

# Seeking Free Publicity in the Square and Round Dance Activity

*Presentation from SQUAREUPB.C., the marketing initiative of the B.C. Square and Round Dance Federation*

by Brian Elmer

April, 2013

## Maintaining Year-Round Awareness

Our dance activity can benefit greatly from an effort to maintain year-round awareness. We tend to focus on publicity at the time of new dancer sessions. Keeping a year-round awareness gives the public a sort of "top of mind" familiarity with our dance clubs and our many events, highlighting the fun and laughter that we enjoy. In a way, through the year you're "cultivating" people toward getting involved in our recreation.

As a result of its year-round publicity effort, an interior club got a call from a school teacher during the Winter, well after new dancer sessions had started. She said that she read about and saw pictures in the newspaper of all the fun being had by the square dancers. Now she and her husband are on a new dancer prospect list for the Fall after she said they've been looking for an activity to share together.

In actual fact, modern day marketers advise that "content marketing" can have a big impact to improve your success. They are referring to articles and write-ups that tell of people interacting with a product or service, possibly including testimonials, yet the product or service is not pushed in blatant fashion.

## The Press Release

One of the best ways to reach a mass audience is by seeking free publicity in the press. In this case, though, we recommend a different approach than inviting a reporter from the media to cover an event.

Many times, things are left up to a visiting reporter, on the rare occasion that they come. They'll often prefer to focus on a human interest aspect that might not be favourable to our image and probably won't tell of the benefits of our dance form that you'd like to see.

The Central Okanagan region has seen exceptional, favourable response from both print and online media upon submission of ready-to-print press releases with accompanying photos. The online media outlets are generally considered "community internet portals" and they serve a city with news and events information and much more, like an electronic newspaper.

The method that has been followed is to write press releases in the style of a press reporter and submit them unsolicited, strictly by e-mail. A little research into your local media web sites should reveal the e-mail addresses of their editors. The topics have varied from detailing a club event to the special activities of dancers.

The distribution via e-mail is the easy part. Taking photos, gathering information about an event and writing the release is the hard part.

In seeking free publicity, we have little control over what the media editor will actually publish, if anything. You cannot expect 100 per cent success with every press release but persistence can pay off. Keep submitting! Dance news is "soft news" and your story might get "bumped" by some serious hard news.

If you wish, you can contact the various editors of your local print and electronic media sources and ask about their preferences regarding the submission of press releases. It can't hurt to establish a good relationship with the press.

If submitting to a newspaper, leave it to the editor to select where to place your story. They'll gauge whether it's suitable for the "About Town" section, the "Travel" section, etc. You might even discover your material on the front page!

An important thing is to know exactly what geographic area each media outlet serves. In the case of newspapers, where do they distribute? Again, those that are “community focused” will be disinterested in content that doesn’t relate. An exception could be persons from the community going somewhere, in which case the story is about them and their experiences. Also, your dance group wants to be seen in media where there’s reasonable chance that the readers/viewers can interact with you. Concentrate on the media that serves the immediate community where the dance club operates and its members live.

### Photo Submission

A selection of three to six photographs are generally attached to each e-mail press release. Each photo has a suggested caption, naming the persons pictured and/or detailing what’s happening in each shot. You want your photos to relate to the subject matter of the press release.

Providing the media outlets with several photos makes it less likely that they’ll all publish the same picture. In the case of competing newspapers, they want to look a little different from each other.

Sometimes it’s a “photo release” that is furnished to the media. That is valuable to maintain awareness in picture form where a full written press release is not appropriate. Again, the photos should be sent with suggested captions.

### Resolution of Photographs

Newspapers need higher resolution photographs than online media. Photos for newspapers are usually requested at 300 dots-per-inch. A photo file-size of 1 megabyte or larger should ensure that. Pictures to be seen online can be furnished in low resolution (100 kilobytes or less). A simple approach is to issue the photos in high resolution and let those who don’t need them that way make the appropriate adjustments.

