

# The New York Times

Sunday, January 29, 2006

## Back-Office Choreographer

**M**Y roots led me into this job in every way. All the values of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater remind me of the values that I was brought up with. They have to do with diversity, self-discipline, giving back to the community and, ultimately, touching and changing lives.

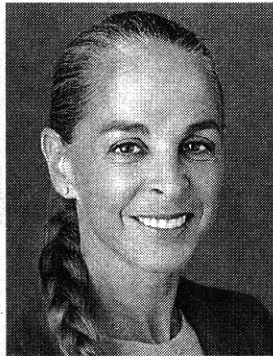
My parents made their living by doing something that they were totally passionate about, and that has always stuck with me. They owned a children's camp in the Adirondacks. It's still in the family today.

During the summer, my family lived at the camp. And summer camp is such a community. It's a team in every sense of the word. That camp experience has been important in my background and has carried over into my professional career.

Even as a kid, I was always managing something. I was always the first girl to be the president of my class and so forth. In fact, I was the president of my freshman class in 1960 at Long Beach High School. My very first job, when I was 14 years old, was teaching baton twirling at Lido Elementary School on Long Island. I had to set the price, collect money, market the program, choreograph routines and get all the students to come together as a team. It taught me how to do a little bit of everything.

My mother was a dance teacher in Long Beach on Long Island during the school year. She was my first dance teacher, and when I was a teenager, she took me into New York City to study at the 92nd Street Y. I became the head of the 92nd Street Y's dance center in 1978 and felt as if I had come full circle.

When I was 16, I went to the American Dance Festival to study dance, and Alvin Ailey was one of my teachers. He wouldn't have remembered me, but I certainly remembered him. I saw his signature piece "Revelations" in 1962, and it transformed



Andrew Eccles

### SHARON GERSTEN LUCKMAN

*Executive director,  
Alvin Ailey American  
Dance Theater*

**BIRTH DATE**

Oct. 10, 1945

**HOMETOWN**

Long Beach, N.Y.

**LAST NOVEL READ**

"Back When We  
Were Grown-Ups,"  
by Anne Tyler

**FITNESS REGIMEN**

45 minutes on a  
stationary bike and  
15 minutes of  
weights, at least  
three times a week

**HOBBY**

Learning salsa  
dancing at the Ailey  
Extension

me.

I went to the University of Wisconsin at Madison. At the time, there weren't many universities that had dance majors. When my parents sold their home on Long Island about seven years ago, the new owners of the house found a letter in the attic that I had sent during my freshman year, in 1963. I had written: "Last night I saw the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Now I know what I want to do with my life."

When I graduated from college, the opportunities for women were limited in the field beyond performing and there wasn't yet a career path called arts administration. I just had to piece it all together through work experience. Even now, I find people never know what I do.

During the month of December, when the Ailey company is performing in New York at City Center, I work seven days and six nights a week. But there is much work to do the other 11 months of the year. There is fund-raising for new works, community outreach programs and scholarships for student dancers. There is marketing and publicity for performances and for our classes. And there is financial management of a \$19 million annual budget.

On Sept. 11, 2001, we were in the midst of the capital campaign to raise money for our new building, which recently opened in Midtown. When we very gingerly started feeling out whether we could continue with fund-raising, much to my surprise, we got the most overwhelming response of people saying we needed to build this building in New York City now more than ever. We ended up raising \$74 million.

As a manager, my favorite thing is not to have to do everything by myself. I have tremendous resources in this job, and wonderful people who run all the different departments and a fabulous board of directors.

I have a quote on my office door that says: "I don't have to have the answer. I like to work with people who like solving things together." □

As told to Juston Jones.