

FIRST FRIDAY FUNFEST!

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We wish to tell you about the "The First Friday Fun Fest", and other ideas for offering square dancing to the public!--

The Whirlybird Square Dance Club in Lynnwood, WA is the sponsor of the dance, and I initially suggested a once-a-month student dance which became The First Friday Fun Fest. The club is officer-run and I've called for the club for 45 years. "First Friday Fun Fest" started out as a student dance beginning in September about 9 years ago. It was to become a Half and Half dance when the new Jan. classes started that first year. Well, we had a lot more newer dancers coming versus the Sept. students, so I dedicated every third tip for the Sept. students. It wasn't long until I dedicated the whole program to the newest dancer in the hall. About the second or third year, experienced dancers would ask if it would be alright if they brought their niece, or their grandchild who was home on college break, or some non-square-dancing friends, etc., and so this became the beginning of the no-experience-necessary designation of the dance. Thus, our no-experience-necessary dance was dancer-created, having evolved into an entire program dedicated to the new dancer! Prior to Covid, our dance time was from 7:30-10:30 with a finger food and announcement break at 9:15. When Covid hit, all dancing, and many other activities, in Washington stopped because of a state mandate. As of the first Friday 2021, we are up and running again. Prior to Covid, we had never had a dance with less than 8 squares; the average was 13 squares! The hall maximum is 18 squares but the parking lot is full at about 16 squares. We have actually had people come the dance and leave because they couldn't find a parking place! When we reopened the dance program this September, we made a couple of changes: one because of Covid; no more food, and because we weren't taking a food break, we shortened the dance time—the last set of squares now starts at 9:30. That September dance was the first dance that we had less than 8 squares (we had 4), but about 1/3 of the floor were people experiencing square dancing for the first time which was amazing. October's dance had 8 squares again and one square was made up of college students. November's dance had 9 squares, and our square of college students were back, and they stayed through the very last set of squares. They were laughing and giggling as they walked out the door. As they left the November dance, they said they had other plans for December, but they would be back in January. December's dance had 8 squares again and there was at least a square of brand-new dancers in attendance.

At the very beginning of the dance, I ask those people that have never square danced before to raise their hand. We give them a round of applause and thank them for coming. Then I tell them they are going to experience a lot of square dancing, but the only thing I truly want them to remember, when it is over, is that they had a great time! We start the evening off with "this is your partner, corner, home position" and quickly teach Do Sa Do, Allemande left, and Promenade, and then I put the music on and start dancing through some star sequences. The square set is followed by a line dance, or easy round dance teach, and the dance progresses from there. It is fast-paced programming. The music rarely stops. There is no down-time and everything is briefly taught as-we-go, so they can dance as much or as little as they want. Nobody ever must sit out because of a star tip of upper-level squares or rounds, because there aren't any! Just before the finger food break prior to the Covid changes (and now, it is placed second to the last tip), we have a light hearted hot hash hoedown competition, where the squares dance until they make a mistake that they can't recover from...When that happens, the square breaks it

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up and if there is food, they line up in the potluck line. The last square standing gets a hot hash hoedown dangle for their badge. The competition does a few things: It creates entertainment for those sitting out or standing in the potluck line, it is fun for our club dancers, too, and it gives a sense of accomplishment to the winning square. One night, after winning, one of our members said to me "We had the oldest couple (he and his wife are in their nineties) and the youngest couple (a middle school boy and his younger sister) in our square and we won!" Another time we had a square of 6th graders from one of the schools where I teach square dancing, and they won. I think that video is still on the club's Facebook page. The competition is based on the material taught up to that point, and my goal is not to break the squares down, but to help them accomplish as much as they can with the skills that their square has as the competition gets faster & trickier.

This last November we used the First Friday Fun Fest to launch a Basic One Blast Class over that weekend (and we added also alamo style, swing thru, ocean wave trades, run, and wheel and deal). The club felt that it was successful enough that they are planning to do another one in March. We will start another mainstream class in February and the Blast Class will be another way to increase the attendance in the February class. I see this as a huge bonus for our area, in that it gives the current class students a chance to experience another teach of the movements that they have already been exposed to, and possibly a look at what is coming up in their regular classes, and it affords an opportunity for the newcomer to experience an intense introduction to square dancing. At the same time, they get to enjoy 3 fun dances in the same weekend. All area clubs are invited to bring people to this event.

