

IN ONE OF THE ONLY places that encourages bouncing off the walls, Creative Movements holds kids' gymnastics classes every Monday night at the Golden Age Center. Students get instruction as Danielle Weyeneth (far left) did from Coach Kayla Unger on her backwards somersaults, and do things like leapfrog the way Gracie Fries (left) did over friends like Corbin Puga, who later showed off his flexibility (below) as he and the others practiced their backbends.

It's tumble time!

The kids were bouncing, bopping and swinging through the room – by all means, creatively moving – while teachers assisted by holding feet and parents looked on from the sidelines.

The Creative Movements gymnastics class on Monday, Feb. 25, was off and running, cartwheeling and somersaulting.

"It's really good for the kids," said Coach Robyn Rouse, who along with Sarah Howland teaches every Monday night at the Golden Age Center. "They develop motor skills, flexibility and confidence. You can build it in these kids, and it's a really good foundation for any other sport that you can go into."

"In Oberlin, we have little kids wrestling, which is great for the boys, but you would be amazed at how good gymnastics are for wrestling. You'd think there would be more of them involved."

"It started in Atwood," Mrs. Howland said. "I'm not sure of the year. We were in Atwood for two years and then came to Oberlin around 2005. It's once a week, Monday evenings from September through April, and sometimes summer classes. There are actually six coaches total. And there's a little bit of competition – we have a gymnastics meet in Atwood coming up on Saturday, March 23, and there are other groups that come to that from around the region, and even a few from Colorado. We do it every year."

When the program first started, Mrs. Rouse said, there were 17 kids from Oberlin driving to Atwood every week. A few of the moms talked with the board of Creative Movements to see if they could set up a branch in town, and the board said yes, provided they had a building to do it in.

"We started at the Bohemian Hall at the Last Indian Raid Museum," she said, "but when they put in a new floor, they said they didn't want the mats there anymore. Then we went to The Gateway and had it there for a couple of years. We stored the mats upstairs and so we had to drag them down for class. So when they built the Golden Age Center, they wrote the grant (application) to include different ages of people so they could include the gymnastics class."

And all those cheerleaders you see at the high school games? We'll give you one guess as to where they picked up their skills.

"A lot of the cheerleaders who are doing back handsprings and stuff started with us," said Mrs. Rouse, "so we like to say we're building the cheerleading program here."

