Dancer, 13, to train in Monaco

By CALVIN LEAR
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LAFAYETTE — That's not a shadow following Sarah Stravins-
ska's balletic movements around the University of Southwestern
Louisiana's dance studio.

It's Virginia Fournier, the USL dance professor's 13-year-old pro-
tego, the girl who is about to embark on a journey dancers of
any age only dream about.

Fournier will leave in September for the Princess Grace
Ballet School in Monaco, the school started by the late
princess. Fournier will be away for four to six years of study and
six to eight hours a day of nothing but ballet. And she can't wait.

"It's really special to be accepted," she said. "It's really a
good school."

What's amazing about Fournier is that she has danced for only
three years and had intensive training for a year.

A native of Alberta, Canada — her family is originally from Que-
bec — Fournier's father has an oil industry job that led to a transfer
to Lafayette a year ago.

"Her mother phoned me and asked for some help finding a
place for her to dance," Stravinska said. "She was looking for
someone who could give her some intense training, but most local private dance schools don't
do that, so I allowed her to study with the university dancers."

Fournier took every opportunity to learn more about ballet, joining
night classes offered by Stravinska in addition to working
individually with her.

"When she came to me, she had
never been in pointed shoes (the
ones ballerinas wear to dance on
their toes), but she got strong
fast," Stravinska said. "Then, she
performed in La Danse, her first
substantial dance, with us at the
Heymann Center. She did fine."

Fournier is 4 feet 8 inches tall,
but looks much taller when she is
extended in her movements. She
is slender, but not thin. Her move-
ments are graceful, even to eyes
untrained in ballet.

"You can have two people the
same height, the same build, and
one gets it and the other doesn't," Stravinska said. "She gets it," or
the seemingly innate ability to
merge art with the dance move-
ments.

Her coach said she has the three
things that could make her a great
dancer. She has the "physical
equipment," or her physique; the
opportunity to reach the highest
level, which the Monaco school
will offer; and the desire.

"You can have the body and the
opportunity, but unless you have a
fanatic desire to pursue this, it
will be too much. She has that
desire," Stravinska said.

Fournier insists her movement
to reach the highest levels of bal-
et is her wish, not something
pushed on her.

"That really is important," Fournier said. "If your parents
push you too much, you won't love it."

Virginia Fournier, 13, dances Wednesday afternoon inside
the University of Southwestern Louisiana McLaunir Gym in
Lafayette. Fournier will attend the Princess Grace Ballet
School in Monaco.