

Shea-Jennings Academy

Our Staff



Meg Conry has been dancing since the age of six, when she received a year's worth of Irish Dancing lessons as a Christmas present. Over the course of her twenty year career, Meg trained under the instruction of Deirdre Shea and John Jennings, and competed at regional and national competitions all over the country, as well as the World Championships and All-Ireland Championships in Ireland. Meg was also given the opportunity to dance at numerous prestigious venues, including the State Theater in New Brunswick (with the Grammy award-winning Irish band, The Chieftains), the Papermill Playhouse in Millburn, and The New Victory Theater and Carnegie Hall in New York City.

Following her retirement from dancing in 2009, Meg became a registered teacher (T.C.R.G.), and began teaching alongside Deirdre and John at the Shea-Jennings school. In 2016, Meg achieved a long-time aspiration to become a certified adjudicator (A.D.C.R.G.). In "real life," Meg works full-time as a paralegal for an Insurance Defense law firm in Morris County, New Jersey.

Deirdre and John instilled in Meg a love of Irish dance, music, and tradition that has kept her committed to the art form for the majority of her life. She hopes to continue to pass that on to the students at the Shea-Jennings School for many years to come.



Meredith Carvalho has been a part of the Shea-Jennings dance enterprise for over 30 years. Meredith began as a student of the Deirdre Shea School of Irish Dance in 1989, taking lessons from Deirdre in the cafeteria of Holy Trinity grammar school in Westfield, NJ. She followed Deirdre's school to many locations as it continued to grow, until Deirdre ultimately joined forces with John Jennings to become what we know today as the Shea-Jennings School of Irish Dance.

Meredith lightly competed at local feisanna through the preliminary championship level until age 19. She participated in a many performances including the school's Irish festival debut at the PNC Bank Arts Center. She also joined in the accompaniment for some Irish artists, including Paddy Noonan, Frank Patterson, and Black 47.

Meredith taught youth classes and adult ceili under the supervision of Deirdre Shea since the age of sixteen. In 2012, Meredith passed the TCRG exam, becoming a certified instructor.

Meredith and her husband Paul have two dancing daughters, Molly and Maddie. Meredith graduated from the New Jersey Institute of Technology with M.S. degrees in Chemical Engineering and Engineering Management, and currently works for the Department of Defense.



Noelle Zielenbach began dancing at the age of two in Cranford, New Jersey, under the informal instruction of her mother, Deirdre Shea, T.C.R.G. In 1989 when Noelle was four years old, Deirdre decided to open her own school, as she was already teaching Noelle's friends and other local kids how to dance for fun. Noelle was quickly dancing every day of the week. After beginning to train at her mother's school, Noelle also danced for the Bridget Behan School and The Peter Smith School over the course of her career. At the age of eleven, Noelle returned to Shea-Jennings and began training under the direction of John Jennings.

Noelle has received multiple top-five placements at the Mid-Atlantic Regional Oireachtas, top-ten and top-twenty placements at the North American National Championships, and top twenty-five at the All-Ireland Championships. Noelle has qualified for the World Championships over ten times, and received a 31st place medal at the 2008 Worlds. Along with her solo success, Noelle has been on several top-three winning teams at Regionals and top-ten teams at Nationals.

Along with other dancers from the Shea-Jennings School, Noelle has performed at Radio City Music Hall, Carnegie Hall, Count Basie Theatre, The State Theatre, Disneyworld's Epcot Center, and the Papermill Play House. She was also featured in a commercial for NJ.com. Noelle has performed with the world renowned Cherish the Ladies and the Grammy-award winning Chieftains and appeared in a show with the Trinity Irish Dance Company.

Noelle has assisted John and Deirdre at the studio since the age of fourteen, and in 2010, she passed her Irish Dance Teachers exam (TCRG) and became certified

under the main organization in Ireland (CLRG). Through her many years of teaching, she has assisted three of our four regional first place winners in achieving the top prize. She has also had many dancers qualify for Worlds, receive top-ten and top-five placements in overseas competitions, as well as the National competitions in North America. Noelle is also a certified (k-5) elementary school teacher.

Noelle's favorite parts of teaching dance are choreographing show routines to modern music, watching her beginners continue on to become champions, and seeing the traditions she instills in our dancers follow them well into their college and adult years.



Inspired by his Irish-born parents, **John Jennings** began Irish Step Dancing at age 6, under the instruction of Donny Golden. He enjoyed a competitive career, which included winning seven Regional titles and six National titles, as well as placing in the top 3 at five consecutive World Championships, highlighted when John won the World Title in 1988. John toured the US and parts of the UK, performing with several popular Irish bands including The Chieftains and Cherish the Ladies.

Some memorable performances include concerts at Radio City Music Hall, Carnegie Hall and the Hollywood Bowl. John can be seen in Shania Twain's music video **Don't Be Stupid**, and also performed at Roger Daltry's 50th birthday

celebration. John also performed on the Late Show with Conan O'Brien and danced at the 1996 Olympics.

In 1994, John passed the TCRG exam and became a certified teacher. Shortly after, he joined the Deirdre Shea School of Irish Dance, and has taught there for over 25 years. In 2002, John passed his ADCRG exam and became a certified adjudicator. He has adjudicated at competitions all over the US, as well as the North American Nationals and World Championship. John and his wife Colleen have four daughters, (Caitlin, Caroline, Courtney, and Cassidy) who all dance at Shea Jennings. John graduated from college with a degree in Mechanical Engineering and works during the day in the Aerospace and Defense Industry.



Deirdre Shea began Irish dancing in 1962 under the instruction of Fedelma Davis, in a church basement in Scotch Plains. Soon after, Deirdre joined the Peter Smith School, which she attended for the next 20 years. As a dancer, some of Deirdre's notable accomplishments include 3rd and 6th place finishes at the Mid-Atlantic Oireachtas (which, at the time, was also considered the National Championship). Deirdre also competed in the solo and team competitions at the second ever World Championships in Dublin in 1976.

Deirdre passed the T.C.R.G. exam in 1987 and became a certified Irish Dance instructor. In 1989, after starting a family and leaving her career in the financial district in New York City, Deirdre decided to put her talents to work. She started by teaching ceili dances to local mothers and children for fun during the St. Patrick's Day season. After the explosion of Riverdance in 1995, Deirdre soon saw her school grow from 10 or 20 students to 300 dancers. When balancing the responsibilities of raising children and running a dance school started to become overwhelming, she decided to invite well known World Champion John Jennings to join the school in order to foster her dancers' developing talent. After a couple

of years, the school changed from "The Deirdre Shea School of Irish Dance" to "Shea-Jennings". Deirdre's daughter Noelle now runs the school along with John Jennings, with the help of Meg Conry and Meredith Carvalho.

After devoting most of her life to dancing, Deirdre remains committed to passing her love for Irish dance onto her own children and the community.