

"I want to dance for the Blazers as long as my body will take it."

Amanda Greger, BlazerDancer and Heritage High School graduate



Photos by STEVEN LANE/The Columbian

Vancouver resident Amanda Greger made the Portland Trail Blazers' dance team on her fifth try. She's already rehearsing with the team for the 2010-2011 season, which opens in October.

SHE SHOOTS, SHE SCORES

VANCOUVER'S AMANDA GREGER EARNS A SPOT ON THE PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS' DANCE TEAM ON HER FIFTH TRY

By ERIN MIDDLEWOOD
Columbian staff writer

Amanda Greger almost gave up. She had auditioned four times for the Portland Trail Blazers' dance team.

"After I didn't make it last year, I thought maybe dancing wasn't my thing," said Greger, a 22-year-old Vancouver resident.

Before calling it quits, she decided to ask judges for their feedback.

"They said I'm a good dancer, but I'd be a better candidate if I was more fit," she said.

She hired a personal trainer at 24 Hour Fitness in January. When he asked her about her fitness goals, she got straight to the point: "I want to be a BlazerDancer."

"I wasn't huge," she said. "I just wasn't toned. The trainer's term was 'soft.'"

She started lifting weights. She replaced the cereal she was eating for nearly every meal with oatmeal, chicken, veggies and protein shakes. In July, 15 pounds lighter and toned, she returned to audition yet again.

This time, she made it.

Greger traces her passion for dancing to her freshman year at Heritage High School, when she tried out for the dance team.

"I don't know how I made it," she said with a laugh. "I was really bad."

But she stuck with it. After



Amanda Greger sits near roommate Michelle Johnson, right, at BlazerDancer rehearsals. Greger drew inspiration from Johnson, who made the Portland Trail Blazers' dance team last year, when Greger almost gave up on her dream.

graduating in 2006, she attended the International Air Academy and scored a job based in Seattle with Continental Airlines. She was hit by a car when she was in Cleveland for training. The accident injured her shoulder, and she came home to Vancouver.

Then she got a job with a bank, and decided to return to dancing in her spare time. She joined Groove Nation Academy. She landed a gig

dancing for the Vancouver Volcanoes in 2007, and the Portland Winterhawks in 2009.

But she always had her sights set on becoming a BlazerDancer.

It's not uncommon for aspirants to try out for the team several times, said Michelle Woodard, the Blazers' performance teams manager, adding that she thinks Greger may have set a record.

"I think coming back five times is

pretty unique," Woodard said. "The audition process is very grueling. You have to be very physically fit."

The preliminaries include three rounds of cuts in two days. Aspirants learn a new routine for each round.

"It's stressful," Woodard said. "You have to learn quickly."

Judges seek strong dance skills, but not a cookie-cutter look, Woodard said. In fact, the team strives to have dancers look different from each other, but they all have a certain presence, she said.

"They all have an 'it' factor, a 'look-at-me' factor," she said.

Greger is thrilled judges decided she has what it takes to be a BlazerDancer. In her struggle to make the team, she has drawn inspiration from her roommate, 23-year-old Michelle Johnson, who became a BlazerDancer last year.

"Living with her and knowing she made it was so motivating for me," she said.

Greger plans to continue taking classes at Clark College and working part time. BlazerDancers earn minimum wage for practices and games, and \$75 an hour for publicity appearances.

She will have to audition again to keep her spot on the team next year, but she's already planning on it.

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