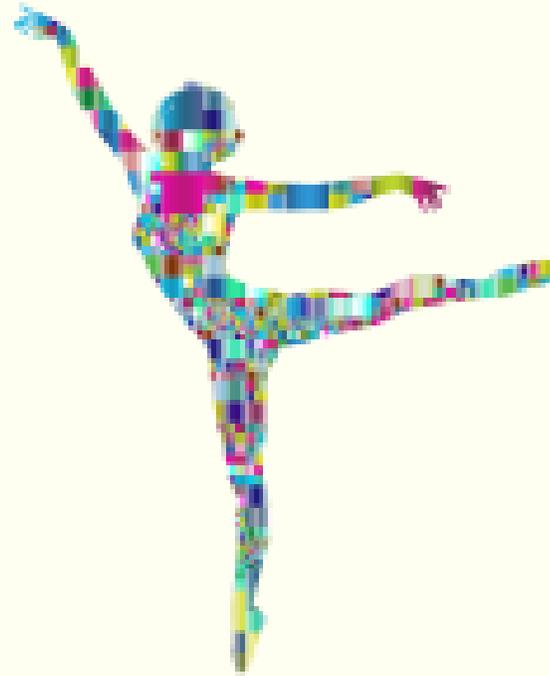


LEOH Trip

The Margaret Alkek Williams Center for Dance Houston Ballet

February 10, 2026



The impressive Center, located at 601 Preston St. and opened in 2011, was named in honor of Ms. Alkek Williams, and could not have been possible without her \$10,000,000 legacy gift.

The 6-story 115,000 sq. ft. building, built by Gensler architecture firm in the heart of the theater district, contains 9 dance studios, a Dance Lab that seats 175 for rehearsals and presentations, a music library, and facilities for administrative and support staff.

Conveniently, the Center links directly to the Wortham Theater Center via a skybridge.

Photos inside the building were prohibited; however, when outside, one could admire and photograph the colorful mural on the side of the building.





The Houston Ballet Academy was founded in 1955. Faculty include those who have performed throughout the world, and who currently train over 1,000 students annually.

Former Houston Ballet principal dancer and native Houstonian **Lauren Anderson** greeted everyone and ushered groups into the Dance Lab for a one-hour studio performance by dance students. She then served as moderator. Groups of elementary school students were an enthusiastic part of the audience. Encouraged and instructed by Ms. Anderson, they clapped and cheered with shouts of *Bravo* after each performance and were clearly a captivated audience.

Ms. Anderson was introduced to ballet at an early age, but later, at age 9, was thrilled to see so many black dancers, when her mother took her to a *Dance Theatre of Harlem* performance.

In 1990, she was the Houston Ballet's first African American principal dancer. She has performed leading roles in all the great classical ballets. To put that in perspective, becoming principal dancer occurred 2½ decades before the great Misty Copeland became the first African American woman promoted to principal at the *American Ballet Theatre*.

Ms. Anderson now dedicates herself to teaching and to diversity in ballet.

She is the Manager of Houston Ballet's
Education & Community Engagement Program.

Once everyone was seated in the **Dance Lab**, Ms. Anderson explained that we would be seeing performances and music representing each decade of Houston's history and ballet, beginning with the 1960's.

Dancers, choreography, wardrobe, and backdrop varied with performances from each era, and was highly entertaining, during the one-hour presentation of ***Dancing Through Time with the Houston Ballet***.

Following the conclusion of the last performance, Ms. Anderson selected a few of the performers to comment or answer questions. We learned that most of these dance students are teenagers, and that many had started training at a very early age.



The Mission Statement of Houston Ballet is *Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (IDEA)*.

“Art is a Right, not a Privilege”

Current Artistic Directors *are Julie Kent and Stanton Welch AM.*

Mr. Welch has served in this capacity since 2003, and has choreographed 43 new works for the ballet, along with presenting works from George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins, among others. Ms. Kent joined Houston Ballet in 2023; she was first a Principal ballerina of American Ballet Theatre, then Artistic Director of the Washington Ballet, before joining Houston Ballet.

