CHAMBER BUSINESS AWARDS

DANCE FIRE STUDIO – "RISING STAR / OUTSTANDING NEW BUSINESS" AWARD

NOMINATED BY ALISSA QUINN

1. **Why are you nominating this individual or organization?**

Dance Fire Studio is a new business operating for less than three years, demonstrating outstanding growth & commitment to our Capital Region community since they first opened their doors in November, 2017. Dance Fire Studio is a world class ballroom dance studio located at 2341 Nott Street East, in Niskayuna, NY, off Balltown Road, filling a vacant space with over 4,400 square feet of "state-of-the-art" wooden ballroom dance floor! Studio owners Natalia O'Connor and Florin Vlad, choosing to make the Capital Region their home, relocated from Vermont, where they taught private lessons & coached a Competitive Ballroom collegiate dance team. Florin & Natalia teach Ballroom Standard & American Smooth dances including: Waltz, Tango, Viennese Waltz, Fox Trot & Quick Step, in addition to Latin & Rhythm dances: Cha-Cha, Samba, Rumba, Paso Doble, Jive, Bolero, Mambo & Social dances: Salsa, Bachata, Merengue & West Coast Swing. Their mission is "Giving people a positive outlook on their lives through dance and helping their community flourish". Their approach is extremely personalized with a customized plan for each student, whether a beginner dancer, wedding couple or competitive dancer. Florin & Natalia have proven to be wise beyond their years, starting a business in their early twenties with professional dance expertise, pure grit and determination to succeed. They have exemplified extraordinary business acumen & discipline as young entrepreneurs, opening their own dance studio, after renting space in the Renaissance Hall in Schenectady, NY for less than one year. Their hope and focus has been uniting local ballroom & Latin dancers under a "universal banner of dance," recognizing the health benefits of ballroom dance through "body, mind and soul". Their world-class instruction combined with their welcoming and friendly studio atmosphere is what makes them consummate professionals. Their approach to teaching and their commitment to enhancing peoples' lives is truly exceptional. Natalia started dancing at the age of 7, competed across the world on the amateur circuit since the age of 10, having worked in Russia, Romania, Louisana, New York, Delaware, Maryland and Vermont. She is a former National Champion, World Semi-finalist and World Cup finalist. She is a full member of the National Dance Council of America (NDCA) and World Dance Sport Federation (WDSF), both leading governing bodies in the dance industry. Having worked as an instructor in many places around the country and world, she is a proud owner of the newest ballroom & fitness studio in the Capital Region. Natalia has a BA in Psychology, having studied both Sports Psychology, as well as Behavioral and Social Psychology. Florin Vlad, originally from Romania, is a world renowned

competitive ballroom dancer and a multiple US National Dance Sport Finalist. Together with his dance partner, Natalia O'Connor, he successfully represented the USA at 5 World Championships. Florin is an active member of the Competitor's Commission of the National Dance Sport Council of America. He has a clear understanding of this industry with over 10 years of experience in competitive dancing, as well as teaching experience. Mr. Vlad had business experience as a young entrepreneur and successfully handled various challenges that a start-up company faces. Prior to moving to the US, Florin handled business management for a company that he co-owned with his brother in the Civil Engineering field. The company continues to be successful, even after Florin shifted focus to his dancing career.

2. **Describe how this person or organization meets each of the criteria for the respective award?**

Dance Fire Studio exemplifies commitment to their community & exhibits potential for long term success in a variety of ways. For a new business, Dance Fire Studio's community involvement is truly noteworthy. At their "First Anniversary Celebration" in November 2018, Dance Fire Studio partnered with "Make-A-Wish of Northeast NY" in a fundraising effort, welcoming them to their "Masquerade Ball" event, donating all proceeds to "Make a Wish"! Dance Fire Studio has participated in several exhibition performances for local not-for-profit organizations including military families, collegiate dance teams & looks forward to participating in the upcoming "March of Dimes Chef's Gala" event in October 2019 at the Albany City Center. Dance Fire Studio also supports the local chapter of USA Dance, Inc., a longstanding organization that promotes ballroom dance in our Capital Region dance community, from youth dancers, college students, social dancers to competitive adult dancers. Florin has been actively involved in attending a number of Chamber events, most recently hosting the Chamber Ambassador's meeting in their studio, offering complimentary dance instruction to participants; entertaining as well as educational for all! Their approach to teaching and their commitment to enhancing peoples' lives is truly special. In terms of their business planning strategy, I was very proud to see how thoughtful and strategic Florin & Natalia were in submitting their business plan to the Capital Region Chamber, who gave them one of their first small business loans, where they highlighted their well-articulated business plan for growth over a 3, 5 & 10 year plan. Dance Fire Studio is substantially ahead of their planned revenue growth, profit and have expanded programs, offering a first class "Kids Ballroom Program". They are focused and passionate about training the future generation of competitive dance champions in our community! Ballroom dance has become a meaningful fitness business in recent years, a cultural art form that enhances diversity in our community, making for an excellent growth industry. I am proud to nominate Dance Fire Studio for the "Capital Region Chamber Rising Star/Outstanding New Business Award". I could not think of a

better new business to be the recipient of this award for growth and dedication to our Capital Region community!