### Photo “Content Quality”

“You don’t take a picture – you MAKE a picture.” That wise comment was heard in a photo seminar at the U.S. National Convention in Spokane in the Summer of 2012. If you want the media to use the photos that you submit to them, they had better be good.

Apart from shooting in a resolution appropriate for the photo’s use, the components to a good press photo include:

- shot composition that positions the subject well in the frame. A common problem is showing far too much floor or ceiling in the shot. Zoom in on the essence of the picture. Try to have each photo tell a story. If there’s time, consider moving or adjusting the elements in your photo to get the best shot. Perhaps even put something into your shot if it enhances the picture. For example, possibly something like a “40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary” poster in the foreground with the dancers seen beyond it. Avoid clutter or “junky” material in the background of your picture. Perhaps remove a coffee cup from under a chair or a sweater from a seat back. A bit of careful shot composition or even moving the subject to a better location can result in a much nicer picture. Of course, if you must shoot candidly, you have little or no control.
- lighting that enhances the subject instead of making it difficult to see. Use a flash if necessary or increase the overall lighting in the room, if indoors. Some cameras allow you to open the aperture to let in more light.
- action that depicts your dancers in motion, unless a posed picture is desired. A picture of dancers standing while they wait for the next call is rather lacklustre. Try to get people’s faces and avoid backs of heads.
- emotion that depicts your dancers having fun! Get the camera in close to capture faces, smiles and laughs to feature the fun and friendship that we promote.

Features like "quick fix" in photo editing software will enhance pictures but that can only do so much. It generally improves colours and lightens or darkens.

You can use editing software to crop a picture but it can often result in a very odd size. It's best if the shot be taken by the camera the way it will finally look in print or online. That also saves loads of time later.

To accompany photos sent to the media, compose a separate information sheet suggesting captions and generally explaining what's happening or who's in the picture. Sometimes, the captioning text can explain what's not evident in the picture. Each picture should have an ID number and title. You should credit the photographer, such as "All photos taken by Barry Smith except #DSC-0084: Dancer doing handstand, by Sally Wright." In the published newspaper, you'll probably see that they add under the photo "Barry Smith/contributor" or "Barry Smith/Special to Burnaby Now."

### Local Media Needs Local Content

The interior club's effort is taking advantage of the fact that local news media needs local content in order to reflect the community that they serve. Our dance clubs are regularly active in those communities, the club membership represents many persons from the local community and we're photogenic. Although the focus has been upon the free community papers, distribution to some of the larger media outlets has seen some success as well.

A big part of the publicity success experienced by the interior club is that the media is given good content "on a silver spoon." By writing the press release as if it were a reporter commenting, they'll often re-print it word-for-word. The great thing about that is we get to say what we want in the way we want, rather than have our recreation reflected through the eyes of a non-dancing individual.

If a professional reporter attends your event, you can furnish them with your press release. You've basically done the work for them but they'll probably want to adapt your release.

### Creating "Local Content"

The normal progression of a dance season brings events that can be seen as worthy of press/photo releases. That includes new dancer startup, Square and Round Dance Awareness Week (Sept. 15-21 in 2013), Halloween, Christmas, Valentines, St. Patrick's, Easter and New Dancer Graduation to name a few. Sometimes, though, you can increase your publicity exposure by creating some press-worthy events or profiling dancers/callers/cuers.

The interior club had a caller participate in the "Movember" event where, at a dance, he auctioned to the highest bidder the chance to shave off his moustache as a men's health fundraiser. On another occasion, the dancers wore pedometers on the dance floor and the results of that, along with photos, became the topic of a press release. Some of the club's dancers took a square dance cruise, dancing on the boat and during a shore excursion in a jail room at Alcatraz. That made the local newspaper with a full release, printed almost word-for-word from that submitted, and photos of the dancers on deck, the ship and dancing in jail.

