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Best on the pole

November 02, 2009, 03:30 AM By Andrew Herndon

A Los Altos Hills woman who accidentally stumbled upon pole dancing over a year ago is now the best in the west in the eyes of the United States Pole Dance Federation.

With an extensive background of ballet, as well as a degree in dance from UC Irvine, Amber Richard, 23, defied the laws of gravity as she hung, spun, flipped and stretched her way to the top at this year's West Coast Regional Saturday, Oct. 24.

"I knew I had given a good performance," Richard said. "No matter the outcome, I knew I did a good job and I was happy with that."

Along with the first place title came a \$500 check from the USPDF, pro status within the organization, round trip airfare to New York for the 2010 Nationals, a front cover shoot for Pole2Pole Magazine, a photo shoot with American Apparel for a potential advertisement and a gift certificate from apparel company PoleSkivvies.

Richard said she discovered pole dancing about a year and a half ago when she was a senior at UC Irvine. While searching YouTube for ballet and other dance videos, Richard saw a pole dancing clip that immediately sparked her attention.

After graduation, Richard moved back to Los Altos Hills and began taking classes at Polepotential in Redwood City with the intention of eventually teaching the art to others.

Teaching came naturally to her, she said, because she had taught ballet and lyrical dance — a combination of ballet and jazz dance — over the years.

This year's West Coast competition was held at the El Portal Theatre in North Hollywood, Calif. in front of a full house and consisted of 12 finalists from as far away as Denver.

Each dance consisted of two rounds, the first showing required skills for 90 seconds and a freestyle performance that exemplifies the dancer's personality and passion that can last up to five minutes.

The idea behind pole dancing, she said, is to implement a graceful form of expression with strengthening exercises that helps tone nearly all parts of the human body.



Amber Richard, 23, won the "Best of the West" competition conducted by the United States Pole Dance Federation. Richard took up pole dancing just more than a year ago.

Now that the Bay Bridge is open, what was the biggest lesson from its closure?

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“I tried going to the gym and lifting weights back when I was dancing and it’s just so boring for me,” Richard said. “You never get bored of (pole dancing), it’s always a new challenge with the next move — the next hardest thing.”

Before the competition, Richard said she was nervous, but Poletential co-founder Christina Kish knew that the instructor was ready.

“She works her tail off,” Kish said. “She’s so dedicated to the sport.”

For Kish, pole dancing has boosted her self esteem and overall happiness.

“It gives you lots of confidence,” Kish said. “You feel kind of empowered to go out and try new things, because this isn’t easy.”





Standing at 5 feet 10 inches tall, Richard said she was always self-conscious about her stature, but pole dancing allows her to let go of those insecurities.

“I hated my height, but pole dancing was a place where I can wear high heels and I feel gorgeous,” Richard said.

Poletential was created in 2006 by Christina Kish and Pam Courcier after meeting in the same pole dancing class. Six pole instructors teach women from nearly all ages and professions, Kish said.

Though partnering with a pole has accumulated its fair share of stereotypes, pole dancing can be used as a style of exercise utilizing aerobics while also feeling sexy on the outside, but more importantly, the inside, Kish said.

For more information about Poletential go to www.poletential.com.

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