

Group provides fresh take on square dancing

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By Samantha Cronk (scronk@journal-news.net) , Journal News

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A group shot of the new Square Dance Friends club in Berkeley County is shown. The club will be having their first dance, a '50s theme, Saturday, Sept. 13, at Pikeside United Methodist Church.

MARTINSBURG - While respecting the tradition behind square dancing, Terry and Loria Headlee, of Martinsburg, are looking to interject new life and a new perspective on square dancing through their new club Square Dance Friends.

Terry has taught square dance introduction classes in Berkeley County for two years, and after continuing interest from his students, he and his wife decided to take their hobby out of the classroom.

Loria and Terry formed the club in August after receiving interest and encouragement from about 24 students in Terry's class who wanted to continue dancing.

"It was a nice surprise. It's a lot of work ... but it's a labor of love," Terry said.

"Square dancing isn't something people first think to do. Loria and I were like that at first too. Loria is the one that wanted me to try square dancing, and I said 'absolutely not.' I said that a number of times, but she finally talked me into going, and I went, and we took classes a few years ago. After the first 20 minutes, I remember thinking 'this isn't what I thought it would be. This is kind of fun,'" he said.

The couple describe the benefits of square dancing to be not just a unique experience, but a fun form of exercise, with the dances typically lasting more than two hours.

The group practices mainstream square dancing, which is the moves to 68 basic calls, and plus dancing, which is about 30 additional, more complex calls. The group will soon add line dancing to their repertoire of skills.

While square dancing may conjure images of puffy dresses and neck handkerchiefs, Terry and Loria said they are moving away from the traditional look and stereotypes associated with the dance style to attract a wider range of participants.

"We think (the dress) is part of people's perception or image of square dancing, and it's not really like that anymore, especially with our group. ... We're not really getting retirees, we're getting people who are working, have families," Terry said.

The pair are also playing a wide range of music for the meetings and dances beyond just country or bluegrass, including selections from Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson, The Beatles, Christmas music and "Blurred Lines" by Robin Thicke.

In addition to leading the club along with Loria, Terry is the club's caller, telling the dancers what moves to perform and in what sequence. Calling is a new role for Terry, who said he is self-taught by listening to CDs, watching videos and attending two calling workshops.

Although the club is newly formed, members are already demonstrating their skills at public venues, like the annual Labor Day Breakfast, and will be having their first dance, a '50s theme, Saturday, Sept. 13, at Pikeside United Methodist Church.

"What's really exciting is to see these people work hard and then, when the class or demonstration is done, they want to keep dancing and keep working on it. They're very energetic," Loria said.

The club is for community members both new to square dancing and experienced. The annual club membership is \$5.

If residents are unsure whether they want to participate in the club or learn square dancing, Terry said the first two classes of his three-week introduction course are free. His next cycle of classes begins Monday, Sept. 15.

More information on Square Dance Friends or club registration is available by contacting squaredancefriends@gmail.com or ortaheadlee@gmail.com. More information on Terry's square dance classes is available at www.squaredancelessons.net.