### Designing a Release

A press release is generally kept to one page (8 ½ by 11). At the top of it you can have a letterhead of the originating organization or, to save space, just have something like "Big City Squares - Surrey's non-profit square and round dance club." Then, with a left margin, it should read "Press Release" and specify the release date. Most read: "Press Release - for immediate distribution, July 25." If you'd like the information withheld for later release, such as the day that a special event launches (like "Awareness Week"), you can state, for example, "Press Release - embargoed until September 15, 2013."

If you wish, you can supply a "by-line," meaning a credit to the writer, such as: "By Barry Smith, contributor." The newspaper likes to differentiate you from staff, so the word "contributor" helps do that. Otherwise, the editor often adds to the release material the word "Contributed" or, for example, "Special to Burnaby Now."

You should suggest a heading for the release before the text body, such as: "Surrey Square Dancers Undertake Dance Marathon!"

The text body in the release should be kept to a third person perspective, quoting people (with their permission) when you interview them for the article. Also, once a person has initially been identified in the release, only use their last name for any further references, such as "Barry Smith is incredibly enthusiastic about today's style of square dancing. Jumping up and down, Smith couldn't contain his excitement." Reverting to use of the last name, after giving the full name earlier, is a newspaper reporting style and is meant to avoid confusion over use of more common first names and to stay objective (not getting too personal on a first name basis).

A dance press release should give specific dancer names relative to the topic or event because that's what makes the story "local" -- these are the people who live in the area that the newspaper serves. Also, state what city they live in (i.e.: Barry Smith of Burnaby or, perhaps for others in your club, of New Westminster, Vancouver, etc.). Relay the comments of those individuals, showing what they said in quotes or re-worded summaries.

You have to try to put the most important material in the first half of your press release because editors might chop off the remainder if they have space issues. Unfortunately, we often save our details about new dancer sessions and contact information for the close and it sometimes doesn't get published. If it can be introduced earlier in the press release, there's a better chance that it will appear.

Conclude your release with words such as: "More information about the dance club or the recreation in general is available at: 604-xxx-xxx, e-mail: [info@squaredance.bc.ca](mailto:info@squaredance.bc.ca)." Also, furnish some promotional web page addresses, such as: "Promotional video: [www.DancingKeepsYouYoung.ca](http://www.DancingKeepsYouYoung.ca), Promotional web page: [www.TakeMeDancing.squaredance.bc.ca](http://www.TakeMeDancing.squaredance.bc.ca)." Most club web pages are not geared up to be a "first contact" page for new dancer prospects, so showing your club's web address may not be practical.

A professional-looking press release should close with the centered notation "- 30 -"

It means "the end" and is actually a traditional notation established by a press reporter who started using it to mean he was taking 30 minutes out for a break. It came into common usage to mean "done--finished--the end."

### Release-Writer Information

After that, as writer of the press release, you show your name, title, address, phone number and e-mail address. It's often placed in the bottom left with a left margin. That shows the editor the source of the material and allows him or her to follow up if necessary.

Happy release-writing and photo-taking!

– end –

*Accompanying this document is a sample of an actual press release issued in December, 2012 along with a copy of the photo identification sheet.*

*In addition, see a list of free publicity exposure received online around the province.*

# Westsyde Squares

*“the fun club” since 1957*

## SAMPLE COPY

MEDIA RELEASE—for immediate distribution, Dec. 5, 2012

By Brian Elmer

### **Square Dancers Experience Hairy Moments For A Good Cause**

A break in the weekly dance fun for the Westsyde Squares on the last Wednesday in November allowed dancers to bid for the opportunity to shear off their entertainer’s filamentous facial projection.

21-year old caller-teacher for the Westsyde Squares dance club, Dustin McGifford of West Kelowna, admitted that he should have started growing his “Movember” moustache earlier. Just the same, he felt that he had sprouted enough hair to lose it to the highest bidder among 30 dancers in the hall at the Westbank United Church.

