

## **A brief history of square dancing**

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Henry Ford developed a way of mass-producing horseless carriages so that the masses could get to square dances more easily.

I just made that up. I think he really made cars so he could amass a lot of money (and there is nothing wrong with that), but Ford did love square dancing and he spent lavishly to promote it. In the early '20s modern dancing, mostly lumped into the category of jazz, was all the rage. Ford viewed this as decadent, whereas he saw square dancing as more wholesome. One story goes that the Fords were visiting the Wayside Inn in South Sudbury, Mass., where dance master Benjamin Lovett was calling for square dances. Ford was so impressed that he asked Lovett to come to Dearborn, Mich., and set up a school for square dance callers. Lovett supposedly said, "Mr. Ford, I won't come to Dearborn, I don't even like you" whereupon Ford bought the Wayside Inn, and consequently Lovett's contract.

It turned out well. Lovett stayed on with Ford for many years, enjoying a handsome salary, a new Lincoln every year and a hall built by Ford especially for square dancing.

Ford recognized the many benefits of square dancing and encouraged his executives and their wives to engage in the activity, even to the point that those who didn't were soon seeking other employment.

Those benefits, which are as applicable today as they were then, include low-impact exercise, teamwork, concentration and the healthy aspect of taking one's mind off the troubles of the day and allowing a couple of hours of enjoyment in a congenial atmosphere.

It is not a competitive activity, there are no winners or losers, but it can build self-confidence as the newcomers learn the calls and interact with the other dancers in a way that they may find surprising.

Studies have shown that a square dancer who participates in every dance during an evening will have traveled about five miles and will burn up hundreds of calories.

Square dancing around the world (and it's mostly done to calls in English) is known as "friendship set to music." Or as we in Northern Nevada like to say, "Dance in a square, you'll make a circle of friends."

Fallon's square dance club, the Oasis Squares, has been do-si-doing and promenading on Friday evenings for almost five years and we are starting a new beginners class in September. We welcome anyone from 12 to whatever age. Some of our group are well into their 70s. Come visit us some Friday, 7-9 p.m., at Highland Estates, 570 N. Sherman St.

Experienced dancers are welcome any regular dance night to join in the club level tips.

Hope to see you soon in a square.