

ARTS

Manotick girl joins the Greatest Show on Earth

Denise Smith graduate Dierdre Barnes sets her sights on the lights of Las Vegas and Cirque de Soleil

BY STEPH WILLIAMS

It's where the world comes to play. Slot machines, blackjack tables, and show after show tempt any traveler who ventures into Las Vegas. And in a city where entertainment is the name of the game, no show is bigger than Cirque de Soleil.

To star in Cirque de Soleil is a dream for many aspiring performers, and it's a dream that has come true for Manotick native Dierdre Barnes. A graduate of Denise Smith School of Dance, Barnes, 18, is thrilled that she has the opportunity to join the world-famous show for a one-year contract.

"I found out at the end of January," said Barnes, who has been in Montreal training before her move to Las Vegas in August. "The contract is one year with the option of renewing it for another year."

It may be the largest stage she has ever set foot on, but

performing isn't something new for Barnes. She enrolled in dance class at age five and has never looked back. Barnes left Denise Smith at age 17, after graduating high school.

"Without them, I wouldn't be here today," said Barnes.

Barnes' winning audition would be unfamiliar to most people – it lasted seven and a half hours and was entered on video with entries from all over the world. "There are two guys in the cast from Japan, one girl from Italy," said Barnes. "In the audition there was a contemporary combo, a hip-hop number, acting exercises and camera work – it was very intense."

Barnes' family has been behind her during her whole dancing career and couldn't be more pleased to see her realize her dreams.

"They love it," said Barnes, "they know I've been working for this since I was five – it's what I've

always wanted to do."

Barnes leaves for Vegas on Saturday, where she will live independently and train (even more rigorously) for six days a week alongside the cast of 25 other performers. Normally the cast numbers 50 or 60 persons, so the performers will be taking on more roles than just dancing. A normal day makes basic training for the Armed Forces seem like a day in the park.

"Training consists of Pilates every day, dance class, strength and conditioning in a gym, exercises and cardio to keep in shape, three hours of work on parts of the show. Then we break for dinner, after which we work with the choreographer. It's all physical, all day," said Barnes.

Cirque de Soleil will be seen in Vegas' Luxor Hotel, familiar to CSI fans as the "big pyramid." The cast will put on two shows a night, five days a week. Although the glitz and glamour of Sin City strip can dazzle the



For the next year, starting in August, Dierdre Barnes will occupy the stage with 25 other multi-cultural performers in the world famous Cirque de Soleil.

eyes of many a person, Barnes says she will never forget where home is.

"Manotick is where I was born and grew up," said

Barnes. "Manotick will always be home for me."

Barnes is looking forward to visits from friends and family during her time

in Las Vegas, and is eagerly awaiting her chance to shine on the big stage.

"I'm not nervous, just really excited."