



PHOTOS BY ANNA STONEHOUSE/THE ASPEN TIMES

Amanda Boxtel dances Wednesday with partner Joseph Watson II in the Aspen Santa Fe dance studio rehearsing their routine to be performed at the St. Regis ballroom tonight.

Against all odds

Amanda Boxtel and wheelchair take stage at Aspen Santa Fe Ballet gala tonight

Erica Robbie
The Aspen Times

In the winter, Amanda Boxtel listens to classical music through a pair of headphones as she turns and glides to the melody on her monoski.

Since becoming paralyzed in a ski accident on Aspen Mountain 24 years ago, Boxtel said, "It's the closest I've ever felt to dancing. Until this week."

Leading through example, the longtime valley local will step outside her comfort zone tonight when she performs in the Aspen Santa Fe Ballet's Dancing with the Stars gala.

The ninth annual benefit, which pairs a "local celebrity" with an Aspen Santa Fe Ballet dancer, is the nonprofit's largest fundraising event of the year.

For Boxtel — a former child dancer who's no stranger to watching recitals from the audience — dancing again all these years later is somewhat a dream.

"I laugh about that now," Boxtel said of imagining herself onstage before. "No, I never pictured it."

But Boxtel, who remains highly active despite her paralysis, embraces any opportunity to move.



"I just say yes," Boxtel said, admitting it isn't always easy finding such outlets.

"In the winter, I ski. ... But in the summer months, I feel so trapped in the valley," Boxtel said. "I just want to get to a mountaintop,

IF YOU GO...

What: Aspen Santa Fe Ballet's Dancing with the Stars gala

When: Tonight, 6 p.m.

Where: St. Regis, Aspen

For tickets and more information, visit www.aspensantafeballet.com/support/special-events.html. To donate, visit www.aspensantafeballet.com/support/DWTAS_online-voting.html. All proceeds benefit Aspen Santa Fe Ballet.



go see wildflowers, hike.

"I ache to move to be free."

As executive director of Bridging Bionics — a Basalt-based foundation that helps fund, educate and advance the research and development of exoskeletons and bionic technology — Boxtel helps people who suffer spinal injuries regain mobility via an exoskeleton and vibration training.

She also is a motivational speaker and encourages others, paralyzed and not, to challenge themselves.

"I always tell people, don't hold yourself back. It's your mind that holds yourself back," Boxtel said. "The human spirit has no limitations."

Neither does Boxtel, according to her dance partner Joseph Watson and coach Ashly Costa.

"I've learned a lot working with (Amanda)," Watson said, including, "there is no such thing as a limit."

Spoiler alert: As part of the duo's performance, Watson will lift up Boxtel, 49, and her wheelchair over his head more than once.

Costa, who choreographed Boxtel and Watson's routine, described Boxtel as "amazing to work with."

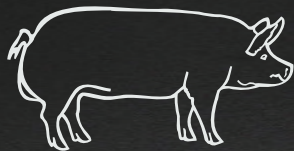
"I've never actually choreographed anyone in a wheelchair before, so this was new for me in my professional career," said Costa, a choreographer on the "Dancing with the Stars" television show. "But right from the beginning, she was really willing to try anything I wanted to try."

Costa added, "As a dancer and someone who can move, it puts my life in perspective and just made me really appreciate life in general."

"(Amanda) is really an inspiration to me and to a lot of people."

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