



Our instructors specialize in everything from choreography and technique to teambuilding and have led some of the most successful dance programs in history. Read about our Guest Speakers below:

Bill Seely



Bill Seely is the President of Varsity Spirit, the leading global source for all things spirit, including cheerleading, dance teams and, most recently, band and performing arts. Varsity Spirit outfits over 750,000 athletes annually, administers over 5,000 camps in 50 states each summer and hosts 600 competitions across the country each year, including 20 premier championship events.

Bill is a graduate of George Mason University, where he was a former cheerleader and captain of the 1990 national championship team. Early in his career, he was the first Southeast Regional Manager for Universal Cheerleaders Association, Varsity Spirit's largest camp brand and the largest cheerleading camp company in the world. As Senior Vice President of Training & Education, Bill was instrumental in developing Varsity Spirit's camp curriculum program, where he introduced the roles of a cheerleader that encompass leadership, ambassadorship and service, in addition to athleticism and entertainment.

In addition to his role at Varsity Spirit, Bill helped launch USA Cheer, the National Governing Body for Cheerleading in the US, and established the first official US National Team to represent the United States in international competition. In that role, he led the efforts to develop the new sport of STUNT, which has become one of the fastest growing sports for women. He is also the Founder of Crosscheck Athletics, a youth sports ministry committed to developing the total athlete and target at-risk youth.

Bill and his wife, Heather, have been married for 26 years, and have four children. This fall, Bill and his son, Hopper, are launching a new brewery, Grind City Brewing Co., in the Uptown neighborhood of Memphis, TN.

Jenny Black



Jenny Sweet is the coach of the Holy Angels Dance Team, 4-time UDA National Champions in Small Varsity Hip Hop. She has her Masters in Dance from New York University and is on the dance faculty at the Cicely Tyson Community School of Performing and Fine Arts in New Jersey. Jenny has choreographed and worked with a variety of dance teams, on the high school, college and international levels, traveling to Norway, Colombia, Ecuador, and Scotland. She also has judged for the Universal Dance Association regional and national events as well as ICU championship. Jenny is excited to be returning as a speaker for the Varsity Dance National Coaches Conference.

Nicole Cestone



Nicole has over 25 years of dance and competitive dance team experience. She is nationally known for her choreography and coaching ability. Nicole was a scholarship dancer at Jimmie Defores Dance Center in Costa Mesa, and a member of the Tremaine's Dance Company in Los Angeles with Marguerite Derricks. Nicole is a graduate of UCLA and a former UCLA Bruin dance team member. She was also a former instructor and Program Director for the United Spirit Association (USA) for 10 years, and continues to be a head judge for high school, collegiate, and all-star National competitions. Nicole danced two seasons for the Disney California Angels performing at Anaheim Angels home baseball games. Her credits also include production and choreography for the American Bowl in Mexico City with Ricky Martin, the Paris and Austria NFL Tours, the Pro Bowl in Hawaii, and numerous pre-game and half-time shows for NFL, NBA and College teams. Nicole has choreographed for numerous NFL, NBA, WNBA, CFL, and Arena Football Pro-dance teams including the Laker Girls, San Diego Charger Girls, San Francisco 49er Gold Rush, Los Angeles Clippers, Sacramento Kings Fast Break, Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders, and New England Patriots to name a few. Nicole was a featured choreographer at the Pro-Dance Convention for NFL and NBA dance teams for several years. She has coached several nationally ranked college and high school dance teams, and has been featured in many LA dance projects and national commercials. She has been teaching dance and coaching students for years, and her teams have won numerous national titles, 7 consecutive USA Spirit National Championship titles, USA Dance National title, NDA National Championship title and UDA National Dance Team Championship title in Orlando, Florida. Other awards include Innovative Choreography, Superior Showmanship, Grand Champion, and Technical Excellence. She was name "Coach of the Year" at the California State Championship in 2014 & 2016. Nicole was the Dance Director/Head Dance Coach of the Santa Margarita High School Pom team for 8 years and created their Jr. Eagle mentorship program as well. Nicole is currently the Dance State Director in the west region for Varsity Spirit where she oversees and manages their three dance brands - USA, UDA, and NDA. When not at a Varsity dance event, you can find Nicole at a dance convention or competition with her studio, Pave School of the Arts, where she teaches dance multiple times a week and coaches teams in their competition program. Nicole has a passion for training dancers to be at their personal and team best, and she loves sharing her experience and knowledge with her students. Nicole lives in San Juan Capistrano with her husband and three kids.

