



# LEAPING LASSES

**Miami Shores** resident Kiera Daley, 17, and Aubrey Swikehardt, 8, of **Miami** recently placed among the best dancers in the world at the North American Irish Dancing Championships. The pair shows off fancy footwork at the Aventura Ballet Theatre in **North Miami Beach**. **PAGE 3**

## **NORTH MIAMI**

The Arch Creek Nature Preserve recently served as a backdrop for an explosive episode of the show 'Burn Notice,' **4**

## **OVERTOWN**

An resident who recently died leaves behind dozens of chickens and cats in her now-vacant home, **8**

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Participants gear up for Strides 5K race, **16**

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TWO DANCERS FROM THE BREFFNI ACADEMY OF IRISH DANCE PLACED HIGHLY IN A NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP IN JULY. THEY ARE NOW PREPARING FOR THE REGIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS IN DECEMBER.

BY PARADISE AFSHAR

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Although they are 10 years apart, Kiera Daley and Aubrey Swikehardt have shared the same passion since they were toddlers: Irish Dance.

Their paths lead them to finish among the top dancers at the 2009 North American Irish Dance Championships. The championships, which took place in Opryland during the July 4 weekend, include dancers from the United States, England, Scotland, Australia and other countries.

Kiera, 17, placed fifth in the under 17 category while Aubrey, 7, placed 11th in the under 8 category.

"We are a small school and we had eight dancers go to nationals this year," said Nicola O'Hara, dance teacher at the

Breffni Academy of Irish Dance, which has dance studios in North Miami Beach, Pembroke Pines and South Miami.

Kiera, a student at St. Thomas Aquinas, will represent the United States in Glasgow, Scotland, for the World Irish Dancing Championships in March.

"I think it is great entertainment," said Kiera, of Miami Shores. "I enjoy doing it."

To compete, dancers do intricate footwork at an intense speed, with their arms right by their side.

Kiera's journey in the world of Irish Dance began with her upbringing.

"I grew up with it," said Kiera, whose mother was a competitive dancer in Ireland. "I have been dancing since I can remember."

Her mother, Pat Daley, is an assistant teacher at the 12-year-

old Breffni Academy.

Aubrey, who attends David Fairchild Elementary in Coral Gables, fell in love with Irish Dance after her parents took her to a St. Patrick's Day celebration when she was 3. There, she saw dancers from the Breffni Academy performing.

She couldn't stop talking about it.

"She really wanted to do it, so the next year we went and we got the number for the school," said her mother, Sharon Swikehardt, 42.

"I like it because it is a unique dance," Aubrey said. "I begged my parents to let me do it."

The nationals were Aubrey's first major competition. If she scores well at the regionals in December, she'll perform at an international level.

Kiera has gone to several





PHOTOS BY CHRIS CUTRO/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

**TOP DANCERS:** Above, Kiera Daley, 17, watches as Aubrey Swikehardt, 8, practices a jump. Kiera and Aubrey finished among the top dancers at the 2009 North American Irish Dance championships. At left, Kiera, with instructor Nicola O'Hara, will represent the United States in Glasgow, Scotland, at the world championships in March.

competitions and has used her dancing talents to help others. Most recently, she performed in Peru to help raise money for the country's victims of the 2007 earthquake.

"It felt good to help the people there," Kiera said. "We raised \$125,000 that will go toward building a medical center."

Both girls have special dance studios set up in their homes.

"I practice two hours every day in my garage," said Kiera, whose father built her an elevated dance floor at their home.

O'Hara has seen the dance form evolve over the years, and it's becoming increasingly popular.

"It is a worldwide dance," she said, noting there are studios from Japan to Mexico. "You don't have to be Irish to do it."