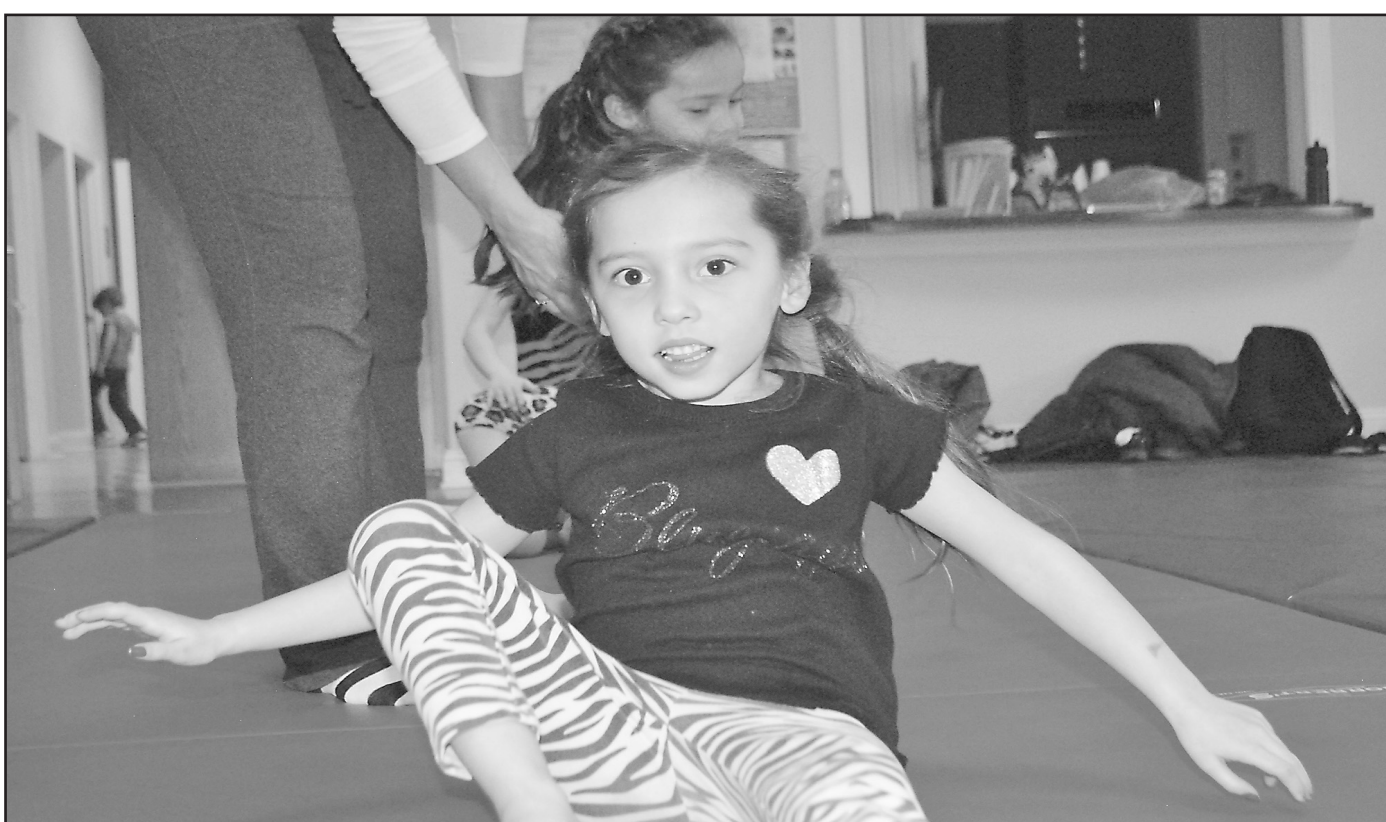
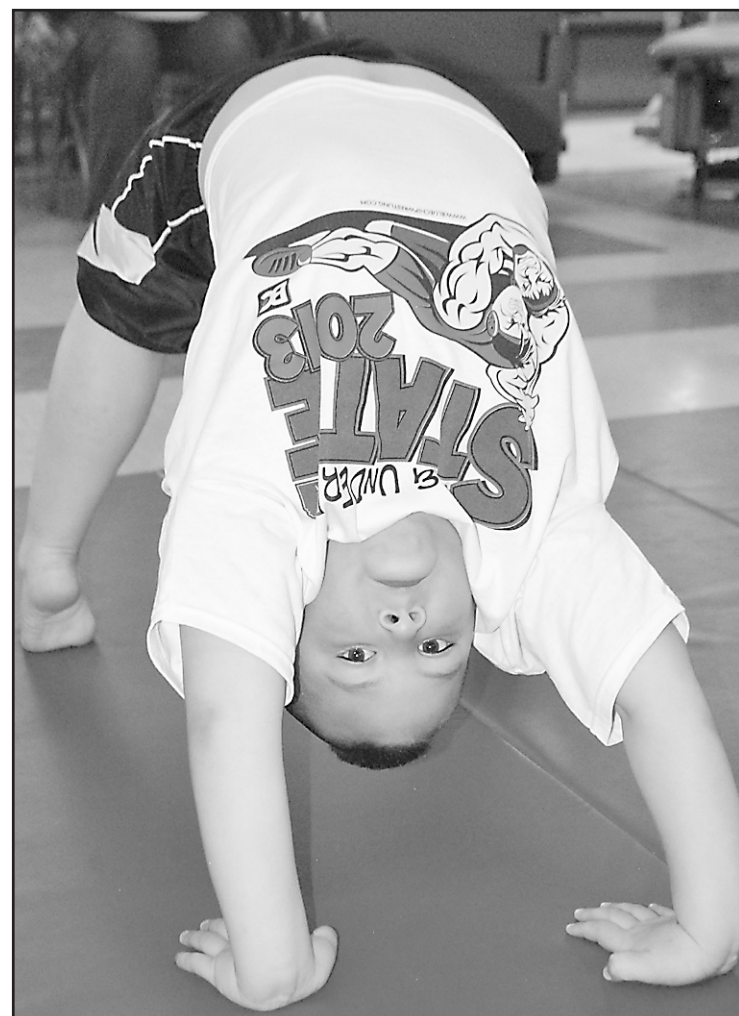
"It's a big confidence builder," added Coach Howland. "It helps them with balance and it's a good way to build up for any other sports the kids may do when they're older. Especially when they're younger, it helps them get good exercise, and they seem to really enjoy it."

"They have to be at least 3 years old to participate, and they have to be potty trained. When we first started out here, I'd always been interested in (gymnastics) and always wanted to do it as a kid. I just taught myself. So it's something I've always been interested in, and when they offered it here that first year, my daughter joined up, and the next year I started coaching."

Mrs. Rouse said that she has been involved with gymnastics since her 18-year-old daughter, Darbi, was 4.

"We're a nonprofit organization," Coach Rouse said, "so we rely on donations from different clubs when we need new equipment. The Bargain Box in particular has been wonderful – they've donated several times to us. Any fund raising we do, we put it right back into the kids. For example, we try to take them to camp once a year. We'll take them to a bigger gym that might include more equipment like bars and beams. And we get more advanced instructors who may have teams that compete statewide, and we'll get that coach to teach the kids new things."

The classes cost \$30 a month for older kids and \$20 a month for preschoolers. The summer class usually starts June 1, said Mrs. Rouse, and if you'd like to enroll your child you can call either her or Mrs. Howland, or stop by the Golden Age Center on a Monday night to check it out for yourself.



TWINS LILLI AND LAYLA Puga, from Norton, (above) took some spills during the class, but almost all of them were intentional as the girls bounced around the equipment. The kids at Creative Movements learn everything from head stands to cartwheels (right), which the coaches say helps lay a foundation for all sorts of athletic challenges in the future.