

## Team Orangeville wins silver at Oireachtas competition

By **Brian Lockhart**

A group of dancers from the Celtic Academy in Orangeville went to the Oireachtas Regional Irish Dance Championships held in Toronto on November 29 - December 1 and achieved good results after winning silver in their category.

The word Oireachtas is a Gaelic word referring to the regional competition and is used in Irish Dancing when there is a high-level competition.

Team Orangeville participated in the U8 division.

Celtic Academy owner and director, Mary Foley, said that Irish dancing is an activity which is more of a sport than an art. It requires training, concentration, and physical ability.

"Irish dancing is no longer just a passion, it's my life," Foley said of her dedication to working with her dancers. "It's becoming such a high-level sport now. People are saying Irish dance should be at the Olympic level. It's physically demanding; I teach at a gymnasium, I teach at community centres where you see hockey and lacrosse and other sports. Irish dancing is open to every ethnicity - it's taught in 37 countries. You need 40 countries to make a bid in the Olympics. We're giving kids sports, you're engaging them, you're keeping them active. We're keeping kids in sports and we're using modern upbeat music."

Competing at the Oireachtas is a huge deal for those involved in the Canadian competition.

"It's a core moment for them," Foley said "They may never get a chance in life like this again."

The local team that went to the championships was started in 2022.

"Our team took second place, they were on the podium for the under 8 age group," Foley said. "This was the big event - it's the Canadian Irish Dance championship. The event runs for three days and competition is fierce. We also had two soloists who made the podium."

The winning team, with members Nora, Mattalyn, Charlotte, Claire, Isolde, and Ellie, were all between the ages of four and seven years old.

In total, there were around 1,000 dancers competing at the event from all over Canada.

Irish dancing has become increasingly popular, especially over the past few years with many adults deciding to once again dance and do what they enjoyed in their youth.

"Some people don't just want to go to the gym," Foley said. "They want to dance."