More about the no-experience theme: Whirlybirds sponsored our council dance a few years ago. So, we rented a local middle school, and hired "The B.C. Boys" (a group of popular Canadian callers) as our attraction for the mainstream dance in the gym, and I taught and called at the no-experience dance in the cafeteria. We had between 60-70 squares in attendance! (About 50 squares in the gym, and 15-20 in the no-experience-necessary dance.) Also, our Mount Baker Council hosted the state festival a few years ago and programmed a no-experience-necessary dance both Friday and Saturday night... we had about ten squares in attendance at those sessions both nights, about ½ of the participants were new to square dancing. Literature about classes was available, and people from the different area clubs were there to encourage the new dancers to consider looking up a class.

I strongly believe that we need dances like this at every large square dance event, including the National, other local and regional Square dance festivals, and Callerlab conventions. People are naturally curious and are willing to get out of their comfort zone to try something new if it looks interesting to them. Public advertising, of course, ahead of the event is key, and needs to be a focus of the event planning.

I remember several years ago; our shop was in the Plus hall at USA West in Boise. It was Thursday afternoon and I needed a bathroom break. As I walked out the main entrance headed for the rest room, I noticed a group of teenagers standing in the doorway watching the dancers. When I came back from

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the restroom, they were still there, so I asked them if they would like to learn a little bit about square dancing. They said yes, so we set up a square in front of our booth, I told them to listen to the music but to ignore the caller and just listen to me. (I had no mic or sound system, just the plus dance music). I taught and we danced for about 30 minutes and then they had to leave. I told them if they wanted to come back that evening, I would help them through some more dancing. They came back with an entire square! Friday night they were back with a square again. (Some of the originals couldn't make it so they recruited new teens to take their place) Saturday night I thought I had lost them. The dance was almost over and the afterparty was about to begin, and here they came dressed in their version of what a square dancer should look like! The after party was a much smaller dance and it was an all singing call dance; I took the square out into the middle of the floor and again told them to listen to me and we danced the night away. Again, they had a new boy in the square. I didn't want to start from the very beginning, so I left it up to the square to help him through. I've taught enough teens over the years that I know if they want to learn it, they will make it happen. I wasn't sure if the new boy was enjoying himself, until I noticed while he was dancing, he was singing the lyrics to the song along with the caller on stage!

There are opportunities to recruit new people into our activity all the time. When opportunity knocks, don't let it pass you by. It might lead to your next big class, or the beginning of your new big club. Programs like The First Friday Fun Fest can be a destination dance too, and we are proving that every month!

First Friday Funfest Attendance Records

Date:	# Of Squares	Attendance	Date	# Of Squares	Attendance
Sept. 2017	12	96	Sept. 2021	4	34
Oct. 2017	17	142	Oct. 2021	8	60
Nov. 2017	15	126	Nov. 2021	7	77
Dec. 2017	13	109	Dec. 2021	8	76
Jan. 2018	15	121	Jan. 2022	6	52
Feb. 2018	17	139	Feb. 2022	7	70
March 2018	16	129	March 2022	10	92
April 2018	13	109	April 2022	9	82
May 2018	11	89	May 2022	8	77
June 2018	12	102	June 2022	7	71
Sept. 2018	14	116	Sept. 2022	6	58
Oct. 2018	13	110	Oct. 2022	11	97
Nov. 2018	15	123	Nov. 2022	13	106
Dec. 2018	14	112	Dec. 2022	10	82
Jan. 2019	14	115	Jan. 2023	15	124
Feb. 2019	15	121			
March 2019	17	142			
April 2019	10	94			
May 2019	11	91			
June 2019	15	119			
Sept. 2019	11	94			
Oct. 2019	13	106			
Nov. 2019	13	101			
Dec. 2019	12	98			
Jan. 2020	15	120			
Feb. 2020	15	127			
March 2020	Covid				

Explanation of new lesson structure and destination dances

With this new concept, dancers coming out of "The First Friday Fun Fest" will start a four-week journey to three new destination dances. The first four weeks will get them to Mount Baker Councils Basic program where they can dance until they are ready to move on and learn the next phase. The next four weeks will get the dancers to the Midstream program, again where they can dance until they are ready to move on. The last eight weeks (divided into four-week increments) will cover the rest of the Mainstream Program, and make them eligible to dance at any of the Mainstream clubs.

The class time should be three hours, with the first two hours being dedicated to the basic and Midstream programs, and the last hour dedicated to the remaining Mainstream movements. In the first two hours the tips will alternate between Basic and Midstream. The Mainstream lesson will run a full hour with the first four weeks dedicated to lesson plan 1-4 A, and the second four weeks dedicated to lesson plan 1-4 B, and each containing 9 or 10 movements. This class will rotate every four weeks as the Midstream classes rotate in.