Conceived in Australia, Movember is a worldwide fundraiser and awareness event that, in Canada, supports men’s health issues related to prostate cancer and male mental health. The basic concept is that men register on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November with a clean-shaven face then seek sponsorship as they proceed to grow a moustache. This was the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Movember campaign.

Winning the bid was new dancer Ronda Knight of West Kelowna. She was particularly anxious to support the cause because her father passed away from prostate cancer and her husband has it now.

Knight’s skill using the safety razor to perform the task masked the reality. When asked about technique, she responded “what technique?!” She exclaimed “it was very scary – it was a first for me,” continuing “Dustin was a good sport to even let me near him with a razor but he came away unscathed. I wore a red dress just-in-case,” she joked.

The dance club members generously supported the cause, helping McGifford raise \$230. About the effort, he said “Movember was all over social media – it doesn’t take a lot of effort and I wanted to do my part – it’s a funny little gimmick to raise money and awareness.”

According to a Dec. 3 press release from Cisionwire out of Toronto, seen on the movember.com web site, Canada was the leading fundraising nation for the second year in a row with 247,066 Canadians raising \$36.8 million this year to date. The funds raised are directed to programs run by Prostate Cancer Canada, Movember’s Global Action Plan and the Canadian Male Health Network. In Canada 60% of funds support prostate cancer initiatives and 40% support male mental health initiatives.

Summarizing his moustache loss experience, McGifford said “it was fun but one thing for sure, my girlfriend’s glad it’s gone!”

In operation in West Kelowna over 50 years, the dance club makes several efforts throughout the year to give back to the community. Learn more about the social recreation of square dancing on the web at [DancingKeepsYouYoung.ca](http://DancingKeepsYouYoung.ca) or about becoming a new dancer at the Westsyde Squares by calling 250-769-0927 or e-mail [WestsydeSquaresDanceClub@gmail.com](mailto:WestsydeSquaresDanceClub@gmail.com).

- 30 -

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# SAMPLE COPY

## PHOTO IDENTIFICATION

The Westsyde Squares Dance Club, West Kelowna  
December 5, 2012

Event: Movember Fundraiser

Accompanies the Dec. 5 Media Release:  
Square Dancers Experience Hairy Moments For A Good Cause

*All photos by Brian Elmer*

*Filenames and suggested captions:*

**DSC01357-RonMillsCollectingBids** – New dancer co-ordinator, Ron Mills of West Kelowna, collects Movember bids. Dancers seated, left to right: Judy Syvenky, West Kelowna; Mary Ann Thirsk, West Kelowna; Frances Strusa, West Kelowna; Irene Nadain, Kelowna

**DSC01361-TheShave-RondaKnight&DustinMcGifford** – Saying it was “very scary,” Ronda Knight of West Kelowna, highest bidder, gets to shear off the moustache of square dance caller Dustin McGifford in Movember fundraiser.

**DSC01362-DancersLookOn** – Dancers at the Westsyde Squares look on with amusement as their entertainer gets shaved by a fellow dancer who admits it’s her first time at such a task.

**DSC01368-McGifford&Dancers** – Square dance caller-teacher Dustin McGifford (top center) puts the Westsyde Squares dancers through their paces at the hall in the Westbank United Church.

**DSC01372-FloorOfSquareDancers** – Floor full of square dancers at the Westsyde Squares dance club with Ronda Knight dancing front left, winner of the Movember moustache removal event. Knight joked that she wore a red dress just in case there was a shaving incident.

**DSC01382-McGiffordCalling** – Less one moustache, 21-year old square dance caller-teacher, Dustin McGifford of West Kelowna, calling today’s style of square dancing set to modern music. See McGifford on the web instructing new dancers and singing many of the calls at: [www.YouTube.com/WestsydeSquares](http://www.YouTube.com/WestsydeSquares).

