

Welcome to The News Star - Monroe, LA

Customer Service: [Subscribe Now](#) | [Place an Ad](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Make us your Homepage](#)**thenewsstar.com** **Weather** **Jobs** **Cars** **Homes** **Shopping** **Classifieds** **Dating**Search Monroe:

Friday, February 1, 2008

- » [Home](#)
- » [News](#)
- [Local News](#)
- [State News](#)
- [Nation/World](#)
- [Local Sports](#)
- [PrepsBeat](#)
- [Neighborhoods](#)
- [Sportsman's Paradise](#)
- [Accent](#)
- [NeLaMoms](#)
- [DeltaStyle](#)
- [Engagements and Weddings](#)
- [Other Celebrations](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Forums](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Video](#)
- [Blogs](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [Data Central](#)
- [Technology](#)
- [Travel](#)
- [Weather](#)
- » [Photo Galleries](#)
- [News Star Galleries](#)
- [User-Submitted Galleries](#)
- [Historic Galleries](#)
- » [RSS Feeds](#) [XML](#)
- » [Entertainment](#)
- » [Communities](#)
- » [Customer Service](#)

Sign up for e-mail
Newsletter

▼ ADVERTISEMENT ▼



▼ ADVERTISEMENT ▼



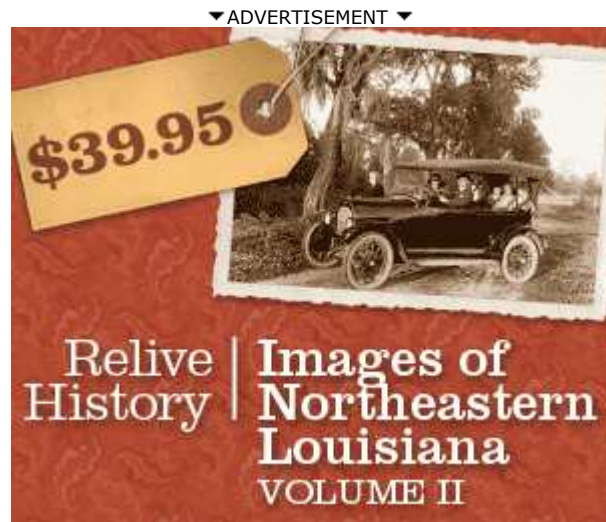
▼ ADVERTISEMENT ▼



Raising the bar: Cedar Creek gymnastics vaults ahead with new coach

Suddenly they have become champions that we should celebrate. And, no, this isn't one more story about LSU.

The newest champs in our neighborhood come from in and around Ruston.



They are bright, talented and young. Really young. In fact, they range from age five to age 11.

And, not a soul at Cedar Creek School knew these young girls were going to almost instantly become outstanding gymnasts when this all got started several months ago.

Heck, most folks didn't know — and still don't know — that Cedar

Creek even has a gymnastics team.

Performing in two huge meets since being formed last summer, the littlest Cougars first collected 21 medals, supplied the top all-around individual scorer and finished second as a team in a November meet in New Iberia that featured over 600 competitors.

Just a couple of weeks ago, these little dynamos performed at a meet in Baton Rouge and captured 45 medals, 11-year-old Lexi Oliver of Bernice again won all-around and the Creek won top team honors.

Actually, this time last year nobody even knew Cedar Creek would be sporting a gymnastics team this school year.

That is partially because not many folks realized their newest Spanish teacher, Claudia Peregrina Cecil, has a lifetime of experience in the sport. Claudia Cecil's career in gymnastics spans the continent; from childhood performer in her native Mexico to world-class athlete on national teams; from gym owner in Mexico City where she became a TV personality with her own daily fitness program to a gymnastics academy in Seattle, Wash. where she directed 100 coaches and over 3,000 youngsters.

Route to Ruston

How she got to Ruston is quite a story in itself. The short version is that 15 years ago she met and married a former Ruston resident, Richard Cecil, who was then working in Seattle but has since transferred back to north Louisiana.

"I guess you could say love brought me here," says Claudia Cecil. "Richard's family is here and we wanted to raise our family close to them. When his opportunity to come home happened, we decided to come."

It appears to have been a tough career move for Claudia, but she doesn't look at it that way.

"I actually began my career as an attorney in Mexico City, but that was just to earn enough money to pursue my own passion in gymnastics," she said.

"I am now completing work on a doctorate (from Granada University in Spain) in education so I am excited about teaching Spanish at Cedar Creek," she said.

Still, the gymnastics itch always lives within this energetic 40-year-old, and that passion has now opened up quite an opportunity for youngsters at Cedar Creek.

"I didn't really think much about expanding into a true gymnastics program when I started a tumbling program here in October of 2006.

"We had no gymnastics equipment, and I had no idea that girls here would be much interested. But some parents approached me, so I said we would hold tryouts. I was totally shocked when 70 girls showed up," she said with a laugh.

Thus, last summer Cecil went about picking a team. "We didn't eliminate anyone, but we set up rules and guidelines and everyone had to be at our daily workouts in the summer.

"Eventually, many eliminated themselves and we now are working with a

[Buy this photo](#) [Zoom Photo](#)

Margaret Croft/The News-Star

Claudia Peregrina Cecil helps Katherine Maxwell with her routine. Cedar Creek in Ruston begins a new girls gymnastics program under Cecil, the new coach.

