

Square dance calling takes Elmer Sheffield to faraway places

Rosetta Land

Tallahassee Democrat

September 14, 2014

Square dance calling has been a call of Elmer Sheffield for 40 years. Sheffield's popularity takes him around the world and back to Tallahassee, although "less now than it used to," he says. He's just returned from Japan where he was invited to call the Japanese Square Dance Association's recent festival.

"I guess I was a VIP," Sheffield offers humbly. When asked what he enjoyed most about his jaunt that included hours upon hours of tiresome flying, he quickly answered, "The energy!" Dancers filled the room with an excitement this caller hasn't experienced in quite a while. The Japanese square dancers were, he added, "always smiling and they liked to applaud."

There were about 30 Japanese callers at the annual event in Kobe, Japan, attended by 1700 people. It wasn't Sheffield's first time to the festival. In fact, friends he made on a trip 20 years ago were instrumental in his return visit this year. "It was a great opportunity for me to renew friendships and earn some money, too," the caller (and singer) said with a chuckle.

The three-day weekend dance fest gatherings saw 170 squares (there are four couples to a square) on the dance floor for each song. Sheffield called the universal language of square dance – "promenade," "allemande left," "bow to the partner," as enthusiastic dancers twirled and whirled. The couples followed his calls "dosado" and "swing your girl" with amazing delight. The square dance festival was held at the Portia Hotel where Sheffield said they took "fine care" of him. He added, "I had a really good time and there was great food!" When the festival executive asked if he'd return, the affable caller told him, "Sure, but let's not do it in the next month or two."

Sheffield's childhood sweetheart and wife, Margie, traveled with him around the globe for decades but sat this one out in Tallahassee. She suffered a stroke a couple years ago and is not as mobile as she was on the couple's three earlier trips to the island nation. Caregiving is her husband's new calling and he's right there beside his bride of more than 55 years.

Note: Elmer Sheffield calls regularly for Capital Twirlers Square Dance on Mondays at 7:30 p.m. at the Tallahassee Senior Center. For more information, call Libby at 385-0608 or Ellen at 386-1440.