Inspiriting Dancers for Decades
Leaving a legacy, Gladys Kares will take her last curtain call

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The Spring Dance Theater opens today to showcase engaging and thought-provoking choreography and dance by Cal State Fullerton students and faculty and guest artists.

One thing is different about this production, however. The show is the last to be coordinated by the woman whose vision, love of dance and passion for her students has molded the spring and fall dance theaters into highly anticipated annual events.

Gladys Kares, a dance professor at Cal State Fullerton for 41 years, is retiring at the end of the semester. She was hired as a ballet teacher when dance was just an emphasis of the Theatre Department and not even its own major.

Over the years she has guided the growth of the Dance Department, mentored students in choreography and dance and has seen her students go to Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. five times.

“She is one-of-a-kind brilliant, generous humble and funny — a woman of integrity,” said Debra Noble, vice chair of the Dance Department. “I always wonder how such a big heart fits in such a little, petite person.”

Kares’ retirement will leave a big hole in the department, Noble said.

“What a legacy she has — the giving of herself,” she said. “It’s her passion. She just channels her own being into our programs.”

Walking through the performing arts building on a recent afternoon, Kares reflected on why it was time to leave a place she has cherished and helped shape. Over the years she has taught ballet, modern dance, choreography and other classes, and has overseen the fall and spring dance theaters for over three decades.

Five years ago a feeling washed over her that it was time to leave the program to the “young kids,” she recalled.

Kares didn’t listen. The students — as always — kept her there.

“Everybody says the students here somehow don’t have that sense of entitlement, they are not diquish,” Kares said. “They are just really hardworking.”

She had the same thoughts about leaving again this semester and decided to listen.

“It’s my age,” said Kares, 69, with...