

GOOD NIGHT, SWEET PRINCE

A tribute to restaurant icon Francis Kobty

Francis Aziz “Prince” Kobty, founder of Arlington’s vastly popular Prince Lebanese Grill, died peacefully in his sleep on May 25. He was 63.

A native of Nazareth, Kobty came to the United States in 1979. After settling in Arlington with his wife Amira and children Hani, Aziz, Vivian and Elizabeth, Kobty established a restaurant that drew not only vast local acclaim, but that was so popular it was featured twice on “The Food Network.”

To call him a local legend is an understatement. Here are just a few of the tributes to the man everyone knew as “Prince”:

Francis was my dad, best friend, mentor and hero. He was the most generous, fun-loving, hard-working, caring, genuine and the friendliest guy you’ve ever met. Dad was the anchor in our family – loving, honest, loyal, forgiving, tough when he needed to be, but always smiling. He protected us and worked tirelessly to provide a better life for us.

– Aziz Kobty

Prince can RIP knowing he will be remembered forever in his children, family and community as a great leader of all.

– John Stefanos

Sleep well, our Prince. You have touched so many lives, created a beautiful family, and you are loved by so many people. It was my honor to know you. You are such an amazing man.

– Tony Leland

“Prince” was a wonderful man who lit up the room when he walked in. He always had a smile on his face and always could carry a good conversation. He sure was one of a kind.

– Haytham Abu-anbar

He was like family to me, a home boy from Nazareth. I loved his laughter, his spirit, his love of people, his humor, his kindness and generosity, his love of family and friends, his involvement in the community, his influence and the legacy he left behind. Francis’ memory will never be forgotten. May God rests his soul.

– Mel Bishara

Everyone that knows me knows how much I adore and love the Kobty family and this man. I met Francis many, many years ago while I was in banking. He quickly became one of my favorite people, and we looked forward to his weekly visits in the bank – pure entertainment! Later, when he opened up Prince Lebanese Grill, bank



Francis “Prince” Kobty was the beloved founder of Prince Lebanese Grill.

Photo courtesy of Aziz Kobty

visits grew into lunch and dinner visits, and my relationship grew with all of them. I was always so proud to take my friends to eat there for their first time and to introduce them to Francis, THE Prince. I’ve watched him and Amira raise four great kids that turned into amazing adults. He was always beaming with pride for them, even while giving them his “loving hard time,” which always made me laugh. Francis was one of the kindest, most generous people on this planet, but he would also set you straight if you needed it and I loved his no BS way. He was honest to the core!

– Robyn Coffey

“Prince” was the kind of man that the phrase “larger than life” really was written for. He made everyone around him feel special. And if he liked you, he made you feel like family.

– Steven Glasker

We lost a great friend. Francis “Prince” Kobty was not only a beloved brother to one of my best friends, Fadia Hanson, but father to four beautiful adults: Hani, Aziz, Vivian and Elizabeth; husband to the beautiful Amira; and friend to so many. His laughter still rings in my memories, his joyous smile will never be forgotten. His love for his restaurant, Prince Lebanese Grill (which folks from around the world came to, including Food Network’s DDD Guy Fieri), showed in the quality of the food and his personal greeting of his guests.

– Kimberly Glasker

One can only hope to touch and inspire half as many people as Francis did in his lifetime. You did good, big guy. I think I can speak for most of his current and former employees when I say that Prince Lebanese Grill served as an informal academy; my work ethic is so much stronger because of my time there. I can still hear Francis’ voice yelling “what the hell is this?,” and I still wince a little from PTSD, and, honestly, I hope that never goes away. It builds character.

– Mireya Martinez A

SHE TAUGHT US TO DANCE

Remembering the legendary Persis Forster

Persis Forster, who was known to literally thousands of aspiring and veteran local dancers simply as “Miss Persis,” died on June 8. She was 91.

Forster established Miss Persis Studio of Dance in 1954, culminating a career in dance and theatre that included performing, directing, choreography and teaching. During the first year of publication, *Arlington Today* shared her remarkable story, the highlights of which are chronicled below.

IN 1954 THERE WERE three things happening that would forever transform life in the small town of Arlington, already on track to becoming a major urban center.

The first new cars rolled off the General Motors assembly line out on the city’s eastern prairie, forward-thinking voters authorized the development of a lake to provide an essential resource for the city’s future, and 24-year-old Persis Forster began shaping the lives of children at her downtown studio.

Her students through the years readily acknowledge her loving-but-firm, encouraging-yet-challenging methodology coupled with her insistence on proper decorum that gave them lifelong skills at a formative age.

