

SAGE Swingers Square and Round Dance Club Update March 2009

The SAGE Swingers Square and Round Dance Club continue to have success recruiting new dancers and retaining its members as it currently holds an active membership of over 120 dancers. Evidence of the vitality of the club include the 6-10 squares dancing at their weekly workshop as well as the 6-7 squares that have traveled for a weekend of dancing at each of the last three New England Square & Round Dance Conventions.

The club has continued its focus on Mainstream and on making the new dancers feel part of the club as soon as they start attending workshops. During the weekly workshops the caller alternates tips between the new class and the more experienced dancers, this allows time to meet the new dancers and engage them in conversation. All banner raids are designed to maximize the dance time for the mainstream dancer. The dance format for the club's dances that are promoted for attendance are at a minimum; mainstream, mainstream, plus so the new dancers do not sit too much at a dance. There has been some success with area clubs to change the format of their dances to better support the newer dancers. SAGE continues to have their dances at the mainstream level with one plus tip at intermission.

SAGE has continued with two new classes each year, a strategy that began in the 2000/2001 calendar year starting in both September and January. SAGE decided; however, during the 2007/2008 calendar year to only have one class (September start) to get to know our new members better and potentially sharpen the club's overall mainstream skills. Historically, the January class numbers have been greater than the September class numbers. The excitement of having several squares of new people learning was the overriding reason why the club resumed having the two classes per year. Additionally, while many clubs stop dancing in the summer, SAGE continues year round.

Key to the club's success is the balance between the dancing and the social aspect of the activity. Starting with the first Class level dance of the season, the club arranges for the entire group attending the dance to meet for dinner either before or after the dance, indeed, some in SAGE feel that SAGE stands for **S**uper **A**ppetites **G**ood **E**ating. It is felt that the dinner experiences are a great way to bond with the new members. The club also includes after hour parties for each night of the convention and other weekend events which provide an opportunity for people to relax and get to know each other. At the workshops closest to Halloween, Christmas and graduation, an informal dance will be held and the membership will add to the festivities with their wonderful culinary contributions. The social event of the year, which has been held for over 18 years, happens each August when two couples from the club host a lobster/clam bake at a site that over looks Casco Bay. Whether a long time member or a brand new dancer, everyone is made to feel welcome for the afternoon lobster/clam bake.

While SAGE continues to be a Mainstream club, there is also a growing contingent of plus level dancers (over 6 squares). The last half hour of the 3 hour workshop is dedicated to teaching plus. SAGE holds at least two informal Friday evening dances during the year that are dedicated to the plus level dancers. Additionally, the club has supported a few plus level weekend events where the dancers get their plus "fix." SAGE has continued to flourish and has struck a good balance with introducing new people to square dancing and keeping their long time members happy.