

Otonabee Squares
Howard & Jean Lander

In March 2009 Howard and I met with Wayne Whatman (caller who lives in Peterborough) to see whether he would be interested in calling if we could find dancers. He agreed but was not convinced that it would succeed. It was decided at this time that it would be a separate club from Lift Lock Squares.

Our first idea was to target existing groups, such as churches or clubs. Two churches took an interest and we did a demo at one. We also wrote letters to many existing organizations in Peterborough such as Lion's club; retiree's clubs of certain firms; social clubs, places teaching dance, Newcomers Club; Welcome Wagon, etc.

Along with another couple of dancers from Lift Lock, we went through the list of dancers who had dropped out of Lift Lock (due to reluctance to dance the higher level) and contacted them. We got about ten dancers from this list.

We rented a school hall and had a start-up date for September 2009. In early September we took one day and toured all the surrounding villages and dropped into churches and libraries and other suitable places, to put up notices and leave flyers. Churches and libraries were very co-operative. Some offered to put it into their bulletin. The second day we did the same in Peterborough. We contacted local newspapers; radio stations and the TV station who were all very co-operative and this advertising was all free! In fact the country radio station mentioned it for a few months. We advertised for people of all ages, couples, singles; and young people aged 10 years and up. We also did a demo at a local summer market in Peterborough. We got a lot of interest and got one former dancer through this. Our dancers have come through the radio, community newspapers and word of mouth. We think flyers are less effective. New dancers bring new dancers.

The advantage of having a completely new club is that when people arrived that first day there was not a room-full of a stereo type of person. The reality of square dancing today is that most dancers are over 65 (which includes us!). Our dress code is casual.

We were thrilled when we had five squares to start that September! Unfortunately we lost some in the winter; to warmer places. Those who stayed were keen and really enjoyed themselves. In January 2010 we took in new dancers and danced new basic; Sept basic and some mainstream.

At the end of the year we graduated 13 new dancers. We had no trouble getting an executive committee. At this time it was agreed that we would change our dance night from Thursday to Monday. (Thursday is hockey night in Peterborough. Also many churches have choir practice on a Thursday).

This change of night obviously was a good move because since September 2010 we have consistently had 6+ squares each week. Our members are couples, singles and we have two teenage boys! Age of our dancers start at 13 to probably about 88 with dancers from every decade in between. Most are working so we don't lose them in winter.

We started off this year 2011 with a welcome back pot-luck and gave all of our members

coupons to give out, inviting new dancers to a free night for January 10th. This coupon system seems to work better than just telling people that new dancers can get in free.

January 10th brought in 32 new dancers! They are learning to keep their squares small!! We are teaching the new dancers for the first half hour; the next hour and three-quarters we alternate tips between new basic; September basic. The last 45 minutes is mainstream.

We do have more single women than couples but before they get onto the floor we ask that half of them dance the man's side and the other half the ladies'. This has worked well. We encourage them to change partners (unless they have come with a friend) so everyone mixes more.

Last year we held a very successful invitational dance in January with 90 people present and will be repeating this on January 24th 2011.

We are very optimistic about the future of Otonabee Squares and of square dancing in the Peterborough.

Jean and Howard Lander