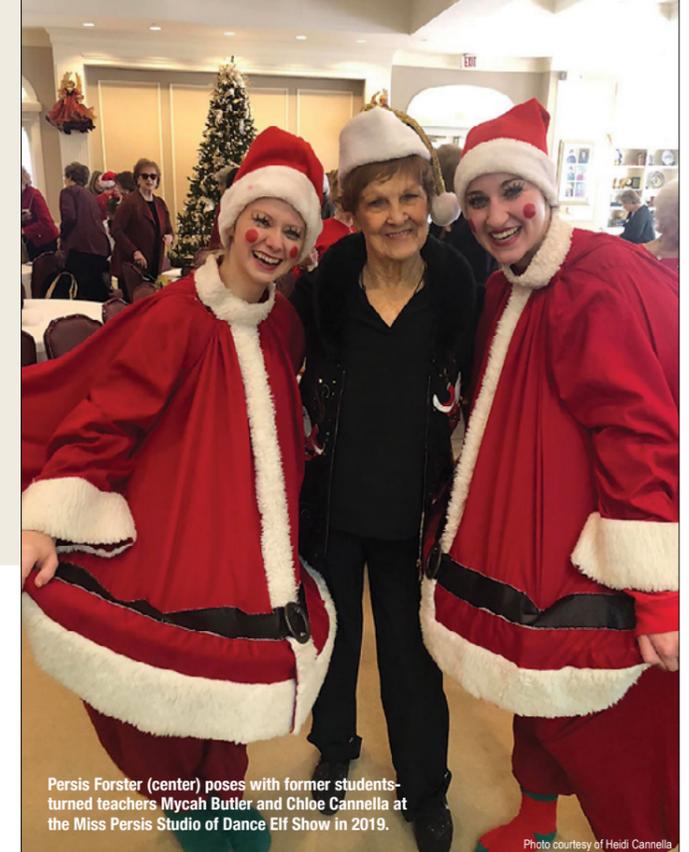
However, all of what she means to the community might not have been. Following two years at North Texas Agricultural College (now UT Arlington), she continued her studies in the performing arts and earned her degree from the University of Texas in Austin.

Persis then headed to New York City and the possibilities of Broadway. Testimony from many over the years affirm the certainty that she could have made it there, but funds ran low after a few months and even though she was getting callbacks following auditions, Persis came home.

Broadway’s loss was Arlington’s gain. Three generations of the city’s families will forever mark time from the day that Persis returned and set up her first classes as a tenant in a space that she rented for \$325 with money she got from a loan using her refrigerator as collateral.

Though the location of her studio changed over the years, Persis’ impact on her community remained a constant, as she delighted audiences across the region, performing, directing, and choreographing some of the more popular musicals ever staged.

In Fort Worth, you could often find her on the stage in leading roles and/or behind the scenes at Casa Manana. While working as adjunct professor at UT Arlington – something she did for more than 18 years – and serving on the Chamber of Commerce’s Cultural Arts Task Force, Persis collaborated with others to develop Gown Town Theater. In the large Potluck Room of



Persis Forster (center) poses with former students-turned teachers Mycah Butler and Chloe Cannella at the Miss Persis Studio of Dance Elf Show in 2019.

Photo courtesy of Heidi Cannella

Miss Persis Dance Studio at Town North in 1973, a new theater group, first named The Potluck Players, was formed and produced “I Do, I Do,” helping to launch what is today Theatre Arlington.

Community service was a Miss Persis hallmark, and one of the powerful lessons her students learn about community service comes along every Christmas season via the greatly anticipated arrival of “The Elf Shows.” Persis’ dancers across the spectrum of her classes, ranging from 3-year-olds to high school seniors, annually face the daunting assignment to show up somewhere in the community 25 to 30 times between Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve to perform the show that runs for a full hour.

In the mid-1980s Persis launched a non-profit, community-service initiative that she named Dance Theatre of Arlington (DTA). Its purpose is to provide dance education for citizens and performance opportunities for aspiring dancers as well as talented students destined for other careers.

Persis told us that discipline and professionalism acquired through participation in a working dance company transfers to any career venue.

DTA has developed several avenues for its students to pursue. Teen Talent Follies was begun by the Sundown Kiwanis in 1966 and adopted with their encouragement by DTA in 1994. Today the follies provide scholarships to winners of the annual show in which eligible 7th graders through high school students may enter. For those who get started early and win every year, there’s a nice payoff for them when they enroll in college.

One would expect that you could learn to dance at Miss Persis Studio. However, Persis’ Cotillion curriculum hones all forms of social skills, from instruction on introductions, communication, and proper etiquette to fine dining practices. Sixth graders and older students learn slow dance, waltz, swing, salsa and rock.

In a city of some 400,000 persons today, it’s unlikely that any are more than two or three degrees of separation from the incredibly positive influence of Persis Forster in their lives. A