

# BREAKING BREAD AND BUILDING CONNECTIONS

- by Claudia Littlefair, Editor

**As square dancers, we know that food unites.** Breaking bread together is one of the oldest forms of community interaction. It provides a valuable time and place to socially connect and bond through conversation and laughter.

In 2021 CALLERLAB's Social Connections Committee ran a contest for ideas on how to promote social connections and bonding in our activity. The many responses were categorized and compiled into a document that is available on the CALLERLAB Knowledgebase website for anyone who is interested. The link to this document is:

<https://knowledge.callerlab.org/ideas-from-social-connections-contest-1/>.

## REGULAR FRIENDSHIP DINNERS

One of the ideas submitted that has made a significant difference to a club, and that involves food is **Friendship Dinners**.

**"Several years ago, our club, Space Trackers of Merritt Island, Florida, came up with an idea that provided a monthly social gathering for club members and visitors with the added side benefit of becoming a means of income for the club.**

As you are aware, most square dancers have a difficult time deciding which aspect of Square Dancing they enjoy more...the DANCING part or the EATING part. We decided to combine them and see what we could come up with. And that is how FRIENDSHIP DINNERS came to be.

**On the first Thursday of every month (Thursday being the night our club dances), the club provides a full meal for about thirty club members and visitors** (anyone who shows up, really, but we average about thirty people each time). The attendees put a donation (usually \$5 per dancer, sometimes more, sometimes less) into the bucket to help defray the Club's expenses.

**We have several good cooks in our club, and they prepare the food beforehand and bring it to the club's place of dance to be set up buffet-style.** We usually "theme" the food to whatever month it is...Mexican in May for Cinco de Mayo, Brats in October for Oktoberfest, Corned Beef and Cabbage in March for St. Patrick's Day, etc. We have also served Ham with Mac & Cheese, Pulled Pork sandwiches, Ham and Beans with CornBread, and Chicken Pot Pie to name a few.



**Our initial thought was to provide an opportunity for our club members (seasoned or brand new) to break bread together and get to know one another.** They can come to the dance hall, sit down for a delicious home-cooked meal that is inexpensive (and they didn't have to prepare!) and get to know their fellow dancers.

**While our initial purpose was to provide a social opportunity for our club members, it quickly became a source of income for the Club as well.** We have found that the donations our dancers happily place in the bucket more than cover the cost of the food...sometimes tripling our investment! Most of our dancers have expressed their wish that we get back to having our Friendship Dinners. We are currently dancing in a location that will not allow us to bring "food to share." **We will definitely reinstate this beloved tradition as soon as we can."**

## FOOD FIRST, INTRO TO SQUARE DANCING SECOND

**In our club we advertise our free intro dances as "Dinner & Dessert" nights, knowing that some, not all, people (mostly male) come for the food which should make up for having to dance.** In an excerpt from the article, *"Meet Them, Greet Them & Bring Them In"* in American Square Dance magazine, January 2022, **Lea Veronica describes how they go one step further by combining a dinner with a free intro dance.**

“At your last monthly club dance and during the last couple of weeks of your current class for your club members and new graduates, provide, on colorful stationary, an invitation to a special dinner and an evening of fun, quoting and highlighting, “Please be our guest for a free dinner and an evening of fun Square Dancing.” Club Board Members personally hand at least three copies – including the mailing envelope for each – to every club member to mail or hand to someone they are inviting as a guest to dinner followed by an evening of fun square dancing.

On that first night of class provide a potluck dinner with members only providing the food. Have the dinner start about one hour before class starts. Be sure your members have been instructed ahead of time to visit with the new guests. Sit with the new guests. Talk with a very positive attitude about your getting into square dancing and how you acquired a whole new circle of friends. And, you are enjoying simple exercise to music, helping to keep your mind and body active and strong.



As the guests arrive, they are greeted by more than two people who are checking them in and thanking them for coming for an evening of fun. Do not complicate the sign-in form with lots of questions about them but be sure to have a line that asks them what their hobbies or other interests are. Hopefully the members who are working on the sign-in table know enough about their club members to be able to introduce the new person that very night to someone in the club who shares the same interest or hobby. This is an instant attachment to someone in the club.”

## THE SNACK TABLE

**In our own club we made a substantial positive change simply by moving up when our potluck snack table was available.** We used to have a lunch after the dance, but many of our dancers left early because of work the next day, or because the new-dancer-portion of the evening finished earlier.



**We now set up the snack table and coffee, tea and water at the beginning of the evening so everyone can enjoy it whenever they want.** It’s a natural gathering place between tips. It’s so easy for the new and experienced dancers to mix and mingle – an automatic social builder.

In an excerpt from the article, “*Fun & Friendship Is The Name Of the Game*” in American Square Dance magazine, February 2022, Lea Veronica shares her experience with the snack table.

“In the club I belonged to I was class coordinator for several years, refreshments were set up and served from a counter at the roll-up window at the kitchen at a specific time during the evening. **I noticed the long line for refreshments had the new people in front (it was announced our new people go first) then the members followed.** NO! It may look and sound polite, but it segregates them from mixing with the club members.

Then I started what I called to myself, the “watering hole”. **Instead of having a line for refreshments, as soon as the class committee arrived to set up before class started we put up and left up for the entire evening, a ROUND table.** It was out of the way of the dance area but where lots of folks could be around that table all at one time. We continued that socializing opportunity at each and every break between tips for the whole evening. And guess what? Most of them were talking to each other across the table and next to each other. New class members and club members. No pointing out who was which one. **Again, having fun meeting new people and talking to them.**”

**So, start the discussion with your club. How can you maximize the social benefits of breaking bread within your group?**