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ST. LOUIS — It was something St. Louis didn't have.

"There was no hometown ballet company here," said Gen Horiuchi.

Ballet companies from other big cities like Miami and San Francisco would travel here and put on productions at the Fox Theatre but our city didn't have its own professional, local dancers.

But 19 years ago, that changed. It was a very slow change. But, the man behind it, Gen Horiuchi was determined to bring a ballet company to St. Louis. How 5G Will Revolutionize Your Commute
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Horiuchi was born in Tokyo. His home was above a ballet studio his parents owned.

"Every time I come home from school there was always dance classes and I just kind of watched," said Horiuchi.

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Ballet companies from other big cities like Miami and San Francisco would travel here and put on productions at the Fox, but that started to change 19 years ago.

He started dancing at 6 and by 16 he had a scholarship to The School of American Ballet in New York City.

At age 18, he was asked to join the New York City Ballet. He performed with the company for 14 years. He also appeared several times on Broadway including in the original cast of "Cats."

In 1997, a last-minute part brought Horiuchi to St. Louis to perform temporarily.

"That was when Mark McGwire was hitting home runs almost every day and I'm a huge baseball fan," he said. "I was so excited to be in St. Louis, so even after the performance, I always had a good feeling about the city."

The next year he went on to choreograph the entire opening ceremony for the 1998 Olympics, but St. Louis was still on Horiuchi's mind.

Within 3 years, he had made the Gateway City his new home. Horiuchi was asked to be the Artistic Director of the struggling St. Louis Ballet. The company didn't even have enough dancers to put on a production.

Horiuchi said he worked hard to recruit paid, professional dancers to move to St. Louis and help form a company. Simultaneously, he started rebuilding the St. Louis Ballet School. In the last 19 years since becoming Artistic Director, Horiuchi has grown the school's enrollment from 40 to 350 students.

"The first 10 years was a struggle," he said.

But it was after the first 10 years, that the company got a big break.

The Touhill Performing Arts Center on the University of Missouri – St. Louis campus asked Horiuchi if the ballet company would perform there. Horiuchi said that's when the ballet landscape in our city changed forever.

The St. Louis Ballet performs 5 productions a year at the Touhill. Their 2019-2020 season opens this weekend with "Nine Sinatra Songs."

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