- end -

## Links to some internet portals that published releases:

Dance and Graduation Ceremony at the Westsyde Squares that took place on Dec. 12, 2012--

Published Dec. 29, 2012, on Castanet.net:

<http://www.castanet.net/edition/news-story-85166-101-.htm#85166>

Published Jan. 2, 2013, on WelcomeToKelowna.com:

[http://www.welcometokelowna.com/columns/press\\_release/news/Press\\_Release/13/01/02/Square\\_Dancing\\_Grads\\_Look\\_Forward\\_To\\_New\\_Hobby\\_in\\_2013](http://www.welcometokelowna.com/columns/press_release/news/Press_Release/13/01/02/Square_Dancing_Grads_Look_Forward_To_New_Hobby_in_2013)

## Actual successful press exposures

that have been received in the Okanagan Valley and beyond, both in print and online:

Sept. 18, 2012 – New dancer group at the Westsyde Squares, West Kelowna, celebrate the provincial “Square and Round Dance Awareness Week” and attain press exposure from the online internet portal Welcome to Kelowna at: [http://www.welcometokelowna.com/columns/press\\_release/news/Press\\_Release/12/09/18/New\\_Square\\_Dancer\\_Class](http://www.welcometokelowna.com/columns/press_release/news/Press_Release/12/09/18/New_Square_Dancer_Class)

Sept. 25, 2012 – Welcome to Kelowna community internet portal publishes press release about the three free sessions at the new Westside Youth Team Dance Club, starting October 2<sup>nd</sup>. Headline: Westside Youth Team Dance. Press release and photos show.

[http://www.welcometokelowna.com/columns/press\\_release/news/Press\\_Release/12/09/25/Westside\\_Youth\\_Team\\_Dance](http://www.welcometokelowna.com/columns/press_release/news/Press_Release/12/09/25/Westside_Youth_Team_Dance)

Sept. 28, 2012 – “Calgary square dancers dosey doe with a modern twist” – a web site article by CBC News, Calgary, featuring a 1 minute, 39 second video about the square dancers in Calgary using modern music for their dancing:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/story/2012/09/28/calgary-tap-dance.html>

Dec. 5, 2012 - Square Dancers Experience Hairy Moments For A Good Cause

21yr old caller for the WestsydeSquares in West Kelowna, auctions off the chance to shave off his moustache as part of the “Movember” fundraiser to benefit men’s health issues.\$230 raised.

Press release published in the Westside Weekly newspaper and online by Welcome to Kelowna at:

[http://www.welcometokelowna.com/columns/press\\_release/news/Press\\_Release/12/12/05/Square\\_Dancers\\_Experience\\_Hairy\\_Moments\\_For\\_A\\_Good\\_Cause](http://www.welcometokelowna.com/columns/press_release/news/Press_Release/12/12/05/Square_Dancers_Experience_Hairy_Moments_For_A_Good_Cause)

Dec. 14, 2012 – Williams Lake Tribune

“There they go ‘a squarolling’”

The Stampede Whirlaways club of Williams Lake danced indoors at two businesses to promote square dancing in the Christmas season:

Posted on the B.C. Federation’s Facebook page on Dec. 14:

<https://www.facebook.com/BCSquareAndRoundDanceFederation>

Dec. 29, 2012 – Central Okanagan

New Dancers graduate at the Westsyde Squares, West Kelowna, and receive press exposure on two different media sources:

Castanet online news portal: <http://www.castanet.net/edition/news-story-85166-101-.htm#85166>

Same topic but published Jan. 2, 2013 – Central Okanagan:

Welcome to Kelowna online news portal:

[http://www.welcometokelowna.com/columns/press\\_release/news/Press\\_Release/13/01/02/Square\\_Dancing\\_Grads\\_Look\\_Forward\\_To\\_New\\_Hobby\\_in\\_2013](http://www.welcometokelowna.com/columns/press_release/news/Press_Release/13/01/02/Square_Dancing_Grads_Look_Forward_To_New_Hobby_in_2013)

