

Welcome to TimesPeople  
What's this?



TimesPeople Lets You Share and Discover the Best of NY...

5:19 PM

Get Started No, thanks

HOME PAGE TODAY'S PAPER VIDEO MOST POPULAR TIMES TOPICS

Log In Register Now

The New York Times

# N.Y. / Region

Search All NYTimes.com

Go

WORLD U.S. N.Y. / REGION BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY SCIENCE HEALTH SPORTS OPINION ARTS STYLE TRAVEL JOBS REAL ESTATE AUTOS

THE CITY CONNECTICUT LONG ISLAND NEW JERSEY WESTCHESTER

[Advertise on NYTimes.com](#)

## IN PERSON; 'Never Stop Moving'

By MARY ANN CASTRONOVO FUSCO  
Published: Sunday, April 15, 2001

WHAT do you call an entertainer who is paralyzed at 21 but goes on to dance in 40 films and to teach John Travolta, Michael Bennett, Susan Stroman, Madonna, Barbra Streisand, Elliot Gould, Liza Minnelli, Twyla Tharp, Robert Morse and countless others his unique dance style?

The dance world calls him Luigi -- the name bestowed on Eugene Louis Faccuito by Gene Kelly during the filming of "On the Town" in 1948. Now 76, Luigi rests at his home in Woodcliff Lake for only half of each weekend because he still teaches dance in Manhattan twice a day, six days a week.

The father of American jazz dancing, this year Mr. Faccuito is the national education spokesman for National Dance Week, April 20 to 29.

"Jazz dancing is an interpretation of sound and America's cultural contribution to the world of dance," he explained before a recent class at Luigi Jazz Center at Studio Maestro on West 68th Street. He was the first to codify that dance form by devising a training method for it.

Kathy Renna, a former student and professional dancer who heads the Applause Performing Arts Center in Paramus, said: "After you do Luigi jazz, you can do any style of jazz or even ballet. It makes dancers strong in their balance, stamina, endurance, and form."

Robust and taut in charcoal jazz pants and a gray sleeveless workout shirt, Mr. Faccuito gracefully led his students through their steps.

"They're like a symphony," he said, beaming. "To me, the body parts are instruments put together by the heart and conducted by the soul. I tell my kids, create a sound for your body, create a style for yourself."

If he has one quibble with contemporary dancers, it is that "sometimes they dance too loud for the music."

His own mantra is "never stop moving," even when standing still. "Pull your shoulders down, suck in the stomach, tighten the buns, get the pressure of the blood to the fingertips, the toes," he explained.

SIGN IN TO E-MAIL

PRINT

REPRINTS

SHARE

### Politics E-Mail



Keep up with the latest news from Washington with the daily Politics e-mail newsletter.

Sign Up

[See Sample](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

Advertisement



**Snoring Yourself To Death?**  
Try a simple proven solution to reduce or eliminate snoring. 90 day money back guarantee. \$69.97... [Learn more](#)



**1 Trick For Whiter Teeth**  
Whiten your teeth 5 shades in one hour by following this simple rule... [Learn more](#)

[Advertise on NYTimes.com](#)

### MOST POPULAR

E-MAILED BLOGGED SEARCHED

1. [Unlikely Singer Is YouTube Sensation](#)
2. [Op-Ed Columnist: Twitters From Texas](#)
3. [Op-Ed Columnist: A Loud and Promised Land](#)
4. [In Europe, Hostels Grow Up](#)
5. [Op-Ed Columnist: How to Raise Our I.Q.](#)
6. [Judith Warner: Dude, You've Got Problems](#)
7. [In Grim Job Market, Student Loans Are a Costly Burden](#)
8. [Your Money: How a Personal Finance Columnist Got Caught Up in Fraud](#)
9. [Business Grads Looking Beyond Wall Street](#)
10. [Really?: The Claim: Nasal Irrigation Can Ease Allergy Symptoms](#)

[Go to Complete List »](#)

**SUBSCRIBE NOW.**

That philosophy gave him back his career after a car accident nearly took his life. Oddly enough, his father, Nicholas, a steel worker from Potenza, Italy, was killed in an auto accident. His mother, Maria Antonetta, was left to raise eight children -- ranging in age from 1 to 16 -- on her own.

"It was just a matter of her splitting an apple nine different ways, and if a neighborhood kid was watching, 10 different ways," Mr. Faccuito said of those early days in Steubenville, Ohio.

Although he was named Luigino, his family called him Eugene; he later added Louis as a middle name. His surname, originally spelled Facciuto, came to be spelled Faccuito "because of the 'i' and 'u' and the dot above it, nobody knew where it went," he explained.

Under the tutelage of his brother Tony, Eugene was winning local dance contests by the time he was 10 and went on to perform in vaudeville as a singer, dancer and acrobat, touring the Midwest and Northeast.

After three years in the Navy, where he earned three gold stars in the Philippines and New Guinea, he and Tony headed to California, where their sister Helen had settled. The goal was not only to put Eugene in the limelight, but expand his repertory.

"I'd do one routine for an encore three times," Mr. Faccuito said with a laugh.

But in December 1946, the car in which he was riding on the way to buy dance shoes skidded, tossing him onto a curb. A basal skull fracture left the 21-year-old with crossed eyes and double vision, and paralyzed on the left side of his face and right side of his body.

"My sister said, 'You were in a coma for 11 days and unconscious for almost three months.' What's the difference? I don't know. I don't remember any of it anyway," he recalled.

While recovering, he told his sister that an inner voice had been telling him: "Never stop moving, kid. If you stop moving, you're dead."

Yet, his doctors held little hope that he would ever walk again.

