

CALLERLAB Social Connections Committee Contest #1 Club Activities Ideas

In late 2021 the Social Connections Committee ran a contest to solicit ideas to promote social connections and bonding in the square dance activity. The responses often included many valuable thoughts and ideas covering a range of topics. The ideas have been grouped into the following subject areas: New Dancer Sessions, Social Media, Group/Club Interactions, Dances, Club Activities, and National Outreach. All the ideas are presented in an omnibus document which you can view at <https://knowledge.callerlab.org/ideas-from-social-connections-contest-1/>. Several of the larger sections of that document have been copied out into separate documents focused on specific subjects. This document presents the ideas for **Club Activities** that foster sociability and social bonding.

Club Activities (Outreach)

1. Public pancake breakfasts.
2. The two clubs I was instrumental in helping gain new members. One club was between two country towns, and they put on **Friday evening street dances**, alternating between the towns. 2-3 hours dancing included getting interested viewers a chance to join in, learn a few basics and dance. They also had floats in local parades. The second club put on **dances at the local VFW**, and participated in the city festival with a **float in the parade**. These events put Square Dancing in front of hundreds of spectators, and resulted in building club membership.

Club Activities (non-dances)

1. Camping
2. Club garage sale.
3. As always, the typical dancing in the swimming pool, in an elevator, at a restaurant, in the mall. Also, themes for dances such as halloween, christmas, new years, Elvis, 50/60's, big band, etc. **Progressive dinners, pot lucks before the dance, meeting at a restaurant before the dance.** Nothing new actually.
4. Social Activities for The Texas Reelers
 - 1) They sit by/with and interact with visitors and new dancers at our dances
 - 2) We have excellent Angel support at our classes.
 - 3) We also have a Mentor program, wherein Club Members (who volunteer to do so) basically adopt a new couple. The Mentors are responsible for attending all classes and dancing with their Newbies, call them once a week, bring them to any "outside of the dance" club activities, and if they miss a class, the Mentors get together with them to catch them up, etc.
 - 4) We have a **Dinner Night Out** once a month at different restaurants in town.
 - 5) One of our members performs in the Senior Follies, and the club **always goes to one of the shows**; then we go out to dinner!
 - 6) The Texas Reelers have a theme for every dance, which they support with dress and decorations
 - 7) We have a **Club Picnic** every spring at a park
 - 8) When there is an event at the hall west of our home, we invite all members to meet here for refreshments and fellowship beforehand.

- 9) The Texas Reelers are active banner participants, which encourages visitations to other clubs in the Metroplex. Our Texas Reelers' motto is "Keep Coming Back!" At the end of our dances, all members and visitors form a large circle, saying, "Thank You! Keep Coming Back!" The Texas Reelers held Zoom mtgs once a month during the pandemic, using the theme that had been chosen previously for that month's dance. We would dress and share stories that had to do with said theme. The North Texas Square & Round Dance Association just gave the Reelers an award for their innovative use of themes for their monthly zoom meetings.
5. How many of you have danced with others for years but really don't know anything about them. That is because at a dance we have a few minutes in between tips to basically say how are you as a pleasantry. Have **social get togethers** with the members outside of a dance to bond a friendship. Those connections continue and hold people closer in your club. We also invite the students to a **Christmas party** which helps keep them for a second semester. Another thing we do is most members purchase a tshirt with the club name on it. In the summer we **attend free concerts** in the park together and are walking billboards for the club. It's a plus plus. Social and free advertising.
 6. Pictures. Send messages. Talk about upcoming events. A website works much better for this than a facebook page. Be sure to include a calendar with upcoming events. Then don't allow announcements to be made at the dance. You are not going to be able to implement all these suggestions. Pick out what suits your dance group. Don't insist on having officers. Having a committee works just as well. Don't insist on stealing banners. Focus everything on drawing the group of dancers together. Always keep it simple, keep it fun.
 7. Pre-pandemic our club would have soup nights in the winter and have salad nights in the summer and start earlier, so everyone could socialize together.
 8. 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.