

Every Square Dance club has the same concerns when it comes to finding new dancers. We all know that the only way to keep a club active is to add new dancers every year. Without doing this, the club's destiny is predictable. We have published a four part article that addresses this situation. Obviously, there's not a "one size fits all" solution. These are ideas that have worked for us over the last 50 years. Feel free to copy and use anything that you think may be of use to your club.

Webmasters note: This is a four part series which has been published in the American Square Dance magazine.

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Article 1 of 4

Who Says You Can't Get New Dancers?

By Pete Wex

The Charles Dickens Classic begins, "It was the best of times...It was the worst of times." Watching square dance clubs' reactions and results in their periodic attempts to attract new dancers often reminds me of those words and that image.

For a few clubs, open houses are an exhilarating, highlight-of-the-year experience, their panning for gold rewarded by lots of shiny nuggets. For all too many other clubs, it's just another frustrating, futile effort, doomed before it began. Everybody knows you can't get classes any more, 'cause nobody's interested and everybody's way too busy. Yes, we'll make a token effort, but only because we're expected to, and we all already know how it's going to turn out. And, surely enough, having prepared all the rationalizations and excuses and the mindset to expect and accept failure, the prophecy is inevitably self-fulfilling. Another year without new dancers is, of course, another step closer to the club's demise. And Modern Western Square Dance's population continues its steady decline, as its aging, exiting dancers consistently outnumber the incoming, new participants.

I am privileged to belong to one of those clubs squarely in the first category above. For Do-Pas-O in Lancaster, PA, open houses in September are immensely exciting occasions: At last we get to find out how many curious, adventurous, fun-seeking "nuggets" all our publicity and recruiting efforts attracted this time! And we're usually gratified and grateful when we see the actual numbers that did turn out. Add to the pure numbers the fact that we're

also bringing in both youth and a good many folks who wind up becoming quite passionate about MWSD, and we feel very fortunate, indeed!

In our own and nearby associations and the surrounding states in which we dance regularly, and at the festivals to which as many as three squares of us travel, Do-Pas-O is earning a reputation and some respect for its recruiting successes and growth, and its dedication to and enthusiasm for MWSD. We are constantly asked what our “secrets” are. While we doubt that we have any startling or truly unique or different revelations to share, we gladly reveal anything and everything we do.

Our willingness to share is rooted in a strong belief all dancers and all clubs need each other, and all have to support each other’s endeavors for our marvelous activity as a whole to survive. We all share equally the responsibility in halting MWSD’s decline, nurturing its recovery, and leading its resurgence to renewed vitality and popularity.

Our results weren’t always something to write home (or anywhere else) about. In 1996, our class numbered four (two still dancing). In 1997, the class had eight new people, with four still dancing. In 1998, we crashed and burned! Only three couples started in class. Two of them left soon with injuries or health problems, and the third just couldn’t seem to get it, so we pulled the plug. It was the first (and last) time in the 15 years I’ve known Do-Pas-O that there wasn’t a class. It turns out maybe that was the best thing that could have happened to this particular club!

We didn’t blame our failure on factors beyond our control. Instead, we became determined we would never again go a year without new dancers. The Club’s leadership weighed long and hard all the things we could possibly do to create public awareness of the joy of square dancing, its physically and mentally healthful benefits, and its availability and accessibility right here and right now. Most important: How could we convince people to come out and try it, at least once?

What resulted? Here are some of Do-Pas-O’s facts and figures since 1998:

- We open to new dancers once a year, in September.
- We hold two open houses, the first is either the third or fourth Saturday in September and the other is the Monday nine days later. Saturdays are the typical “date night”, and Mondays are our regular “new dancer” nights year around.
- As our promotional efforts got better, so did the number of new people we drew each year, growing from 30 to 40 and 50 and then 60, reaching 80 in 2004.

