

# **A Strategy for Growth, Visibility, and Social Connection**

## ***Open Square Dance Party Events***

Across our square dance community, club leaders are asking thoughtful questions about the future. Attendance patterns are shifting. Recruitment requires more intention. Communities are busier and more digitally connected yet socially disconnected. That's where Square Dance Party Dances shine.

When approached strategically, Party Dances are not just “beginner nights.” They are powerful tools for club growth and social connection. They bring people face to face, hand to hand, and laughter to laughter. They create first impressions, build relationships, and boost public visibility, all while reminding us why we fell in love with square dancing in the first place.

### ***Lowering the Barrier to Belonging***

For someone who has never square danced, the idea of joining a structured lesson program can feel intimidating. They may worry about keeping up, committing to something unfamiliar, or about the time it takes to learn. Party Dances remove those fears.

A Party Dance is a single dance event geared to those who have seldom or never danced. It is a single fun dance with simple squares, circles, line dancing, contras, or any type of group dancing that the caller or callers feel comfortable presenting.

Party Dances emphasize immediate success rather than progression. Teaching is brief. Figures are simple and repetitive. The tone is relaxed and celebratory. Guests step onto the floor and begin moving within minutes. They laugh. They succeed. They leave feeling included. That first positive experience transforms square dancing from “something I might not be able to do” into “that was fun, I could do that again.”

### ***From Guests to Friends***

Clubs that experience steady growth rarely depend on just one annual open house. Instead, they host three to four Party Dances each year with a clear goal: fostering relationships.

Each Party Dance contributes to a growing “Friends of the (name of your club) List.” This is a key element to success because these are individuals who:

- ✓ Have attended at least one event.
- ✓ Have danced and socialized with your members.

- ✓ Have begun forming personal connections with them.
- ✓ Feel recognized and welcomed by your group.

For liability and insurance purposes, guests should sign in at each event. This also provides an opportunity to collect names, email addresses, and phone numbers for your “List.” Over time, this contact list becomes a living network of social connections that belong to your club. You can also create an incentive for gathering this information by running a raffle for a simple gift card or present.

These friends should continue receiving invitations to future Party Dances, New Dancer Programs, and open social activities of the club, such as potlucks, group dinners, theater outings, or museum visits.

People rarely commit to an activity solely because of advertising. They commit because they feel connected. Party Dances cultivate that connection long before any formal commitment is required.

### ***Expanding Connection Through Community Partnerships***

Social connection deepens when clubs look beyond their own membership. Party Dances become even more effective when held in collaboration with community organizations, such as:

- ✓ Service groups (Elks, Masons, and similar organizations)
- ✓ Church congregations
- ✓ Scout groups
- ✓ Civic or charitable associations

These partnerships extend the reach of your club’s social connections and make your club more visible in your community. They introduce square dancing to individuals who may never have considered it. They position clubs as active contributors to community life.

These dance events may even support fundraising efforts for partner organizations. When square dance clubs are visible in community celebrations and service efforts, they become recognized as vibrant and welcoming. In a world where many activities are increasingly solitary, this matters.

### ***Designing an Environment That Invites Conversation***

Connection does not happen accidentally. It is facilitated by thoughtful planning. A large snack table with space on both sides encourages guests to gather naturally. Circular tables, when available, provide comfortable seating during breaks and

allow small groups to converse easily. These round tables are especially effective because everyone can see one another.

Clearly printed name tags remove social hesitation. Providing “Hello, My Name Is” type stickers and bold markers ensures names are visible from across a circular table, making introductions effortless. These details convey a subtle yet powerful message: you belong here.

Your members act as “ambassadors of connection” for any social event your club is involved in. The greatest influence on a guest’s experience is not the music, dancing, or choreography; it is the people. Your members set the tone through their behavior and can treat your guests as if they were guests in their own homes.

Members should:

- ✓ Greet newcomers warmly.
- ✓ Introduce guests to others.
- ✓ Invite different guests into their squares.
- ✓ Avoid clustering only with experienced dancers.
- ✓ Engage in genuine conversation during breaks.

Guests should feel as if they have entered a circle of friends, not an exclusive club. Leaders may want to remind members before each event that hospitality and inclusion are the main goals. Connection builds relationships, and our dance inherently requires cooperation. That fosters a spirit of fun and connection. Be careful with hugging your new dancers, as we often do with those close, longtime club friends. New dancers’ “comfortable personal space” is usually bigger than ours.

### ***The Caller as Catalyst***

The caller plays a crucial role in sustaining energy and inclusion. Teaching should be short, upbeat, and encouraging. Complex choreography or lengthy explanations can unintentionally create barriers. Instead, the emphasis should be on simplicity and repetition.

Dances may include easy squares, mixers that may rotate partners or not, line dances, and simple contras. It’s important for the caller to present dances he or she is comfortable with teaching. Music should be lively and recognizable. Even during breaks, soft background music helps maintain warmth and continuity.

Callers and their partners can further strengthen their connection by mingling during social time and greeting guests personally. The caller is not just a leading figure; they are shaping the atmosphere.

## ***A Simple Structure for Social Success***

Begin with a simple circle or line dance. Add mixers to encourage interaction. Use basic square formations with clear calls. Keep a steady tempo without over-explaining. Maintain energy throughout the evening and end with an upbeat, celebratory finale. Early successes build confidence, which leads to laughter, and laughter strengthens connections.

## ***The Long-Term Impact of Social Investment***

When clubs host Party Dances regularly and intentionally, the results extend beyond membership numbers.

They often see:

- ✓ Increased lesson enrollment.
- ✓ Expanded social networks.
- ✓ Stronger member morale.
- ✓ Greater community awareness.
- ✓ Enhanced public perception.
- ✓ More importantly, they strengthen the social fabric of their communities.

Square dancing is uniquely positioned to offer something many people crave: real-time human interaction. It brings people together physically, emotionally, and socially. Party Dances showcase that strength in its most accessible form, and they open a much wider door to our dance.

If clubs commit to hosting three to four Party Dances each year, focusing on hospitality, follow-up, and community partnership, the impact can be profound.

- ✓ Square dancing becomes visible.
- ✓ It becomes welcoming.
- ✓ It becomes socially relevant.
- ✓ Most importantly, it becomes a place where people form genuine connections.

## ***The invitation is simple:***

- ✓ Make it welcoming.
- ✓ Make it intentional.
- ✓ Make it joyful.
- ✓ Make it about connection.

***When we focus on social connection first, growth follows naturally.***

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