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## Square Dancing in Forest

By Patricia Held Correspondent  
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Square dancing involves both physics and balance plus a lot of give and take.

Steve DuVal is a square dancer. He lives and breathes it. After a decade of square dancing and also being a square dance caller for a few of those years, Steve is now introducing square dancing to residents in Bedford County.

Steve's background is somewhat varied. His occupations have ranged from donut maker to a mortgage loan officer. He also lays claim to being a good harmonica player and a ten-gallon blood donor with the Red Cross. Now he can add square dance instructor to

his resume.

DuVal is a lot like many other square dancers. He enjoys going out, being with people, and getting some pretty intense exercise. Steve is also of the belief that square dancing is not only a healthy form of exercise but also benefits people as they age. He thinks that dancing is especially helpful for people suffering from memory disorders.

Steve has an idea that square dancing can stimulate your brain. The Global Council on Brain Health (GCBH) seems to agree. This is a worldwide group of scientists and health professionals who are working on areas of brain health related to human cognition.

An article published by American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) discusses the GCBH's focus on brain health as people age and their ability to think and reason. The AARP was looking for the best advice about what older people can do to maintain and improve brain health.

In their studies they explored the impact of music on the brain and discovered that music memories remain intact even in cases of dementia. Music-based treatments are being used in dementia therapy and are reducing stress, promoting morale and encouraging interpersonal connections. The ability to dance, sing and play music can be preserved in people with memory issues.

Last year, Steve DuVal's life came tumbling down when he became seriously ill. After a period of inactivity, Steve realized that sitting still was not the answer. He suspected that he was declining and perhaps even having memory issues. "I figured that if I did not get up and do something today, it could be my very last day," stated DuVal.

He decided to contact everyone he knew who wanted to dance and began to offer square dancing classes. Bedford County Parks and Recreation provided him free access to the Forest Recreation Center on Rustic Mill Road in Forest, and here, every Wednesday evening, beginning at 7PM Steve teaches and calls for a group of enthusiastic adults

interested in learning the rudiments of square dancing. Everyone, young and old, is invited to join in the fun. There is no fee, and both couples and singles are welcome. Steve stresses that participants can dress however they wish.

The elaborate outfits often identified with square dancing are not at all necessary to join this group.

Steve describes square dancing as “having a kaleidoscopic effect.” That is, a square dance is made up of a complex mix of multifaceted elements. There are eight people in a square and while each person has a partner, every dancer in the set dances with seven other people. It involves physics and balance, and a lot of give and take. Steve DuVal believes it is a good way to increase social connections with other people and reduce loneliness.

Steve’s mission is to reach the broadest audience possible and he hopes that by offering the class in a central location like Forest, more people will discover the benefits of square dancing. He has been holding this class in Forest for a year now and currently about twenty adults attend his classes regularly. Hopefully, as word spreads, there will be more interest.

The popularity of square dancing soared following World War II. People were looking for a social recreation to take their minds off their problems. The main goals were fellowship, having a good time, and enjoying a non-competitive activity. As time went on, its popularity dwindled, but today people are again becoming interested in square dancing.

Steve DuVal’s advice about dancing also applies to life in general. “Everyone is important in a square dance. There cannot be a square without all eight people participating.” And his other recommendation; “Look forward and if you get confused, put your hand out. Someone will always take it.” Both thoughts are comforting and well worth holding on

to. And perhaps square dancing can offer adults of all ages an opportunity to gather together, enjoy each-others company, enhance a sense of well-being, plus improve physical and mental health!

For more information of joining the group on Wednesday evening call Steve DuVal at 434-299-8208.