- Obviously not everyone is suited (or motivated) to become a square dancer. We're finding roughly 25 to 30% of those who come to the open houses can be enticed to continue on.
- The smallest class we've graduated since 1998 is ten; it has usually been at or near 20 most years. For instance, from 2001, 19 graduated and 17 dance today. From 2002, 18 graduated and of those 15 dance with us regularly and two others plan to return. 2003 was another big year with many teenagers included. Conflicting activities for some of the teens and a rash of health problems has limited the number who have joined the Club to date, so we can't tell yet how many will eventually be counted.
- At the end of December, 2004 we have over 20 new dancers going strong with every indication all will graduate in April.
- The Club's annual paid memberships grew from 75 in 1998 to 121 in 2003, a better than 60% increase. Just to clarify, students/new dancers are not counted in each year's paid membership totals.
- On our "new dancer" Monday nights, we typically have seven to eight squares, made up of the 20 to 24 students and 36 to 40 angels. With that many squares and angels, the new dancers feel like they're at a dance every week, rather than in a class.
- It's rare when less than at least one square of youths (defined as under age 20) is dancing with us; often it's closer to two squares.
- Because we don't pry into our member's actual ages, we can't give the exact figures, but the Club's dancers' average age has plummeted with the steady influx of both new dancers and the youth.

Our encouraging numbers aren't limited to just our new dancer programs. We're told these are also enviable statistics:

- Our monthly plus level dances average 12 squares. 14 squares are not unusual; 10 squares is a disappointing night.
- Our new dancer and mainstream dances average seven to eight squares (similar to what we get on Monday nights).
- At Do-Pas-O's memorable 50th Anniversary dance two years ago, we hosted 400 dancers (that's 50 squares) and 350 of them dined with us.

We hope the reader will understand the motivation for sharing all of this and what will follow is neither to blow our own horn or pat ourselves on the back, nor even to draw any attention to ourselves or our Club. It's simply this: we

have been asked so many times what it is we do that we decided to put it into writing in order to share it with anyone and everyone who cares. Frankly, we're not totally satisfied with our results. We do see them as a nice beginning, and as encouragement to keep on setting higher expectations and goals. We also see the results as some affirmation that real determination and honest efforts have their rewards.

Another motivation is our belief that many of the things that work for us could work for other clubs, also. Maybe they just didn't think of some of the things we do; or maybe they've given up because they're convinced it can't be done.

It can be done! Our results are proof! Even if your club can do only half of what we do, and you get only half the results, wouldn't that be a worthwhile step forward?

To try to keep things to reasonably readable lengths, we'll relate the key details of just what we do and how we do it in several monthly installments. Next month we'll share the specific things we do to attract people to our open houses. Obviously everything begins with our getting them there in the first place. **THAT IS ABSOLUTELY THE KEY!** Anything else is completely meaningless unless we can get them to come out and try it at least once.

The following month, we'll reveal how we keep them once they've come. We do everything we can to make square dancing the thing they most look forward to each week, and the square dancers they meet the people they most want to spend their discretionary time with. As long as square dancing remains a fun, friendly and satisfying experience, we know they'll keep coming back. If it becomes in any way just another commitment or obligation, another chore or irritant in their lives, they're gone, never to be retrieved.

Our last installment will make a case for our belief that Do-Pas-O's approach is a far more effective, realistic and lasting hope for MWSD's survival, when contrasted with the American Callers' Association's scarily simplistic, one-trick-pony solution: just dumb it down! Strip the guts out of the present basic/mainstream/plus programs and simultaneously turn all dances below the Advanced level and the main floors of all festivals into "dancing for dummies". Supposedly this will miraculously cure all of MWSD's recruiting, retaining, retrieval and festival attendance problems. We'll tell you exactly why we find that to be not only a colossal crock...but also a dangerous and destructive strategy from which far more harm than good will come, especially in the long run.

If you think any of this could be interesting or helpful to you, stay tuned. If you're already doing better than we are, or you're using something that might help us, please share with us. Healthy, growing clubs everywhere are a prerequisite for healthy, growing MWSD. We're all in this together!

