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## MARY VERDI-FLETCHER

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**Mary Verdi-Fletcher**, a native of Cleveland, is artistic director and principal dancer of *Dancing Wheels*. Born with spina bifida, Mary founded Dancing Wheels in 1980 as a means for people with disabilities to explore the world of dance. Ms. Verdi-Fletcher's principal roles have included: "Grandma" in the **Cleveland San Jose Ballet's, The Nutcracker**, choreographed by **Dennis Nahat**, the "Little Boy" in **Dancing Wheels production of "The Snowman"**, and dances by guest choreographers, such as **Norman Walker, Keith Young Daniel Job, Michael Medcalf, Sabatino Verlezza, Bethany Prater and David Rousseve.**

Prior to her dance career, Mary was the first Attendant Care Coordinator for the Independent Living Center for the State of Ohio. During her tenure at Services for Independent Living, Mary organized a statewide advocacy organization that led hundreds of advocates with disabilities through a tremendous effort to insure equal access in public transportation and statewide personal assistance care. In 1986, in her role as Director of Development, Mary developed a fundraising and special events division for the Independent Living Center and successfully created a citywide fundraising/awareness program for the organization.

Overall, Mary has nearly 20 years of experience in the realm of not-for-profit fundraising and development. Today Mary is not only Founding Director for *Dancing Wheels*, but is also President of Professional Flair, a not-for-profit arts/disability organization that she and a Board of Directors established in 1989.

She serves on numerous boards throughout Ohio including: Ohio Dance, ex-officio of Very Special Arts Ohio, and Community Partnership for Arts and Culture. Mary was crowned the 1982 Miss Wheelchair Ohio and she was runner-up in the 1982 Miss Wheelchair National Competition. Mary is the 1990 winner of the "Outstanding Young Clevelanders Award," the 1991 recipient of the "ORACLE Merit Award" for outstanding Educational and Outreach Programming, the 1992 Lakeland Community College "Woman of Achievement Award," the 1994 "Invacare Artistic Achievement Award," and the 1996 Ohio Theatre Alliance "Encore" Award. In September 1997, Mary and Cleveland Ballet Dancing Wheels were honored with the "1997 National Rehabilitation Awareness Award" along with Christopher Reeve and three other individuals in recognition of their work for and with persons with disabilities. Mary, Professional Flair and Dancing Wheels were also the recipients of the 1998 Cuyahoga Special Education Service Center Award for Outstanding Community Services, "1998 Governor's Award" for Outreach and in March 1998, Mary and Dancing Wheels were featured performers on the ABC television special, *Christopher Reeve: A Celebration of Hope*. In 1999, Mary received the "YWCA Greater Cleveland Women of Achievement Award" and was a "Northern Ohio Live Arts Award"

