

They love to call a good dance

SEPTEMBER 7, 2014

BY DAVID WILLBERG

Estevan Lifestyles (Estevan SK)

Bob Lees is convinced that there isn't a better form of exercise out there than square dancing. "It's very good cardio to do square dancing," said Bob. "The Mayo Clinic did a study several years ago, and said that square dancing is the best exercise you can get for rounded exercises, both mentally and physically."

His wife, Marian, will tell you that the best way to relax and make new friends is through round dancing.

"Dancing is a lot of fun," she says. "It's relaxing. You forget all the rest of the cares of the world for two hours."

The Lees have become champions for their respective forms of dancing, although anyone who thinks that the two are in competition with each other would be mistaken. After all, the square dance and round dance clubs in Estevan meet together.

Bob is the caller for the Diamond Dancers square dance club. Marian holds the same job for the Hitch and Vine Twirlers round dancers. They also teach new dancers, and, whenever possible, take time to dance together.

The Lees started square dancing in 1996. They were planning to winter in Arizona, and were told that if they wanted to visit the state, they had to learn to square dance, as it was a popular activity in the state.

Two years later, they became involved with round dancing.

Bob started to call square dances in 2000. He went to a school in Alberta, and for the next five years, he honed his craft, learned to cue a dance, and even called an occasional tip.

"A tip is composed of a pattern, and then you do a singing call," said Bob. "It takes about 15 minutes for a tip. If you're doing some teaching in that period, it can get stretched out to 20." He finally became the club's full-time caller in 2005, and attended further schooling in 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2013.

"It's roughly about 200 hours of classroom training that I've taken to be a square dance caller," said Bob.

"And there's still lots more to learn," added Marian.

Marian started teaching round dances regularly in 2008; prior to that time, she had dabbled in teaching.

"When I'm teaching, to see the dancers progress, and see how well they can pick it up and go with it, and to see the sparkle in their eye when they have it, (is terrific)," she said.

She became the round dance club's caller three years later.

They estimate that they spend four to six hours preparing to call an evening dance each week, because they're always experimenting with new ideas and techniques. Bob has some new square dance software on his computer.

The Lees' skills and experiences have earned them a place on the organizing committee with the 2016 national dance festival that will be held in Regina. Marian has been chosen to head up the round dance component. Round and square dancers from across North America will flock to Regina for the event.

The Diamond Dancers and the Twirlers meet Wednesday nights at the over-55 club at Estevan's Leisure Centre. They alternate between the different dances, with Bob calling a square dance,

and then Marian cuing a round dance. The clubs have been meeting jointly for about three years now.

“They’re still two separate clubs, they’re two separate lesson sections, but we dance on Wednesday night with both clubs,” said Bob.

There are differences between the two types of dancing.

A square dance ideally involves eight people, he said, although he can call a dance with more than or fewer than eight. A round dance is a couples dance, and Marian said she can cue a round dance with a small crowd.

“Square dancing you’re involved with the seven other people in the square,” said Bob. “In round dancing, you just dance with your partner. In round dancing, they call it round because we dance in a round circle around the hall, and we do mainly waltzes and two-steps.”

Differences also exist for the caller. Square dancing allows for greater spontaneity, while round dancing typically follows a script.

“Round dancing is pretty much certain steps that you teach, and then certain steps work with other steps to make up the dance,” said Marian. “I Bob’t make them up ... I have made up some, but there are other people who make up the dance routines, and I just teach them.”

But they compliment each other well, Bob said, and there’s only a few people who won’t do both dances.

“If you talk to dancers that do both, they’re not nearly as tired at the end of the night, because you use different muscles for round dancing than you do for square dancing,” said Bob. “So it gives you a well-rounded exercise.”

Dancing has allowed them to meet all sorts of wonderful people, they said. Bob and Marian have danced at venues across North America, and they could attend dances in nations around the world. Square dance calls are always in English, even in places like Japan, where Bob said it's quite a popular activity.

Those who are interested in the dance clubs are encouraged to take lessons, they said. Square dance classes are offered in the fall. Up first will be a demonstration and barbecue night at the Leisure Centre's forecourt on Monday, September 8, starting at 6 p.m. Lessons will then be offered on Monday nights at 7:30 p.m., also at the Leisure Centre, starting on September 15, and continuing until just before Christmas.

In January, they will start teaching round dance lessons, also on Monday nights at the Leisure Centre. The sessions will continue until the end of March.

The first night of regular dancing will be on Wednesday, September 17. They will continue to meet until the end of April. They’d like to attract a few more people to their get-togethers, Bob said, so that they can enjoy the benefits of square and round dancing.