

## “The First Friday Fun Fest”

The Whirlybird Square Dance Club in Lynnwood, WA is the sponsor of the dance, and I initially suggested a once-a-month student dance which became The First Friday Fun Fest. The club is officer-run and I've called for the club for 45 years. “First Friday Fun Fest” started out as a student dance beginning in September about 9 years ago. It was to become a Half and Half dance when the new Jan. classes started that first year. Well, we had a lot more newer dancers coming versus the Sept. students, so I dedicated every third tip for the Sept. students. It wasn't long until I dedicated the whole program to the newest dancer in the hall. About the second or third year, experienced dancers would ask if it would be alright if they brought their niece, or their grandchild who was home on college break, or some non-square-dancing friends, etc., and so this became the beginning of the no-experience-necessary designation of the dance. Thus, our no-experience-necessary dance was dancer-created, having evolved into an entire program dedicated to the new dancer! Prior to Covid, our dance time was from 7:30-10:30 with a finger food and announcement break at 9:15. When Covid hit, all dancing, and many other activities, in Washington stopped because of a state mandate. As of the first Friday in September 2021, we are up and running again. Prior to Covid, we had never had a dance with less than 8 squares; the average was 13 squares! The hall maximum is 18 squares but the parking lot is full at about 16 squares. We have actually had people come the dance and leave because they couldn't find a parking place! When we reopened the dance program this September, we made a couple of changes: one because of Covid; no more food, and because we weren't taking a food break, we shortened the dance time—the last set of squares now starts at 9:30. That September dance was the first dance that we had less than 8 squares (we had 4), but about 1/3 of the floor were people experiencing square dancing for the first time which was amazing. October's dance had 8 squares again and one square was made up of college students. November's dance had 9 squares, and our square of college students were back, and they stayed through the very last set of squares. They were laughing and giggling as they walked out the door. As they left the November dance, they said they had other plans for December, but they would be back in January. December's dance had 8 squares again and there was at least a square of brand-new dancers in attendance.

At the very beginning of the dance, I ask those people that have never square danced before to raise their hand. We give them a round of applause and thank them for coming. Then I tell them they are going to experience a lot of square dancing, but the only thing I truly want them to remember, when it is over, is that they had a great time! We start the evening off with “this is your partner, corner, home position” and quickly teach Do Sa Do, Allemande left, and Promenade, and then I put the music on and start dancing through some star sequences. The square set is followed by a line dance, or easy round dance teach, and the dance progresses from there. It is fast-paced programming. The music rarely stops. There is no down-time and everything is briefly taught as-we-go, so they can dance as much or as little as they want. Nobody ever must sit out because of a star tip of upper-level squares or rounds, because there aren't any! Just before the finger food break prior to the Covid changes (and now, it is placed second to the last tip), we have a light hearted hot hash hoedown competition, where the squares dance until they make a mistake that they can't recover from...When that happens, the square breaks it up and if there is food, they line up in the potluck line. The last square standing gets a hot hash

hoedown dangle for their badge. The competition does a few things: It creates entertainment for those sitting out or standing in the potluck line, it is fun for our club dancers, too, and it gives a sense of accomplishment to the winning square. One night, after winning, one of our members said to me "We had the oldest couple (he and his wife are in their nineties) and the youngest couple (a middle school boy and his younger sister) in our square and we won!" Another time we had a square of 6th graders from one of the schools where I teach square dancing, and they won. I think that video is still on the club's Facebook page. The competition is based on the material taught up to that point, and my goal is not to break the squares down, but to help them accomplish as much as they can with the skills that their square has as the competition gets faster & trickier.

This last November we used the First Friday Fun Fest to launch a Basic One Blast Class over that weekend (and we added also alamo style, swing thru, ocean wave trades, run, and wheel and deal). The club felt that it was successful enough that they are planning to do another one in March. We will start another mainstream class in February and the Blast Class will be another way to increase the attendance in the February class. I see this as a huge bonus for our area, in that it gives the current class students a chance to experience another teach of the movements that they have already been exposed to, and possibly a look at what is coming up in their regular classes, and it affords an opportunity for the newcomer to experience an intense introduction to square dancing. At the same time, they get to enjoy 3 fun dances in the same weekend. All area clubs are invited to bring people to this event.