Jenny Durbin Smith



Jenny Durbin Smith is one of Dallas's most sought after award-winning choreographers. Her resume reads like a "who's who" list in the dance industry! She trained in jazz and hip hop during her college years at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill while obtaining a double degree in journalism and communication studies. During her time at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill she was a member of the national award-winning cheer and dance teams. Jenny has been a member of the NBA Dallas Mavericks Dancers where she served as a captain her second year. She has also been a principal dancer and actor for many national industrials, commercial, and films. Jenny's dynamic choreography has been featured on many national television commercial, industrials, films, reality television shows, and international stages incusing Hasbro, Mary Kay, 'America's Got Talent,' MTVs 'TRL' and Monday Night Football. In addition to being the proud director of the NFLs first and only co-ed hip hop crew, the Dallas Cowboys Rhythm and Blue, she is a choreographers for the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders, a master instructor for Professional NFL and NBA Cheerleading & Dance Conventions including All Pro and Choreography Pros, a contributing choreographer for the NFL's Pro Bowl, and travels the country choregraphing for numerous high school, collegiate, and professional dance teams and dance studios. Jenny was recently featured in Dance Track Magazine, Dance Team Magazine and Inside Dance!

Marja Edwardson



Marja grew up in Minnesota dancing for studio and All-Star dance teams, competing also at the USASF Dance Worlds. She graduated from the University of Kansas with a BFA in Dance. She has coached at the high school and All-Star level. Marja has also been an instructor and competition choreographer at several dance studios, also performing for many years with a local Kansas dance company. Currently, this will be her 15th summer as an instructor for NDA, serving as Head Instructor, Team NDA and a part of the events team. Marja lives in Philadelphia, is working towards her MS in Arts Administration at Drexel University and is the Varsity Dance State Director for the Northeast!

Amanda Gaines



Amanda Gaines is entering her ninth season as the coach of the 19x UDA National Champion and 3x World Champion University of Minnesota Dance Team. Growing up training and competing in all styles at her studio and high school dance team in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Amanda went on to attend the University of Minnesota, where she was a captain and choreographer of the dance team her senior year. After graduating, she jumped right into coaching, and continued choreography with high school, colleges and all star programs around the country. She's taught camps, clinics and master classes all over the world, and is excited to share her passion for dance with coaches during this conference!

Karen Lew



Karen Lew, is currently the Vice-President of Varsity University, Varsity Camp Administration and the Director of Safety for Varsity Spirit. Karen is an educator and certified athletic trainer. She has held numerous positions in higher education before coming to Varsity University full-time. Her passion is cheerleading safety and the overall well-being of athletes. Her research areas include concussion education, injury prevention and emergency action planning. Karen holds a Doctorate of Health Sciences. In addition to her work with Varsity, she is actively involved in athletic training education and is a member of the Louisiana Athletic Trainers' Association Hall of Fame. Karen also serves as the chair of the USA Cheer Safety Council, where she is directly responsible for initiating safety practices in cheerleading and making recommendations to member organizations.

Melissa McGhee



A native of Toledo, Ohio, Melissa McGhee is a graduate of The Ohio State University where she obtained a B.S. in Business Administration. She is the current Head Coach of The Ohio State University Dance Team. Under her direction, the team has consistently placed in the top five in Jazz and Pom at the UDA Collegiate National Championship. The team won the program's first ever National Championship in 2018 and has four total to date. After sixteen years of studio training, she now choreographs and consults for dance studios and teams nationally and judges for numerous dance competitions including NDA, UDA, AmeriDance, Showcase America, OASSA, and the USASF Dance Worlds. Melissa has been a speaker at the Varsity Dance Coaches Conference, National Dance Coaches Association Conference, taught master classes at UDA High School Camps and provided coaches education classes for CLI Studios.