Jan. 4, 2013 – Globe & Mail, BC edition:

Star Twirlers' Christmas dance in Colwood, Van. Isle

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/in-pictures-square-dancing-with-bcs-star-twirlers/article6940968/?service=mobile>

January 8, 2013 – Welcome to Kelowna published a Westside Youth Team Dance Club press release announcing the coming of a new youth dance group for kids 8+. The story was headlined: New Dance Experience for Youth Launches Jan. 15:

[http://www.welcometokelowna.com/columns/press\\_release/news/Press\\_Release/13/01/08/New\\_Dance\\_Experience\\_for\\_Youth\\_Launches\\_Jan\\_15](http://www.welcometokelowna.com/columns/press_release/news/Press_Release/13/01/08/New_Dance_Experience_for_Youth_Launches_Jan_15)

Here's a Capital News newspaper clipping on file (as a jpeg) from Jan. 10/13 Filename: CapNews-TeenClubStartup-LOWRES-Jan15-2013 383K (includes a stock photo of a couple pre-teens dancing in blue & white outfits)

Here's a Westside Weekly newspaper clipping on file (as a jpeg) from Jan. 20/13 - DSC01467-WestsideWeekly-LOWRES-Jan20-2013.jpg 539K (includes a boxed picture of Dustin McGifford calling)

Here's a Westside Weekly newspaper clipping on file (as a jpeg) from Jan. 24/13 - DSC01496-W-Weekly-LOWRES-Jan24-2013.jpg 544K (the article is TEXT ONLY)

January 25, 2013 – Welcome to Kelowna published a Westside Youth Team Dance Club “photo release” announcing that newcomers were still welcome following the club's Jan. 15 start-up:

[http://www.welcometokelowna.com/columns/press\\_release/news/Press\\_Release/13/01/25/Still\\_Room\\_For\\_Kids\\_Square\\_Dance\\_Fun](http://www.welcometokelowna.com/columns/press_release/news/Press_Release/13/01/25/Still_Room_For_Kids_Square_Dance_Fun)

January 26, 2013 – Castanet.net published a Westside Youth Team Dance Club “photo release” announcing that newcomers were still welcome following the club's Jan. 15 start-up:

<http://www.castanet.net/edition/news-story-86485-101-.htm#86485>

February 17, 2013 – The Westside Youth Team Dance Club, featuring high energy square dancing for pre-teens and teens, gets front page exposure after their Valentine's dance. The free community newspaper called the “Westside Weekly” put their photo with a caption on the front page. The children are seen holding up big valentines. See a photo of the newspaper on the B.C. Square and Round Dance Federation's Facebook page. Scroll down until you see the (unrelated) headline “Down to the Drain:”

[www.facebook.com/BCSquareAndRoundDanceFederation](http://www.facebook.com/BCSquareAndRoundDanceFederation)

February 18, 2013 – The Valentine's dance at the Stampede Whirlaways club gets internet exposure after submission of a press release to the community internet portal “Welcome to Williams Lake:”

<http://welcometowilliamslake.ca/index.php/human-interest/76-human-interest/6703-williams-lake-square-dancers.html>

February 28, 2013 – The community internet portal “Welcome to Williams Lake” published a submitted press release about the Stampede Whirlaways dance club square dancing in snowshoes:

<http://www.welcometowilliamslake.ca/index.php/human-interest/76-human-interest/6735-square-dance-in-snowshoes.html>

March 15, 2013 – A dance and pie auction organized by the Stampede Whirlaways in Williams Lake gets online exposure on “Welcome to Williams Lake.” The dance raised \$750 for their Child Development Centre, particularly through their pie auction: <http://welcometowilliamslake.ca/index.php/human-interest/76-human-interest/6794-stampede-whirlaways-square-dance-club.html>