More about the no-experience theme: Whirlybirds sponsored our council dance a few years ago. So, we rented a local middle school, and hired "The B.C. Boys" (a group of popular Canadian callers) as our attraction for the mainstream dance in the gym, and I taught and called at the no-experience dance in the cafeteria. We had between 60-70 squares in attendance! (About 50 squares in the gym, and 15-20 in the no-experience-necessary dance.) Also, our Mount Baker Council hosted the state festival a few years ago and programmed a no-experience-necessary dance both Friday and Saturday night... we had about ten squares in attendance at those sessions both nights, about ½ of the participants were new to square dancing. Literature about classes was available, and people from the different area clubs were there to encourage the new dancers to consider looking up a class.

I strongly believe that we need dances like this at every large square dance event, including the Callerlab convention. People are naturally curious and are willing to get out of their comfort zone to try something new if it looks interesting to them. Public advertising, of course, ahead of the event is key, and needs to be a focus of the event planning.

I remember several years ago; our shop was in the Plus hall at USA West in Boise. It was Thursday afternoon and I needed a bathroom break. As I walked out the main entrance headed for the rest room, I noticed a group of teenagers standing in the doorway watching the dancers. When I came back from the restroom, they were still there, so I asked them if they would like to learn a little bit about square dancing. They said yes, so we set up a square in front of our booth, I told them to listen to the music but

to ignore the caller and just listen to me. (I had no mic or sound system, just the plus dance music). I taught and we danced for about 30 minutes and then they had to leave. I told them if they wanted to come back that evening, I would help them through some more dancing. They came back with an entire square! Friday night they were back with a square again. (Some of the originals couldn't make it so they recruited new teens to take their place) Saturday night I thought I had lost them. The dance was almost over and the afterparty was about to begin, and here they came dressed in their version of what a square dancer should look like! The after party was a much smaller dance and it was an all singing call dance; I took the square out into the middle of the floor and again told them to listen to me and we danced the night away. Again, they had a new boy in the square. I didn't want to start from the very beginning, so I left it up to the square to help him through. I've taught enough teens over the years that I know if they want to learn it, they will make it happen. I wasn't sure if the new boy was enjoying himself, until I noticed while he was dancing, he was singing the lyrics to the song along with the caller on stage!

There are opportunities to recruit new people into our activity all the time. When opportunity knocks, don't let it pass you by. It might lead to your next big class, or the beginning of your new big club. Programs like The First Friday Fun Fest can be a destination dance too, and we are proving that every month!

Below is the dance layout and lesson plan for the November First Friday Fun Fest and kick off dance for the blast class.

#### FIRST FRIDAY FUN FEST

TIP 1:

TEACH;

ALLEMANDE LEFT

CIRCLE

PROMENADE

RIGHT AND LEFT GRAND

SQUARE IDENTIFICATION

STARS

COURTESY TURN

DIRECTIONAL DO PASO

**LINE DANCE CUPID SHUFFLE**

TIP 2:

TEACH:

FOUR/TWO LADIES CHAIN

RIGHT & LEFT THRU

LEAD RIGHT

CIRCLE 1/2, 3/4

LADIES IN MEN SASHAY

SWING

**ROUND DANCE ACHY BREAKY HEART**

TIP 3:  
TEACH:  
CALIFORNIA TWIRL  
DIVE THRU  
PASS THRU  
WALK AROUND  
SEE SAW

FIGURE: RIGHT AND LEFT THRU PASS THRU CALIFORNIA TWIRL LEAD RIGHT VEER  
LEFT WHEEL AND DEAL CIRCLE LEFT 3/4 PASS THRU SWING PROMENADE  
**ROUND DANCE JINGLE BELL ROCK**

TIP 4:  
TEACH:  
DO PASO  
VEER  
WHEEL AND DEAL (TWO FACED LINES)COUPLES CIRCULATE  
**LINE DANCE NEON MOON**

TIP 5:  
TEACH:  
GRAND SQUARE  
ANNOUNCEMENTS

TIP 6:  
TEACH:  
WEAVE THE RING

Thanks for reading, and I hope this gives you a new approach to recruiting, teaching and creating square dance enthusiasm!

Dave and Bonnie Harry