

Bay Aerials beams success in gymnastics

When Lisa Aguirre opened Bay Aerials Gymnastics in Fremont six years ago, her notion wasn't to create a high-powered competitive juggernaut geared toward producing elite gymnasts. But through her vision of a program emphasizing fun, fitness, positive attitudes and attention to detail at all levels of gymnastics, great things just naturally happened. After starting from scratch, Aguirre now has more than 500 girls enrolled at a gym that has doubled in square footage since she began.

What's more, while still maintaining a vibrant entry-level gymnastics school, Bay Aerials has become quite competitive with its top pupils. At this year's State Gymnastics Championships in March, the gym captured the team title at levels 9 and 10 — the two highest classifications — and also claimed 23 individual titles at various levels.

"This year was our most successful year ever at state," Aguirre said. "And winning both levels 9 and 10, I don't think there's a club around here that's done that in many, many years."

There's also a cherry on top. For the second straight year, a Bay Aerials student earned a full-ride scholarship to Stanford to compete in gymnastics. Recent Monte Vista High graduate Amanda Spinner will head across the Bay this fall to join another Bay Aerials product, Ashley Morgan, in one of the most prestigious college programs in the country. Spinner and Morgan, the daughter of Hall of Fame baseball great Joe Morgan, both joined Bay Aerials together at ages 12 and 13, respectively, just when the gym was getting started under Aguirre's direction. They became examples to those who would follow, and



Six years in the Bay Aerials program netted Monte Vista's Amanda Spinner a scholarship to Stanford.

the pipeline of aspiring gymnasts has continued to perpetuate.

"They both come from amazing families, and the work ethic of those two set the pace for everyone in the gym," Aguirre said. "They were the role models for everyone else."

Aguirre was once a competitive gymnast in New York but suffered an injury in her first college season and quickly turned her attention to teaching and coaching. She worked for 10 years at Santa Clara's prestigious Airborne Gymnastics before departing to become a stay-at-home mom. But when the Fremont facility became available in 2004, she jumped at the chance to run it.

Today, the gym oozes fun and enthusiasm with its brilliantly painted walls adorned with bubbles, and dozens of young girls of varying ages and skill levels working throughout each day to expand and refine their abilities. "On a Saturday morning here, you can find more than 200 kids coming through here," Aguirre said.

"The incredible energy, the happiness, the healthiness of the whole thing is just amazing. We painted it bright, beautiful colors to make it a family-friendly place for everyone, but we also offer high-level gymnastics at the same time."

As her younger gymnasts matured and improved, Aguirre realized she needed to develop relationships with area colleges, particularly Stanford, Cal and San Jose State, all of whom possess strong women's gymnastics programs.

"We've gotten kids into all of those schools," she said. "When we started, it wasn't my goal to produce elite gymnasts. We didn't focus on competition and on winning, either. We focused more on simply growing young women and having them reach the highest capability they could."

"Ninety percent of our teams are made up of 'A' students, and they practice 20-25 hours a week, so they have incredible time-management skills," she continued. "In turn, they have a lot of confidence and

self-esteem, so even though we never really focused on the winning part, we started winning, winning, winning. That has carried on."

In 2007, Aguirre achieved something special — her gym ended an eight-year run by the gym where she once worked, Airborne, as the top gymnastics school in Northern California based on state championship performance.

The gym is going through a transition period now that Morgan and Spinner have moved to Stanford. Aguirre is also searching for coaches to replace two who recently moved on to other endeavors. But with a thriving group of talented up-and-comers — including her 11-year-old daughter, Samantha who became a level 5 state champ in March — she sees an even brighter future.

"We have the nicest facility around," she said. "Most parents in this community, they're high-achieving and highly educated, and they want their kids to have everything, so we try to provide that. I've always had chalk in my lungs, and I think our gym has the right philosophy. It starts with making people happy."

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