

# Top hip-hop

## Local studio's dancers score big at national championships

By Eileen O. Daday  
*Daily Herald Correspondent*

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A pair of hip-hop teams based in Wheeling took the dance world by storm at the recent national championships and world finals in Los Angeles.

Both teams train under professional dancer, Suave, at the Dance ConnXion studio in Wheeling. They compete as the Hip Hop ConnXion in the adult division and in the varsity division for teens.

By the end of the last weekend in July, both teams picked up medals, with the varsity crew winning the gold medal at the 2006 USA Hip-Hop Championship, and earning the silver medal at worlds. The adults placed second at the USA championships, before taking fourth at worlds.

"This is something dance companies dream of — to be able to do this on the world stage," said Suave, who uses that one name and has appeared in various music videos and movies, including "Save The Last Dance."

A total of 11 dancers from throughout the Northwest and Western suburbs formed the two teams, with some dancing on both crews.

They are: Karlo, Kyle and Kevin Familara, all of Des Plaines; Katrina Amante of Woodridge; Asia DeOcampo of Arlington Heights; Elizabeth Abitua of Elgin; Lauren Mulherrin of Naperville; Alyssa Edwardson of Buffalo Grove; Brianna McNamara of Park Ridge; David Fonseca of Aurora, and Chris Zarate of Tinley Park.

Suave formed the nonprofit dance teams in 1999, with the idea that hooking young people on dance would preserve the art form for the future.

In Los Angeles, both crews combined a mix of old-school moves with new, creative ones in their two-minute routines, but the Hip Hop ConnXion Adult crew pulled off the most dramatic move, in their quest to move up in the rankings at the world finals.

As they neared the end of their routine, the seven dancers pulled down their makeshift headbands to cover their eyes. A stunned crowd watched as they completed their complex moves blindfolded.

"They pulled off a trick that's never been seen at the world championships," Suave said.

He adds that the daring finish drew the 6,000 people in the stands at the Redondo Beach Performing Arts Center to jump to their feet to give the crew a standing ovation.

It also propelled them three places in the standings, moving them to fourth place overall, from seventh after the preliminaries.

"I always tell them, 'If you believe, you can succeed,'æ" Suave says. "They had the heart, the passion, the drive — and the belief."

Their respective titles already are paying big dividends. The dance studio has drawn inquiries from producers with the "Last Call with Carson Daly" and Ellen DeGeneres shows to perform.