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### **Bloomer Now Home to a Competitive Team of Gymnasts**

Two years ago, a competitive team of gymnasts in Bloomer, Wisconsin would've seemed an impossible notion. Starting with only a couple of mats, a make-shift vault, and a homemade balance beam, the now thriving gymnastics program emerged from modest beginnings. It wasn't until 2012, when long-time coach and former gymnast Shanna McMullin was asked to join the staff at Penni's Studio of the Arts, did the gym undergo a major metamorphosis. Between owner Penni Asplund's vision-inspired initiative and the acquisition of a new head coach and spacious facility, the gymnastics program in Bloomer was destined for success.

And sure enough, the once small and basic class offerings soon swelled into a program comprising of over 50 girls ranging in skill level from beginner to team. To accommodate for the rapidly-growing interest and enrollment, the studio promptly purchased an assortment of regulation equipment, including a vault, spring floor, and full-size high beam.

McMullin is incredibly thankful for the generosity of the gymnasts' parents and families and credits the gym's growth to their enduring support.

"I am so lucky to have a great set of supportive parents," McMullin said. "They have donated extra money—over the cost of tuition—to purchase equipment and help the gym raise funds. We would not be where we are today without them."

The transformation of the gymnastics program in Bloomer is nothing short of impressive. Now functioning as a sustainable, competitive club, the team girls are advancing at a record pace.

"The way in which a program has developed and the progression of the girls is awesome," said McMullin. "The fact that we actually went to competition after only one year as a real gym is crazy."

Perhaps most remarkable, however, are the young gymnasts themselves. The competitive team currently consists of seven girls—Maggie Sarauer (12), Skylar Zwiefelhofer (11), Cicely Kiecker (9), Maya Larson (9), Lauren Ruf (9), Jensyn Skaar (9), and Lainey Thur (8)—all of whom have become strong, determined, and passionate athletes. For McMullin, witnessing each girl's growth and progression has been the greatest reward of her role as head coach.

"I have loved watching my girls develop into the unique gymnasts they are," said McMullin. "Each girl has her own strength she brings to the team, and because of these unique personalities and abilities, practice is always fun, and each of them gets to excel in some area. These girls blow my mind—I cannot believe how far they have come in such a short period of time. I am so proud of them!"

Being a part of a competitive team has done more for these gymnasts than just improve their skill and physical ability. Instead, the high-intensity sport has caused the group of girls to grow and mature into strong-willed young adults.

"Their level of self-discipline and maturity is well beyond their years," said McMullin. "They know how to be young and have fun, but they also know how to get serious, work hard, and perform difficult and dangerous stunts."

This year the team competes in Rice Lake, the Twin Cities, Green Bay, and Madison, but community members will have the opportunity to watch the gymnasts perform here in Bloomer this holiday season.

The winter showcase will take place Monday, Dec. 22 at 6 p.m. and will feature the gymnasts' routines on each event. While the evening will highlight the skills of each girl and the evolution of the team as a whole, it will also function as a fundraiser to supplement costs of competition.

In this Christmastime display, the community will be given the chance to witness for themselves the fruits of a program's continued efforts and dedication. Each and every stuck landing, nailed move, and pointed toe will serve as a testimony to how far it has come in just two short years—a distant cry, of course, from the budding beginnings of a humble past.