Numerous programs are available. Tuition, financial aid, and other information can be found on the Ballet website.

The **Preschool Program** is for children ages 2-6, designed to introduce students to ballet. No auditions are required.

The **Pre-Professional Program** is for students ages 7+ with previous dance experience and who are committed to training.

The **Professional Program** is for students age 14+ who wish to pursue a professional ballet career.

The **Adult Program** is for those age 14+ with beginner through advanced ballet experience.

Summer Programs are for students age 2+ interested in ballet and movement classes.

Workshops are for students age 4+ and teachers, as available.

Adapted Programming partners with schools and community programs to engage those with specific needs.

Dance Talks are free lecture series to learn more about the works on Houston Ballet’s stage and the artists behind them.

See them live or catch them on YouTube.

During the tour, we learned that the building itself is state-of-the-art to accommodate the dancers; for example, the wooden floors in practice are made to be slightly springy. Noise-cancellation technology is used throughout the building to provide optimum conditions during training and practice.

As we toured the building, we were impressed with the numerous practice rooms and the open concept use of glass, along with the overall architecture and use of wood accents throughout the building.

Stairs between floors were interesting, as well. The stairwell walls were filled with numerous photos of current and former artistic directors, dancers, and celebrities.

The wardrobe department was extremely interesting! We saw boxes and boxes of props and costumes on shelving, along with many items hanging on racks.

Several sewing machines and a variety of fabrics were on display, and one could only imagine how busy this area is when preparing for or during a ballet run at the Wortham.

For those of us who wondered how the costumes were cleaned, we learned that during a run, costumes are generally “spritzed” with alcohol between performances.

Our guide mentioned that a “spirited” use of vodka would even suffice, as it has no alcoholic smell!

A retired pair of ballet shoes was passed around during this part of the tour. As you might expect, the toe portion felt rock-hard! We learned that each pair has a very short life-span, as the performer requires new pairs frequently.





We were reminded that the popular ***Nutcracker Market*** is no longer just an annual late-year event.

The ***Nutcracker Market SPRING*** event
is April 17-19 2026 at NRG Center!

Tickets are already on sale to view (and purchase)
items from over 150 merchants!





Following the tour, one of the docents was kind enough to take a group photo.

For those interested in lunch following our visit, the ***Lyric Market Hall*** is conveniently part of the building housing the state-of-the-art parking garage that many of us used. A large variety of lunch choices (or even fancy waffles) were available. *Thank you*, LEOH trip coordinator Ann Fairchild, for planning this entertaining and informative event!

Future Trips - all by Precinct 1 bus

Tuesday, March 10: Ismaili Center on Allen Parkway

Visitors will enjoy a 1-hr tour. The Center welcomes those of all backgrounds. It celebrates the arts and fosters intellectual exchange, embracing the richness of human diversity while honoring Islamic traditions. Long-time LEOH member Helen Ebaugh assisted with planning the visit and will provide a brief overview prior to the tour.

Wednesday, April 22 (Earth Day): Artist Boat & Coastal Heritage Preserve in Galveston

This non-profit's mission is to promote awareness and preservation of coastal margins and the marine environment through the disciplines of science and the arts. Enjoy a 1-hr birding tour, followed by a 1-hr Habitat Restoration session with the Habitat Manager.

The week of May 18-22: Preservation Houston Destination and tour details to follow.

The week of June 8-12: Channel 8/KUHT 88.7

Tour our local PBS (Channel 8) station, followed by a tour of the KUHF 88.7 radio station on the UH campus.

The week of July 20-24: Amazon Distribution Center

Prepare to be amazed during the tour of this vast warehouse and learn how items such as cat litter and that weird gadget you saw advertised on Facebook can be at your doorstep or designated drop box later the same day that you ordered them!

Signing Up for a Trip

Trip Coordinator Ann Fairchild may be contacted at fairann@sbcglobal.net or **281-686-1325**. She will publish complete trip details, with the opportunity to sign up, closer to the trip date.

If the traveler quota is full, you may ask to be put on a waiting list.