

Dancing in the family

By [Rebecca Aldous - North Shore Outlook](#)

Published: **August 04, 2010 9:00 AM**

Updated: **August 04, 2010 9:32 AM**

Chan Hon Goh's taken off her ballet shoes, but she's still on her toes.

The West Vancouver ballerina is taking over the reins at the internationally renowned Goh Ballet Academy, a school her parents founded 32 years ago.

Last May, Goh stepped down from her position as principal dancer with the National Ballet of Canada.

But she didn't immediately jump into her family's company.

"I wanted to make sure I had an understanding of what the [director] position really required," she said.

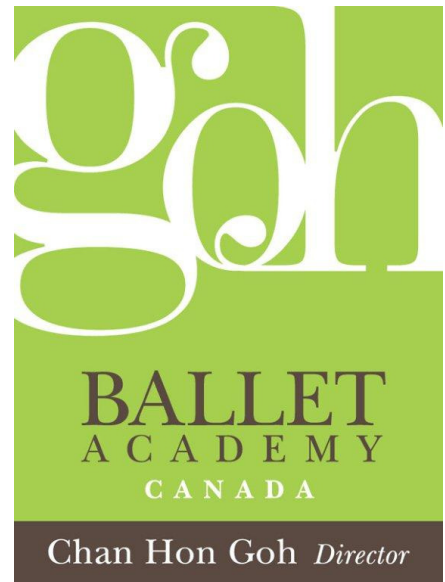
The Sentinel secondary school graduate attended the dance academy as a youngster, before joining the national ballet in 1988. Last year, she returned to West Vancouver with her husband and four-year-old son. At the time she helped organize the academy's 2009 production of *The Nutcracker*.

In September, Goh will officially hold the new role. Having her family's name attached to the company doesn't bring added stress, Goh said.

"The pressures and responsibilities come from myself," she said. "Being an artist, we become our own worst critics."

Her parents, Choo Chiat Goh and Lin Yee Goh, both danced for the Central Ballet of China. Goh recalls the communist China building complex that housed the dance company, its staff and the orchestra. It was kind of like a "gated community," she says. The apartments centered around a main studio facility, where she watched the dancers practise.

In 1976 the family immigrated to Canada. Goh started dancing at nine years of age. Six years later she won the Prix de Lausanne, the world's most important competition for young dancers. When Goh became the national ballet's principal dancer in 1994, she was also the first dancer of Chinese heritage to claim that title.



As a director, Goh wants to uphold the academy's goal of fostering talented dancers' careers. Being a professional ballerina has always been challenging, but the government's cutback in arts funding adds to that difficulty, she said.

Arts is often looked at as for a certain class of the population, an interpretation she hopes to change.

"If we don't feed our mind with culture and the appreciation of culture, I think we are starving ourselves," she said. "To me what dance is, is feeding the soul."

raldous@northshoreoutlook.com

In her shoes

- Goh was invited to dance with The Suzanne Farrell Ballet as principal dancer in 2001.
- Goh has danced in numerous principal roles with the National Ballet's repertoire, including Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty, The Nutcracker and Madame Butterfly.
- In 2005, Goh received the "New Pioneers Arts Award" for her contributions to arts and culture in Canada.
- Goh co-wrote her autobiography Beyond the Dance: A Ballerina's Life.
- Goh started her own dance supply company, Principal by Chan Hon Goh, which sells products designed for dancers.