

FRIENDLINESS

THE KEY TO BUILDING THE SQUARE DANCE COMMUNITY

By Jackie Daemion
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I was horrified and embarrassed on behalf of the square dance community when I read the Letter To The Editor "Do We Just Talk About Friendliness, Or Practice It?" in the February issue of 'Squares 'Round the Bay'. This article has a message for the betterment of square dancing, and that is that friendliness needs to be first and foremost.

I think that we must encourage all of our dancers, old and new, singles and couples alike. The author was correct that we all may be single or alone and wanting connections at some point in our lives.

It seems to me that clubs that welcome both couples and singles are the ones that are thriving. We really need to get beyond the fear that single dancers are going to be a problem or "on the prowl" in our clubs.

We also need to attract younger dancers. There is a whole generation of "Empty Nesters" out there figuring out how to spend their time now that the kids are out of the house.

I am chairman of The Committee To Promote Square Dancing (CPSD). We are a teaching club, and upon completion of our class, students are encouraged to seek membership at local square dance clubs. We have been running classes through the San Jose Parks & Rec Department for the past three years. We welcome couples and singles alike. You don't need a partner. Our classes include both brand new dancers and returning dancers who need a review or brush-up. This year we have been fortunate to have Angels from 11 different Santa Clara Valley clubs supporting our class.

We generally have more women than men in the class. Many times, Angel women either sit out socializing or dance the man's part.

CPSD has trained many younger people, who have made a real difference in the clubs that they have joined.

Our intention at CPSD is to be as welcoming and friendly as possible and this is what we do:

1. We make sure that every class member is greeted and dances every dance and we talk to and get to know every member of the class.
2. We usually have at least as many Angels as students and, currently, we are dancing 5 squares for most of the evening. We have found that the class members learn quickly and with confidence when there are lots of Angels in each square.
3. We call students who are absent to let them know that they were missed, to encourage them, and to let them know that we look forward to their return.
4. Our class caller, Roger Smith, teaches the class with humor and great singing. He makes sure that every dancer feels successful by the end of the night.
5. We show the students what "club life" is like:
 - The students and angels bring food to share.
 - The students attend local club activities.

- The clubs invite the students to their Party Nights.
 - We provide donated square dance clothing.
 - We sponsor Newer Dancer Hoedowns and make sure that all of our single dancers dance.
6. The students and Angels go out for pizza and socializing after class.

I know that many club dancers just want to dance for relaxation and enjoyment. However, if we don't work together to attract new dancers there will not be any club where we can go to dance and continue our favorite activity,

I think that square dance leaders need to work together to welcome new dancers into their social circles. I ask that anyone who is interested in this goal, join our efforts and contact me by phone (408-723-0315) or by email (karl.Jackie@gmail.com).

CPSD is a 501(c)(3) national charity, and needs leaders in areas in addition to the Santa Clara Valley. Please see our website at www.c-p-s-d.org.

In conclusion, I ask that each of you remember the new dancer who wrote that letter and ask yourself what YOU can do to make a difference.