Valerie Potsos



Valerie Stead Potsos is in her 20th season as Head Coach of the nationally ranked University of Michigan Dance Team. She is the Director/Owner of Dancer's Edge Studio in Dexter, Michigan. Recently, she traveled to Vienna, Austria to choreograph and train three dance teams with the Vienna Vikings. She has choreographed for NAIA College Teams, High School Teams and All-Star Teams. She has also choreographed for professional corporate sponsors including Ford Motor Company and much more.

Dancer's Edge was named as one of the "Top Studios on the Move" in Dance Spirit magazine. Her articles on coaching and dance have appeared in Dance Spirit, American Cheerleader and in Motion Magazines.

She is a Seminar presenter, and curriculum consultant for Varsity University, UCA/UDA (Universal Cheer and Dance Association) and AACCA (American Association of Cheer Coaches and Administrators) on topics such as Motivation, Leadership, Teambuilding and many more.

Her students have auditioned for America's Got Talent and have been featured on the show in 2015. Along with judging local, state and national competitions, she has judged Studio, High School and College Dance Nationals as well for various organizations. Previously, she coached The Royal Oak Kimball Dance Company and The Royal Oak Kimball Varsity Dance Team for 8 years.

As a dance educator for 30+ years and an adjudicator for 20+ years, she was also a member and captain of The University of Michigan Dance Team. Valerie graduated with a B.A. from the University of Michigan and has additional graduate studies in Secondary Education from Michigan State University. Valerie resides in Dexter, MI with her husband three children.

Toya Renee Ambrose



Toya Renee Ambrose is a former NBA dancer, for both the Chicago Luvabulls and the Memphis Grizzlies. She is also a graduate of the University of Memphis and was a scholarship member of the award-winning University of Memphis Pom Squad. Toya is the former Spirit Coordinator of the University of Connecticut (UConn) Dance, Cheerleading, and Mascot Teams, and the former Head Coach of the 2-time National Champion University of Illinois at Chicago Dancing Flames. In addition, through her company T.R.A. Choreography LLC, she and her staff choreograph for competitive dance teams, studios, and all-star teams all over the world - most recently in Slovenia, Finland, and Mexico. Since its inception, T.R.A. has produced over 200 dynamic routines, trained 8 associate choreographers, created an internship program to teach dancers about the business side of dance, and has become a strong voice in the dance team industry. T.R.A. is currently developing training programs for dance team choreographers. In addition to be a seasoned judge on the local and national scene, Toya resides in Chicago, IL, and is married to attorney Garvin G. Ambrose.

Taylor Ritchey



Taylor Ritchey is a clinical mental health counselor from the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. She received her Masters of Counselor Education with an emphasis in clinical mental health from Mississippi State University where she developed a passion for helping student-athletes achieve mental and emotional wellness on and off the field. She provides mental health resources for athletes at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College and established the Athletic Wellness Enhancement Program focusing on holistic wellbeing for student-athletes and support for coaching staff. She also assists in coaching the college dance team, the MGCCC Perkettes. As a former dancer herself, she is well versed in the physical, mental, and emotional toll performance arts have on an athlete's body, mind, and spirit. In her work with dancers, she focuses specifically on emotional regulation, body image issues, and confidence. "I feel that my most important work as a mental skills coach is building strong minded, confident athletes who realize that the only person who determines their potential is themselves."

Kelley Tafazzoli



Kelley Tafazzoli is the proud coach of the University of Tennessee Dance Team. Beginning her college coaching career at the age of 24 - she claimed the dance team's first national title in 2007, and went on to a 3 peat championship in the jazz division in 2008 and 2009. As a coach she continued to push the team's skill and performances - consistently placing in the top two at UDA College Nationals - and securing back to back championships in 2015 and 2016. Transitioning from the hip hop category to pom seemed like a natural shift; however, it proved to be a larger hurdle than anticipated. Kelley recognized the need for some evolving from a coaches standpoint and approached this adversity with a new plan for preparation, practice schedule, and training. This adjustment paid off in just three years with Tennessee securing their first pom Championship in 2020. Over the past 14 years, Kelley has worked diligently to create a cohesive spirit front with the cheer and mascot teams. One of her proudest moments as a coach is seeing the entire program working together to raise spirit on the sidelines, in the community, and at the national competition. Outside of the athletic events and competition floor, Kelley has succeeded at elevating the dance team's experience with opportunities being featured on Monday Night Football commercials, country music videos, and traveling internationally to perform at the Rugby 7s World Cup in Dubai. Most recently, Tennessee has been selected to represent the USA as the US National Pom Team in the 2020 ICU World Championships. Kelley is thrilled for the new opportunity and challenge ahead in competing on the world stage.

