. Cepeda, who has been leading a campus-wide campaign to help defray the costs for their training and competition.

This past January, Kova and Ross went to Spokane, Washington to become the first African-American ice dancing team to compete in Novice Dance at the competition.

Over a five-year partnership, they have trained and danced together, climbing through the ranks to finish seventh in the nation in their last year in the Intermediate Division (2008); fifth at US Sectional Championships their first year in the very competitive Novice Division (2009); and capturing the Pewter Medal at Sectionals in November 2009.

That marked a first. Kova and Ross are the first African American ice dancing team to take home a medal in the Novice Division of a US Figure Skating Sectional Championships.

"We're so proud to have the opportunity to open a door that hasn't been opened before," said Kova. "Now we're pouring all of our efforts into getting our programs polished and ready for the national stage."

Kova and Ross are both second year students at Mesa College. Kova is enrolled at Mesa to pursue an Associate Degree in Transfer Studies; she hopes

to obtain a B.A. in Political Science from the University of California, San Diego. Ross is all about dance and is pursuing an Associate Degree in Dance to further his chosen career as a professional skater and coach.

In a recent statement of their accomplishments, Kova offered her comments. She said that they have finished competing at the US National Figure Skating Championships and are ranked twelfth in the nation. Kova said that it is a blessing to have had the chance to get to US Nationals, coming off a year when she had been injured for half the season with a torn rotator cuff. She said that she and Ross believe that they skated well, and are proud of their performances, and good sportsmanship. Their coach, Fowler-Binder, reminded them that she competed her first two times at the US National Championships and got twelfth place. She then came back the third year and won the title.



Kassy Cova and Justin Ross continue to grow as ice dancers.

Kova said that she and Ross are very excited about next year, and are really looking forward to developing new skills, and moving to a new level. And, they are determined to rise to a new challenge.

To learn more about this dedicated ice dance team, visit www.kovaandross.com.