Since "The First Friday Fun Fest" falls on the first Friday of every month, the "Beginning Basic" dance should fall on the third Friday, so that there is more than a week between the two dances. The "Midstream" dance should have more than a week between it and the "Beginning Basic" dance also. Looking at the progression, "FFFF" is a no experience dance, the "BB" has 41 movements, the "Midstream" dance has another 35 movements, and the MS is a combination of Callerlab's basic and mainstream programs. The Beginning Basic dance should follow the same format as the First Friday Fun Fest, in that it should be a combination of squares and line dances and easy teachable rounds, so that there is continuity between the two programs.

The advantages to this concept is, the new dancer doesn't need any experience to dance at the entry level dances, and in four week increments they are eligible for the next two level dance programs. The dancer can stay or move on from one dance program to the next at their own pace, and there is no pressure to move on! The other advantage is that every month there is a new class starting. The disadvantage is that the teaching time for the dancer that wants to go straight through to mainstream is compressed.

I am not recommending that all of the clubs abandon their traditional lesson format, but this would be an additional concept to add to what we are already doing. The destination dances are critical to the lesson concept, and they would add a lot to our existing programs.

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Evening Program Layout

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BASIC

TIP 1:

TEACH:

ALLEMANDE LEFT
DOSADO
CIRCLE
PROMENADE
RIGHT AND LEFT GRAND
SQUARE IDENTIFICATION
STARS
COURTESY TURN

LINE DANCE

TIP 2:

TEACH:

FOUR/TWO LADIES CHAIN
RIGHT & LEFT THRU
LEAD RIGHT
CIRCLE 1/2, 3/4
LADIES IN MEN SASHAY
SWING

ROUND DANCE

TIP 3:

TEACH:

CALIFORNIA TWIRL
DIVE THRU
PASS THRU
FIGURE: RIGHT AND LEFT THRU PASS THRU
CALIFORNIA TWIRL LEAD RIGHT VEER LEFT
WHEEL AND DEAL CIRCLE LEFT 3/4 PASS
THRU SWING PROMENADE

ROUND DANCE

TIP 4:

TEACH:

VEER
WHEEL AND DEAL (TWO FACED LINES)
COUPLES CIRCULATE

LINE DANCE

TIP 5:

TEACH:

GRAND SQUARE
ANNOUNCEMENTS

TIP 6:

TEACH:

WEAVE THE RING

**Mount Baker Council Square Dance
(Beginning Basic) Program #1**

Allemande Left / Right
Alamo Style
Arm Turns
Bend the Line
California Twirl
Chain Down the Line
Circle
Couples Circulate
Courtesy Turn
Dive Thru
Dosado
Dosado to a Wave
Dive Thru
Double Pass Thru
First couple go Left/Right
Forward and Back
Four / Two Ladies Chain
Grand Square
Ladies in Men Sashay
Lead Right/Left
Ocean Wave Circulates
Pass the Ocean
Pass Thru
Promenade, Full, 1/2, 3/4, Inside, Single File
Right and Left Grand
Right and Left Thru
Rollaway
Run (boys, girls, centers, ends)
Second Couple go Right/Left
See Saw
Square Identification
Square Thru
Stars
Star Thru
Swing
Swing Thru
Trade from Ocean waves
Veer
Walk Around the Corner
Weave the Ring
Wheel and Deal
Wrong Way Grand
Wrong Way Promenade

**Mount Baker Council Square Dance
(Midstream) Program #2**

Allemande Thar
Backtrack
Box the Gnat
Cast right / Left 3/4
Circle to a Line
Cross Run
Circulates Box, Split, Single File
Do Paso
Extend
Ferris Wheel
Flutterwheel / Reverse Flutterwheel
Half Sashay
Left Square Thru
Left Swing Thru
Scoot Back
Separate
Shoot the Star, and Full Around
Single Hinge
Spin the Top
Star Promenade
Sweep a Quarter
Touch 1/4
Trade Partner, Couples
Trade By
U-Turn Back
Walk and Dodge
Wheel Around / Reverse Wheel Around

**Mount Baker Council Square Dance
(Mainstream) Program #3**

Cast Off 3/4
Centers In
Cloverleaf
Couples Hinge
Cross Fold
Cross Run
Dixie Style to an Ocean Wave
Eight Chain Thru / Fractions
Fold
Pass to the Center
Recycle
Slide Thru
Slip the Clutch
Spin Chain Thru
Split Two
Tag the Line 1/4, 1/2, 3/4
Turn Thru
Wrong Way Thar
Zoom

*If you would like
a detailed lesson plan
for these destination programs,
email me:
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