

Class of 2010 Final Report

Six clubs from five regions entered the Class of 2010 contest. There were no entries from either Region 4 or Region 9. Some clubs which held classes declined to enter the contest because they knew of other clubs with larger classes than their own and felt that there was no hope of winning, and therefore no point in participating in the exercise. Indifference within our ranks is the toughest obstacle to overcome each time we mount a campaign to address the issue of our declining membership. Whether it's because we feel hopeless, helpless or whether it's because we just don't want to do anything which won't benefit us directly and immediately, the end result is that through our inaction, our numbers continue to sink to ever lower levels. It is my recommendation that if we try something of this nature again, the cash prizes should be awarded by draw rather than by class size and perhaps we could also present a trophy or a certificate of merit to the largest class. This would give everyone who entered the contest an equal shot at the money and the largest class would still get the glory.

In spite of the low level of participation, there were some good ideas brought forward which I would like to share with everyone. Here are a few of the highlights:

The "Swinging Singles" club of Burnaby holds a "Bring a Friend Night" the week after their new dancers graduate. The new dancers, full of excitement and pleased with their success, can't wait to share it with their friends. I think this is a great improvement over the traditional practise of letting everyone cool off over the summer and then mounting a recruitment campaign from scratch in the fall.

The "Saanich Squares" is a club which was formed to teach new dancers for the Mavericks and a number of other Victoria area clubs. Instead of advertising "Square Dance Lessons," their first evening was billed as a "Community Hoedown." This drew a large crowd and by the end of the evening, enough were hooked on square dancing to form the basis of a sizable class.

The “Ocean Waves” of Courtenay made use of free space on local TV and in local papers to advertise their class. They get out in their community as often as possible to do demos. Posters and word of mouth round out their recruitment practises; as you can see, you don’t have to spend a lot of money to get your message out.

The “Westsyde Squares” of Westbank places a large ½ page colour ad in the local paper twice before their first dance. The ad reads “Introduction to Modern Square Dance” and emphasizes “casual attire please.” When they do demos, they wear badges saying “Learn to Square Dance-Ask Me” and consequently get asked lots of questions about the activity. When asked, they’re prepared with answers and handy 3x4 cards which they hand out.

The Powell River “Star Dusters” hold a street dance the night of the city’s Blackberry Fest Street Party. Dancers from around regions 1 and 8 are invited to attend and dancers from everywhere else are welcomed. But this is not “just another demonstration.” Midway through the evening, onlookers are asked if they’d like to join in. Those who try it have a hoot and those who don’t, get a kick out of watching their friends. The club also placed a ¼ page ad last year featuring a young lady in a funky prairie skirt, T-shirt and cowboy boots in an effort to modify the public’s image of what it takes to be a square dancer.

The “Stampede Whirlaways” of William’s Lake began their class in January. They advertised in the local paper and on the radio but felt that word of mouth was still the most effective recruitment tool in their arsenal. The beauty of a mid season start up is that it gives your existing dancers plenty of time to round up new dancers during the dance season instead of hoping for a miracle to happen in the summer and scrambling to put a class together in the fall when you discover a miracle didn’t occur.

As well as being innovative, clubs which are able to consistently recruit new dancers use every opportunity which arises to promote their activity. We can’t always determine specifically what it was that drew newcomers to us but the key is

to engage our communities in as many ways and as often as possible. If a gimmick doesn't seem to be attracting people as well as it used to, don't give up on people; try a new gimmick.

THE RESULTS
SQUARE DANCE

Club Name	Region	Started	Finished	Membership	Ratio
Mavericks	1	27	18	48	38%
Westsyde Squares	3	13	11	42	26%
Stampede Whirlaways	5	8	8	33	24%
Star Dusters	8	12	9	42	21%
Ocean Waves	8	13	7	70	10%
Swinging Singles	2	15	9	122	7%

Only one round dance entry was received. Although the class members were new to round dancing, they were existing square dancers and therefore already members of the federation. This meant that the entry had to be disqualified since it didn't meet the requirement of rule #3: "An eligible class is either a square or round dance class whose members are first time square or round dancers and are not already members of the federation." It is unfortunate that despite the effort which was made to include the round dance community equally in this contest, no eligible classes took advantage of this opportunity.

I'd like to thank those who participated in the contest and encourage everyone to try out a few of the ideas which were offered here in your upcoming season.

This concludes my report, respectfully,
Gordon Ruedig