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August 16, 2015 12:01AM

## NEWSMAKER: Renee Friend

Renee Friend, 13, was the only Delawarean to perform at the 2015 Special Olympics in Los Angeles.

The 2015 Special Olympics was a moment for those with disabilities to show how capable they are. But this honor wasn't just reserved for athletes. Dover resident Renee Friend was the only person from Delaware to perform during the opening and closing ceremonies in Los Angeles.

The Postlethwait Middle School student spent part of her summer training at the Debbie Allen Dance Academy Summer Intensive. Her intensive training prepared her for the tumbling and dancing she would do before big time acts like Siedah Garrett took the stage.

### MORE ABOUT FRIEND

◆ AGE: 13    ◆ YEARS DANCING: 10    ◆ STYLE: Ballet



She had the honor of performing under Allen, who is a member of President Barack Obama's Committee on the Arts and Humanities. A choreographer, actor, and singer, she is also actress Phylicia Rashad's sister.

### **What was like performing during the Special Olympics?**

It was amazing. It was a real nice opportunity. And it was a good experience meeting all of the athletes. It was very important but it was also very fun. Getting the chance to meet the other Debbie Allen dancers was a lot of fun.

### **How did you get the opportunity to perform during the Olympics?**

I attended the Debbie Allen Dance Academy Summer Intensive, which I did have to audition for. And since Ms. Allen was the creative director of the Special Olympics we all got to participate in the opening ceremony.

### **What got you interested in dancing?**

When I was younger my parents put me in dance classes. But I thought it was just a fun thing to do. Now, it's a lot more important to me and it's what I want to do. It's an art form so it's a good way to express yourself. When you're upset you can dance—when you're happy you can dance—when you're sad you can dance. You can do it whenever you're feeling how you're feeling.

### **Where do you go from here?**

I'm going to continue doing my regular training at my studio and then we're going to do the Nutcracker. This year I'll be competing in the Youth America Grand Prix, an international dance competition where students from ages 8 to 18 compete.