Hailing originally from Sandy Lake, Pennsylvania Kelley moved to Knoxville to earn a degree from the University of Tennessee while receiving a scholarship as a four year member of the dance team. She is married to Matt Tafazzoli and the proud mom to Shea and Cole.

Elizabeth Thomas – Gammill



Elizabeth Thomas-Gammill is an Oklahoma native. She has 30 years of dance and cheer background from studio training, college athlete and experience with Tremaine Dance Company. Elizabeth also competed with the Miss Oklahoma/Miss America organization and recently judged Miss Oklahoma's Outstanding Teen competition. She began her coaching career in Oklahoma where she established a strong cheer program for grades 5th-12th. Her teams in Oklahoma were the first to qualify for the State Cheer Competition in school history. After her nine years of coaching in Oklahoma, Elizabeth pursued a coaching position in Arkansas. She is currently the Head Cheer & Dance Coach for Fayetteville High School located near the University of Arkansas. She won the first State Title in school history for dance in 2016. She has placed state champion or runner-up for the past 4 years in dance. She recently won the 2019 Dance State Championship in November. Elizabeth's dance team recently attend NDTC for the first time in school history and made it to semi-finals in Pom and finals in Hip Hop. Her team was named 10th in the Nation in Hip Hop.

Elizabeth also won the 2019 6A All-Girl State Cheer Championship in December. Her cheer team also attended the National Cheer Competition for the first time in school history.

She has an extensive background in building championship programs and focusing on holistic coaching. Elizabeth is modeling a new era of spirit by leading both cheer and dance programs inside a district. She has a staff of 8 coaches and teams that range from junior high, freshman, junior varsity and varsity levels.

Elizabeth is the first coach in school history to win both Cheer and Dance State Championships in the same year. She is also the first spirit coach in Arkansas to win two State Championships in the same semester.

Elizabeth is currently an Assistant Athletic Director and Director of Spirit and Student Affairs for the Fayetteville School District. Elizabeth is passionate about empowering spirit coaches to rise in leadership positions and athletic administration.

Tara Yantis



Tara Yantis is a coach, choreographer, consultant and adjudicator based in Kansas City, MO. She is passionate about growing programs and helping coaches discover, or re-discover, joy in their roles. Tara is in her 11th season as the Head Coach and Creative Director of the 4-Time National Champion Saint Thomas Aquinas Spirits Dance Program. Tara is also a co-founder of the Kansas State Dance Team Coaches Association and was influential in the state deciding to create its first-ever State Championship for dance in 2020.

For the last 13 years, Tara has taught across the country as a Head Instructor and adjudicator with NDA and is a recipient of NDA's Excellence in Leadership award, recognizing the top Head Instructor in the nation in the area of leadership, demonstrated by staff and customer surveys. She was the inaugural recipient of the NCA/NDA The Work is Worth It™ award, recognizing contributions to both cheer and dance and superior dedication throughout years of services to various entities of NCA/NDA, consistently going above and beyond for customers and staff. Tara was also the 2016 national delegate to London for NDA, facilitating performances for the London New Year's Day Parade seen by 300million+ viewers worldwide.

A graduate of Washburn University, Tara was captain of both the game day dance team and the nationals competition team, leading her team to a top 8 finish at the NCA/NDA Collegiate National Championship in Daytona Beach, FL. She was also an arena football cheerleader for 4 years, serving as captain and choreographer for the team. Tara and her husband Brady are raising a joyful toddler named Jack and are pup parents to Penny Lane. You can follow @coachtara_ on Instagram for inspiration and motivation.