Frustrated by conventional therapy, he insisted on being brought to Falcon Studios in Los Angeles, where he had previously trained.

"Before my accident I was a child star, but I didn't know what I was doing," he said. "When I had my accident, I said, 'Why can't I do the things that I did before?'"

The answer, he found, lay in proper positioning, which even today remains a cornerstone of his jazz theory. "Only give your body what it wants, put it in the right position, work evenly, distribute your weight and balance," he explained.

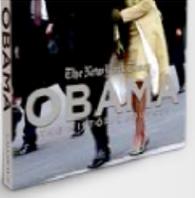
He fought to find the right position for every movement, discovering which muscles controlled each motion while standing at the dance barre. Then he struggled to manage the same control without support.

"I never practiced to walk; I practiced to dance," he said. "I got into a dance step and worked on that step to get it right. To hell with the walk. If you can dance, you can walk."

As his strength returned, he incorporated ballet, tap and flamenco into his training regimen. To distract attention from his face, he would rhythmically snap his head right and left as he danced, a technique he has since abandoned. Yet, he is seldom seen

Get 25% off home delivery plus  
**"Obama: The Historic Journey"**  
 FREE.

**CLICK HERE >**



The New York Times

## RELATED ADS

[What are Related Ads?](#)
[» Defensive Driving](#)
[» Safe Driving](#)
[» Defensive Driving Texas](#)
[» Safe Driving Tips](#)
[» Safe Driving Insurance](#)

without a Greek-fisherman-style cap, which helps mask his crossed eyes and crooked smile.

No longer leading man material, he found himself newly dependent on keeping in step with chorus dancers. Dominic Frontiere, a big-band musician, helped him perfect his timing by counting, "1, 2, 3, 4." Mr. Faccuito would reply, "ah, 5, 6, 7, 8!" His habit caught on and is now a standard part of every dancer's lexicon.

In 1997, the Princeton Book Company in Hightstown published his technique as "Luigi's Jazz Warm Up."

"He was the first to make jazz a respected art form," said Ms. Renna. If the average person doesn't know who he is, she added, "it's because he's a teacher's teacher; he taught all the great ones."

By 1948, Mr. Faccuito had recuperated well enough to be Donald O'Connor's dance-in for "Yes Sir, That's My Baby." He went on to perform in "Let's Dance," "Annie Get Your Gun," "An American in Paris," "Singin' in the Rain," "Call Me Madame" and "White Christmas," as well as appearing on television.

Between takes, Mr. Faccuito kept his battered body limber with exercises he had developed. When other dancers started copying him, one choreographer, Robert Alton, encouraged him to teach his technique, which he began doing in Los Angeles in 1951. In 1956, Mr. Faccuito moved east to be in "Happy Hunting" with Ethel Merman and Fernando Lamas on Broadway. He stayed to work on other Broadway shows and to start his own dance school.

"When you arrive in New York, you network and find out who gives the best classes," said Sandy Duncan, who studied with Mr. Faccuito as a budding actress. "He teaches a sense of expansiveness in the way you move that's sensual and freeing." That technique is passed on by "Luigi-ites" around the world.

"The most satisfying thing to me is getting people whom I've never trained to know my work," said Mr. Faccuito. "The work is bigger than the stars. Stars fall. But the product just goes on and on and on, and it never stops."

Francis Roach, who teaches with Mr. Faccuito and is trying to persuade him to write his memoirs, said, "Luigi is part of that Hollywood era that defined American jazz dance musicals."

Though reluctant to commit his memories to paper, Mr. Faccuito is raising funds for a documentary and talks of developing a Broadway musical, both based on his life.

"I love what I'm doing," said Mr. Faccuito. "This work, don't forget, was created through my rehabilitation. People say, 'How long did it take you to get better?' I'm still not better. That's why I'm still good."

Photos: Before Luigi Faccuito was paralyzed in a car crash in 1946 -- unconscious for almost three months -- he was a child star. As his strength returned, he became a teacher to the superstars. At 76, he still teaches dance in Manhattan twice a day, six days a week. (Carol Halebian for The New York Times)

A version of this article appeared in print on Sunday, April 15, 2001, on section 14NJ page 3 of the New York edition.

[More Articles in N.Y. / Region >](#)

Ads by Google

what's this?

**BP with Invigorate**

Help Enhance Your Cars Performance by Cleaning & Protecting the Engine  
[www.BP.com/Invigorate](http://www.BP.com/Invigorate)

[The Ford Story](#)

See Ford's Progress on their Plan to Make the World's Best Vehicles.  
[TheFordStory.com](#)

[Dr. Oz's Shocking Test](#)

Millions have already taken this amazing test. What's your RealAge?  
[RealAge.com](#)

INSIDE NYTIMES.COM



MOVIES »



[The News on Paper, and Other Artifacts](#)

OPINION »

**Op-Ed: Iran's Yankee Hero**

A young American missionary who was killed in Iran's Constitutional Revolution remains a beloved figure there.

TRAVEL »



[In Europe, Hostels Grow Up](#)

WORLD »



[Egypt's Tomb Raider - On Camera](#)

OPINION »

**Tea Parties, to the Extreme**

Tax week brought conservatives into the streets and an odd warning from the Department of Homeland Security.

FASHION & STYLE »



[Recklessly Seeking Sex on Craigslist](#)

[Home](#) | [World](#) | [U.S.](#) | [N.Y. / Region](#) | [Business](#) | [Technology](#) | [Science](#) | [Health](#) | [Sports](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Arts](#) | [Style](#) | [Travel](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Autos](#) | [Back to Top](#)

Copyright 2009 The New York Times Company | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Advertise with Us](#) | [Site Map](#)