CEDAR CREEK ROSTER

Carley Bowman
Lexi Oliver
Lauren Wade
Lauren Houck,
Annamari Farrar
Harlie Robinson
Halie Robinson
Katherine Maxwell
Hannah Stadius
Kayle Stevens
Logan Brown
Cassandra Milford
Anitra Milford
Annabelle Yates
Caroline Hill

UP NEXT

The Cedar Creek gymnastics team will be in action again Feb. 22 when competing at the New Orleans Jazz Invitational, featuring competitors from throughout the U. S. The state tournament follows in April.

— **Keith Prince**

Related news from the Web

Latest headlines by topic:

- [Mexico City, Mexico](#)
- [Family](#)
- [World News](#)
- [Mexico](#)
- [Kids](#)

Powered by [topix.net](#)

group of 41 girls, ages 5-to-11," she said, adding that the "young years are when girls reach their top potential in gymnastics."

Cecil has a competition team with 15 girls, a future-team group with six more members, a strictly recreational group with four and a tumble bears pre-team featuring 13 little ones (4-5 years old).

There's also a young boys pre-team with three members.

But all of this marvelous quick-paced, big-results work turned in by Cecil and her kids is just half of the story.

The real catch is that they have done it all with no real facilities while using hand-me-down equipment, some purchased by Cecil over eBay.

"The school has been very cooperative, but it just didn't have any extra space for this type program," said the coach.

To prepare for each Saturday's four-hour practice, Cecil and her crew — mainly her family and two student coaches — must clear the school's multi-purpose room and put down their gym equipment, then revamp the room all again when practice concludes.

About equipment, Cecil said, "I learned the school had a gymnastics program briefly some 30 years ago. I went to the P.E. storage room and found three beams, still in good shape. I still remember being very excited that day," she said.

Later, Cecil's girls staged a fundraising campaign selling cookie dough. "We raised over \$6,000 and when I learned a gym was going bankrupt in Dallas, I got in touch and bought several pieces of equipment," said Cecil.

And, thus, the Cookie Dough Cougars were off and running.

Still, nobody thought they would run this fast this soon.

Third grader Lauren Houck, 9, said, "I've never had so much fun with anything else. I've done ballet and it helps me with my balance and control in gymnastics. But this is more fun."

She added, "It's hard work but all of us are excited. We are a little surprised at winning so many medals."

Lauren's mom, Angela Houck, can understand the girls' excitement. "I was on that Cedar Creek team a long time ago. We didn't have this much success, but I still remember how much fun it was."

She also recognizes the great training it gives her daughter and the other girls. "They learn discipline, work ethic, responsibility and how to be part of a team," she said.

Lexi Oliver's mother, Winter Oliver, added, "Lexi had taken gymnastics briefly at about age six when there was a gym in Ruston — but when it closed, that was it. She was good as a beginner, but now at 11 she really loves it."

Two other young ladies who are playing big roles in this venture are student coaches Justine Ker and Katie Gray, both of whom took gymnastics earlier and are now cheerleaders.

"They are both a big help. I would hate to think of not having them," said Cecil, who also is aided by her oldest son, Roy, 16, who earned his certification to coach last year.

Ker, an eighth grader, is an amazing story, herself, what with piano and violin expertise as well as serving as a cheerleader.

Obviously, she also finds time to study because last spring Ker posted a remarkable "double" of her own — taking championships in both the state junior high science fair and social studies competition in successive weeks.

As for her coaching duties, Ker said, "I enjoy it. All of the girls are eager to learn and they work very hard. They also have a lot of talent," she said.

Gray, a sophomore from Jonesboro, added, "The girls are amazing. They have surprised themselves and us. Mrs. Cecil is an excellent coach. She has a lot of patience and the girls work very hard for her."

Truthfully, everybody is surprised by the team's success.

Cedar Creek principal Connie Bradford said, "When Claudia came to me with this idea, she felt there was a need for this — not only for our students but for the community. We are amazed and excited by their success and we want to do all that we can to help the program grow."

Still, there are obvious limitations at the school, both in existing facilities and in funding.

Bradford added, "We are working together on this. Claudia realizes our capabilities and our limits. She is very resourceful and very talented. We felt good about getting her as a teacher, and certainly this area (gymnastics) of expertise is a bonus for Cedar Creek and our children."

thenewsstar.com and its related sites are pleased to be able to offer its users the opportunity to make comments and hold conversations online. However, the interactive nature of the Internet makes it impracticable for our staff to monitor each and every posting. Since *thenewsstar.com* does not control user submitted statements, we cannot promise that readers will not occasionally find offensive or inaccurate comments posted on our Web site. In addition, we remind anyone interested in making an online comment that responsibility for statements posted lies with the person submitting the comment, not *thenewsstar.com* or its related sites.

All comments posted should comply with [thenewsstar.com's terms of service](#)

STORYCHAT 

 [Post a Comment](#)

This article does not have any comments associated with it

Originally published January 23, 2008



Print this article



E-mail this to a friend



Subscribe Now

Gannett Louisiana Online Network: [Alexandria](#) | [Lafayette](#) | [Opelousas](#) | [Monroe](#) | [Shreveport](#)

[Subscribe](#) | [Place an ad](#)

Copyright ©2008 The News-Star

All rights reserved.

Users of this site agree to the

[Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy/Your California Privacy Rights](#)
(Terms updated March 2007)

