



Riverworks Joins Forces with Essence Studios and HGCBT to Preserve and Grow Dance in Our Community

Since the founding of Riverworks in 2022, one of our greatest joys has been the friendship and support of Essence Studios and Hope Garden Children's Ballet Theatre. We've been there for them and they've been there for us, because we share a common purpose: cultivating and celebrating the performing arts in our community.

We're truly excited to share the news that we will formally welcome Essence Studios and Hope Garden Children's Ballet Theatre into Riverworks Art Center in the Fall of 2026. From now until then, Riverworks will be working closely with Essence and HGCBT for a smooth transition. By joining forces, we'll ensure that the wonderful dance opportunities you've come to expect will always have a home in our community, especially for children and teens.

The community will see very little change in the dance program. Summer and fall programming at Essence Studios will continue as is, with pre-professional ballet as well as recreational ballet, jazz, tap, and contemporary offerings. The winter performance, *Winter's Eve*, will be held at the Bender JCC in Rockville in December and the upcoming spring performance, ***Fairy Tales on Stage***, on **Saturday, May 9, 1:00pm and 6:00pm** at the Bender JCC in Rockville promises a nostalgic enchantment of dances with ballet, tap, and contemporary pieces inspired by your favorite fables, including **Princess and the Frog, Tangled, Peter Pan, Cinderella, Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty** and others. The fantastical performance will conclude with Essence Studios' advanced Ballet dancers showcasing Act II of the classic ballet **Giselle**, a story filled with betrayal, heartbreak, vengeful spirits, and the redemption of true love. The incredible talent and artistry of the performers from each dance genre will make this a wonderful and inspiring family event! Purchase tickets [here](#).

Essence Studios and HGCBT have a proud and impressive legacy in Poolesville, and we can't wait to work with their board, staff, and families to build on that foundation. Together we'll carry forward a high-quality dance program that serves and inspires the community for years to come.

Essence Studios, HGCBT, and Riverworks Join Forces - FAQs

A Stronger Future for Dance in Our Community

1. What is happening?

Hope Garden Children's Ballet Theatre (HGCBT) will donate its organization and assets to Riverworks Art Center (Riverworks), becoming part of Riverworks' broader nonprofit structure.

At the same time, the combined nonprofit entity will purchase the physical assets of Essence Studios to ensure continuity of studio space, equipment, and instruction.

This step creates a unified, mission-driven arts organization with expanded capacity and long-term sustainability.

2. Why is HGCBT donating itself to Riverworks?

HGCBT's Board determined integrating into Riverworks:

- Strengthens long-term financial sustainability
- Expands access to shared administrative infrastructure
- Enhances fundraising and grant capacity
- Aligns missions around a single community-based arts education organization

This is a proactive, strategic decision designed to preserve and grow dance and movement programming for years to come.

3. What happens to Essence Studios?

Riverworks (including the integrated HGCBT performance production and community engagement programming) will purchase the physical assets of Essence Studios, including equipment and studio fixtures.

This ensures:

- No disruption to classes
- Continuity of instruction
- Preservation of studio space in town

The dance programming currently running under Essence Studios will operate under nonprofit governance moving forward. However, this should have little or no impact on the structure and operation of the dance studio and classes.

4. Are spring classes, summer classes, or summer camps changing?

No.

- Spring classes are unaffected.
- Summer classes are unaffected.
- Summer camps are unaffected.

Families should expect business as usual for all current registrations and schedules up through August 14th, 2026.

5. Will *A Winter's Eve* still take place in 2026?

Yes.

HGCBT's signature winter production, *A Winter's Eve*, will be staged this coming winter as planned at the Kreeger Auditorium in the JCC Bender of Greater Washington in Rockville, MD.

Artistic excellence and performance opportunities remain central to our mission.

6. Is tuition increasing?

There are no tuition changes associated with this transition for spring or summer programming.

Future tuition decisions will be made carefully, transparently, and with accessibility in mind.

7. Will artistic leadership change?

The current artistic leadership will continue as is for the Spring and Summer 2026 seasons. Artistic leadership is expected to transition in the Fall of 2026. Riverworks is actively working with current artistic leadership to secure experienced, trusted, and knowledgeable leadership that will continue existing programming with as little change as possible for the 2026-2027 season to provide consistency and continuity for the teachers, students, families, and community. Claire Jones will continue to be involved after the transition as a member of the Riverworks Board Dance Performance Committee.

8. Is HGCBT losing its identity?

No.

HGCBT's, productions, traditions, and artistic standards will continue within the Riverworks structure. To that end, members of the current HGCBT Board of Directors will become the Dance Performance Committee under the Riverworks Board of Directors and at least one member of the HGCBT Board will become a voting member of the Riverworks Board.

This is mission integration — not mission elimination.

9. Why purchase Essence Studios?

Owning the studio assets:

- Ensures stability of space
- Protects programming continuity
- Strengthens long-term cost management
- Preserves a local dance home for families

10. What does this mean for donors and sponsors?

All existing donor commitments and sponsorships will be honored.

This transition:

- Increases organizational stability
- Enhances impact reporting
- Expands community reach

Corporate and individual sponsors benefit from alignment with a larger, unified arts organization.

11. What does this mean for the Town and community?

The result is:

- A stronger nonprofit arts presence
 - Preserved dance programming in town
 - Preserved performance opportunities
 - Increased collaboration across arts disciplines
 - Continued cultural vitality
-

12. What is the timeline?

The integration and asset purchase will occur in the coming months, with a formal transition on September 1, 2026.

Classes and productions continue uninterrupted during the transition.
