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SRTB Article
21 June 2007
(800 words)

CPSD

THE COMMITTEE TO PROMOTE SQUARE DANCING

CHAIRMAN'S PERSPECTIVE

By Karl Arnold Belser

I want to tell you about a DREAM COME TRUE.

The Committee to Promote Square Dancing (CPSD) was reborn last year when all of the south San Jose square dance classes folded, and there were no classes for the students coming from the SCVSDA Jubilee Blast Class to join.

The CPSD, as a 501(c)(3) charity, reacted quickly and obtained free space from the City of San Jose at the Camden Community Center to conduct a 10 week free class for couples, singles and families starting on the Monday night after Jubilee ended.

Caller Roger Smith and his partner Josie Baumgartner volunteered to teach the class. Jackie Daemion and I provided refreshments and did the physical set-up and teardown. The CPSD members announced this class at Jubilee and advertised in the Pennysaver. The CPSD also appealed for the clubs who recently discontinued classes to send their students to the CPSD class. Forty-three students came and the first CPSD class danced in 8 squares with angels from 9 clubs.

In January the San Jose Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS) agreed to co-sponsor the class with the CPSD. The students would pay \$5.00 for adults, \$2.50 for youth and seniors, and angels would be free. The caller is paid (modestly) by the city. The CPSD then advertised for people who had square danced previously to join the class. There were additions and attritions as with any class, but in the end nineteen students graduated in June 2007. Many local clubs invited the students to dance for free at their clubs during the month of June so that the students could decide which club or clubs they would like to join.

The energy and enthusiasm astounded me. The class members wanted to go out for pizza after the classes, and this tradition was started. Lastly, Herb and Jackie Lee celebrated the end of the class with a huge BBQ at their ranch in Gilroy. Angels told me that the class was at least as much fun as their home clubs were.

The CPSD was fortunate to have a 3-page cover article written about the class in June in the *Resident* newspapers. The *Resident* has editions in all of the San Jose area cities. Based on this article, the San Jose PRNS agree to have Drop-in, Introductory Square Dancing on Tuesday nights during the summer in preparation for the next CPSD class that will start on September 18. This Drop-In Introductory is an experiment to see if such an activity can accumulate a larger number of students for the fall class. Vicki Woods will conduct the Drop-In class and Sam Shilmover will conduct the fall class. Sam is the president of the Santa Clara Valley Callers Association, and has been extremely supportive of the CPSD activities.

I have been watching with great interest the successful efforts by other San Jose area clubs. The Single Squares of Sunnyvale with Caller Erik Henerlau is teaching a multi-cycle class. The Bows and Beaus with Caller Keith Ferguson is teaching a large January-level class which has over 40 students. This later class was organized and driven by Keith's wife, Meg, and Evelyn Hough. I am further aware of the success of Scott Byars' weekend blast-class approach aimed especially at younger dancers. My conclusion is that there are many promotion and teaching methods that can work.

The key to success is dedicated people to drive the activity.

The next observation I make is that the successful clubs are joint couples and singles clubs. Jackie Daemion, president of the Rockin' Jokers, told the story of how this change transformed her club in her SRTB President's Perspective, November 2006. Since then the Single Squares of Sunnyvale have allowed married couples to become associate members. I think this change is necessary and corresponds to the need for square dancing to be all-inclusive.

The last observation is that the classes that failed occurred with clubs that had their class on club night. Having class on club night may drive off valuable club members and the full plus level dancing may actually demotivate the student dancers. My conclusion is that classes should be on a separate night, as are the above mentioned successful classes in the San Jose area. This can be expensive, but note that both the CPSD and Single Squares of Sunnyvale have been able to get their cities to co-sponsor classes.

The CPSD would like everyone to invite his or her friends to try square dancing this summer at the Camden Community Center, even for just one night. The center is at 3369 Union Ave., San Jose, CA 95124. The activity will be every Tuesday night from 6:30 to 9:00 PM. Please see the CPSD website at www.c-p-s-d.org for a map and more details.

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