

IBMer's creative outlet a local institution

Ann Marie Maynard shares Puerto Rico through nonprofit

Austin, Texas has a split personality. Is it the technically bent "Silicon Hills" or the artsy "Live Music Capital of the World?" As director of the [Austin Center for Advanced Studies](#) and founder of the Puerto Rican Folkloric Dance and Cultural Center (PRFDance), IBMer Ann Marie Maynard personifies both reputations.



Ann Marie grew up in a Bronx, New York neighborhood she affectionately calls "a suburb of San Juan." She studied math, science, and engineering at school, and Puerto Rican dance, music, and culture at home.

"My mother always told me, 'if people ask who you are, you tell them you are Puerto Rican,'" Ann Marie said. "Going to graduate school in Pittsburgh was the first time I realized what she meant. I had to create my own way of sustaining my culture." She cultivated a little slice of San Juan by seeking out the one Latin band in the area and teaching her friends salsa, merengue, and other Latin-style dance steps before hitting the

dance floor (an unofficial, informal beginning to PRFDance).

Ann Marie earned a Ph.D. in electrical engineering from Carnegie Mellon University, and joined IBM in 1992 to work in AIX Performance. Austin's large Latino population made her feel welcome in Texas, and she soon started dancing with Roy Lozano's (Mexican) Ballet Folklorico dance company.

With the birth of her first child in 1997, Ann Marie decided Austin needed an injection of Puerto Rican culture. She took the example of the Mexican ballet company and after nine months of research, PRFDance was born.

"I realized there was nothing here in Austin for my son similar to what I had growing up. So, I started an adult Puerto Rican folk dance class," Ann Marie said.

Six months and six students later, PRFDance was a 501C3 nonprofit organization giving performances at venues all over town. Now, PRFDance is the PRFDance and Cultural Center, offering dance, music, culture, and history classes to about 70 participants of all ages, every semester. The performance company boasts 24 professional-level dancers and musicians, and Ann Marie coordinates and directs two large-scale performances every year.

Arts Commissions from the city, state, and national level, the Puerto Rican government, IBM, and others help provide the financial resources for these productions. Their most recent performance, "Celebrando 2004 -- The Pirates of Puerto Rico" needed elaborate costumes and props as they brought to life the exciting adventures of Confresi (the 19th century Puerto Rican pirate equivalent of Robin Hood).

"Without [On Demand Community](#) we would not have been able to make the costumes," Ann Marie said. PRFDance has earned IBM community service grants since 1999. The money helps purchase material for costumes and buys uniquely Puerto Rican instruments -- a hand-crafted, made-in-Puerto Rico-only barrile (drum used in Plena and Bomba music styles) can cost \$500.

One of Ann Marie's goals is to establish a prestigious Puerto Rican institute in the United States, but most importantly -- going back to the original reason why she started PRFDance -- she is developing a sense of community and a support structure for the individuals and families alike, that come to PRFDance. To learn more about PRFDance, go to prfdance.org.

-By Chris Nay, IBM Site Communications

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