

INNOVATIVE PROGRAM FOR NEW DANCERS REVIVES DYING CLUB - By Claudia Littlefair, Strathmore, AB

As the dance season ends, it's time to reflect on how it went. This is the second year that our Strathmore club, just east of Calgary, used 'The Nest' program for new dancers. (We also use this program for a club located in Calgary.) The method is straightforward and simple. About 70% of the mainstream calls are 'two-couple' calls, and these calls are taught in small work stations by narrators (ie. callers/experienced dancers) who follow a patter script. On completion of the two-couple calls, the remaining four-couple calls are taught in the main room by the main caller. There are several benefits to this method.

1. Dancers can join any time throughout the dance season.
2. Absences are not an issue because dancers simply pick up where they left off.
3. Dancers learn at their own pace (fast or slow) without affecting the other dancers.

What this method has meant for us in Strathmore is that our club is not only surviving, but thriving. Four years ago we were close to shutting down because our small group of dancers (one to two squares/night) were quickly aging out. We were fortunate to graduate several new dancers that year and the next, who were willing to take on executive positions. But we were still just hanging in there. When we introduced The Nest program two years ago, six dancers completed the program. Using the old method (one fall entry point and no absences), only two of the six would have completed.

This year seven people have completed the program. Using the old method, only one person would have completed. We are still a small club BUT we are building back up. We currently have 30 active members, and only 2 of them have danced for more than 8 years. We are like a new club, with enthusiastic dancers and no preconceived ideas of how a club should be run. Dress is dancers' choice - casual, traditional or western. Everyone brings something to put on the snack table, and these are enjoyed throughout the evening. Congregating around the food is an easy way for new dancers to meet and talk with the experienced ones. We have a mix of all ages, people who work and those who are retired. And we embrace couples and singles – with most of the single dancers (men and women) willing to learn both sides. The other night, one of the single dancers new to our club, who used to dance years ago when her husband was alive, said, *"This is the most welcoming and friendliest club I have ever seen. I tell all my friends about it."* Yes, it's been another good year.