

# Still swinging

BY JOAN TUPPENCE | Special correspondent

**F**riday night might mean football to some, but not Betty Myers and Chris Rankin. Square-dancing is their Friday night ritual. The two serve as co-presidents of the Tuckahoe Square Dance Club. Each Friday they meet with approximately 50 of the club's 73 members at All Saints Episcopal Church on River Road to test their skills on the dance floor.

"This is not high school square-dancing," Rankin said. "We have a very diverse group of people in age and occupation, and that's one of the things we pride ourselves on in this club."

This year marks the club's 50th anniversary, which it will celebrate with a dance Saturday, Sept. 10, at River Road Church, Baptist, in Henrico County.

Originally referred to as barn-dancing, square-dancing is a blend of Scottish and European dancing with some Appalachian influence, said Dean Decker, a senior member of the club. It is the official folk dance of Virginia as well as 18 other states.

A traditional square is made up of eight people who dance as four couples. They don't begin their movements until the caller makes his first call. Then they begin to weave in and out, back and forth and side to side in a kaleidoscope of steps and formations based on each call.

"We don't know ahead what he is going to call," Myers said, noting the mental dexterity involved.

The members of the Tuckahoe

club do country-western square-dancing as well as line dancing and choreographed round dancing.

"We concentrate on square-dancing," Myers said, adding that country-western square-dancing started becoming popular in the early 1950s. "Square-dancing is more organized now. There are more calls and more levels of dancing."

Dancers at the Tuckahoe club have advanced to the mainstream-plus level, which means that they have learned 90 calls.

"Most clubs are mainstream-plus, which is midlevel," said Rankin, who started with Tuckahoe in 2000. "My sister had been after me to square-dance for years. Finally, a girl I knew asked me to go square-dancing."

He finds that square-dancing is a great stress reliever.

"When I'm dancing, I am concentrating on the dancing and the people," he said.

Myers, who has been with the club for six years, was also looking for a way to lessen stress when she started square-dancing.

"When I started dancing in



Bill Harrison called out prompts to get the dancers moving. Known as "the friendly club," Tuckahoe welcomes all visitors.

## Tuckahoe Square Dance Club 50th anniversary

**Where:** River Road Church, Baptist, 8000 River Road, Henrico County

**When:** 7-10 p.m. Sept. 10

**Cost:** Guest fee \$10

**Details:** Chris Rankin at (804) 425-6995 or Betty Myers at (434) 242-0502 or [www.tuckahoesquaredanceclub.com](http://www.tuckahoesquaredanceclub.com)

**Open house:** The club also will have an open house and start classes on Sept. 20 from 7:15 to 9:15 p.m. at Quilloccasin Middle School, 9400 Quilloccasin Road.

1983, I was working a full-time job and two part-time jobs while raising my daughter. I needed to do something relaxing for me," she said.

A regular at Tuckahoe since the 1980s, Decker finds the weekly workout physically and mentally challenging.

"When you're dancing, you have to concentrate and stay alert," he said. "You get to dance with a lot of different people, and no one worries if you mess up. Everybody has fun."

Rankin acknowledges he struggled with the calls at first.

"I had a difficult time getting proficient in it, and that was very important to me," he said.

The club uses a variety of guest callers because it doesn't have its own club caller.

"Our callers come from North Carolina, Massachusetts, Maryland, Florida and Northern Virginia," Myers said. "Right now we are working on getting a father-and-son caller group for 2018. We already have 2017's schedule in place."

Myers and Rankin, who met at the club and plan to marry in October, attend conventions across the country where they are exposed to international callers.

"No matter where we go, all the calls are in English," Myers said.

While most club members usually dress casually for dances, they will sometimes sport more traditional attire — long-sleeved shirts and bolos, or neckties, for men, and prairie skirts or dresses with layers of crinoline for women.

"We do have new members that come in and decide that they would like to get some traditional outfits to wear," Rankin said.

Coined "the friendly club," Tuckahoe always welcomes visitors. It makes no difference the age or level of dance ability.

"Everybody is equal on the dance floor," Decker said.

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