

# Tori Schelling Gregson '98

## *Radio City Rockette/Professional Dancer*

Victoria (Tori) Schelling Gregson '98 is proof that dreams can come true—if you're willing to work for them. Recently coming off her fourth season “kicking” as a Radio City Rockette, the nearly 27-year-old professional dancer is truly living her dreams.

Yet Tori's road to success was anything but easy. While she has always loved dance (she began dancing at age three), it was not until high school at The Shipley School that she decided becoming a professional dancer was the dream she wanted to chase. “I knew that it wasn't going to be easy,” Tori said. “Dance never came naturally to me, and I was never the star dancer dancing up front. I've always had to work the hardest, and I knew this dream was something I'd really have to work at.”

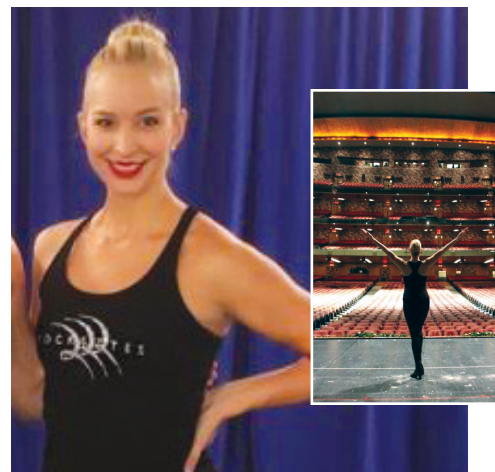
Luckily, learning how to persevere past obstacles was nothing new for Tori. When she was seven years old, she and her parents decided that Benchmark was the best fit for her after recognizing that she had learning differences and was struggling with reading. Tori said that Benchmark “definitely changed the course of my academic career. I remember my teachers being so encouraging and celebrating our differences as students.”

For Tori, it was learning who she was and that it was okay to be different that changed her outlook on school and life. “My time at Benchmark was definitely the most influential of

my early childhood education. The foundation that was laid there helped me to be confident and taught me the perseverance to push forward even when it was hard. I realized [at Benchmark] that I wasn't alone in learning differently and instead of being punished for that, I should celebrate those differences. Those years at Benchmark are definitely something I hold close to my heart.”

Years later, that same perseverance came into play again when, at age 18, she first auditioned to become a Rockette and realized that she was vastly unprepared. But Tori never lost sight of her dream. She spent her college years at Oklahoma City University studying dance performance, learning the ins and outs of the professional dance business, and continuing to audition for the Rockettes—a total of eight times over five years.

After graduating college in 2011, she moved to New York City and “did the artist life” of auditioning and waitressing. During the summer of 2012, she was thrilled to receive an opportunity to fulfill another dream when she landed a gig as an ensemble dancer at Disney's Hollywood Studios *Beauty and the Beast* show in Orlando. Much to her surprise, the summer of 2012 also held another wonderful opportunity. “I was just three months into my contract at Disney when I finally got the call to become a Radio City Rockette,” she said. “It was insane



that two dreams of a lifetime happened in a three-month period.”

Today, she is still honored to be in the famed troupe. After spending three years on the road “spreading Christmas cheer throughout the U.S.,” Tori had the opportunity to “kick on the big stage” this past season at Radio City Music Hall in New York City.

Yet just because she has “made it” does not mean her perseverance is gone. Because Rockettes have to re-audition every year, Tori has to continue to work hard all year long. “I still take dance classes, do cross training, and eat well,” she said. “Nothing comes easy, but I just try to stay focused, work hard, and stay positive. I am lucky to have a lot of support from my family and friends.”

Tori has also been enjoying her life's journey off stage. After a whirlwind year, she is excited to be working as a dance instructor at Barre3 during her off-season and spending time with her husband, James, and two dogs, Boots and Gus, in their new house in Connecticut.

Her advice to Benchmark students is to “...never give up. Know that it's not easy, but keep working at it because dreams can come true. Your path in life will be different than the person sitting next to you, and that's okay. Celebrate your differences and know that whatever your end goal is, it is achievable.”

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—Tori Schelling Gregson '98