Article 2 of 4

Who Says You Can't Get New Dancers? Part II By Pete Wex

There we were in November, 1998: We were left with no new dancers at all that year. Our recruiting results in the previous several years hadn't been spectacular, either. It was the perfect time to take stock and explore options. Attributing our failure to bad luck, a fluke, or "the times in general" wasn't an option: We were looking for solutions, not excuses. So we began by committing to working both harder and smarter...What-ever it would take to have new dancers in the future, we would find and we would do!

It doesn't matter how or in what order things evolved. What does matter is the entire package we use today. We will describe briefly what it is we do and how we do it. Everything that follows has contributed, in at least some degree, to the results we described last month.

Word-of-Mouth - Many will claim this is the most effective recruiting tool of all. We will agree that it can be useful sometimes, particularly if a club has new or fairly new dancers. Those of us who have danced for a decade or more have exhausted our prospects, and so badgered our friends and acquaintances that they now run across the street when they see us coming. But if newer dancers can communicate to others the joy and excitement they've found in their new hobby, they're working on a whole new audience.

To encourage its members to recruit by word-of-mouth, Do-Pas-O offers an incentive/reward program. When members bring in new dancers, and those new dancers complete the mainstream program and join the Club the following September, the recruiting members have their dues waived for a year. What is the cost to the Club? It's one year's dues in exchange for (hopefully) many years of participation and dues by new blood.

Word(s) of advice: Remember when you had new folks all lined up and committed for the first night, only to have their dog eat the car keys just as they were ready to come? Outwit the dog: Pick them up and bring them with you!

Fliers / Posters – Do-Pas-O relies very heavily on fliers and posters to tell our story. Fliers supplement our word-of-mouth. We pass out fliers at our demonstrations. We mail fliers to anyone we can think of that has danced

previously or showed any interest or curiosity, past or present (we keep names and addresses).

The posters (usually eye-catching and multicolored ink and heavy stock) are put up in any public places (stores, restaurants, beauty salons, laundromats, etc.) that permit them. We plaster the area within a half hour drive of our dancing site with these posters, which have attached to them envelopes filled with smaller copies to be taken home.

Look at the sample flier/poster we use. Note particularly what we stress and what we omit completely. There is absolutely no reference to lessons or classes, or to anything that suggests commitment of any type. See the emphasis on “Easy” and “Free”. We have seen some clubs assign a dollar value for the free night (such as \$8 or \$10 per couple). We think the public is accustomed to spending \$25 or more (particularly if refreshments are included), so we leave it to everyone’s imagination to assign their own value.

The telephone number given has to connect the caller with people completely and unabashedly dedicated to and enthralled by Modern Western Square Dance. A call to them presents the activity in all its most positive and enthusiastic dimensions.

We choose the message on our fliers/posters carefully. Remember that the object of the publicity at this stage is purely to entice them to come for that first time. If we can just get them there once, we believe we can hook them! There will be plenty of time to share square dancing’s detailed wonderful story with them later on.

Demonstrations – This topic actually merits another, future article entirely on it, alone. As a public relations or recruiting tool, demonstrations can range anywhere from a huge asset to an absolute disaster, the quickest way to convince people it’s the last thing they would ever want to get involved in.

An example of a demo at its worst? A group of octogenarians hobbling along, wincing in arthritic pain, in time to the tune-less, monotonous dronings of a “has been” or “never was” caller. You can just imagine the stampede of onlookers, rushing to sign on to find their niche in that exciting activity!

Do-Pas-O’s goal is to offer four to six demos a year, the nearer our free open house dates, the better. We focus on recruiting opportunities: We look for and apply to be the entertainment at large company picnics, at festivals or carnivals, at community evenings in the park, etc. We don’t have to be paid...It’s the opportunity to be in front of the people that matters. We want a large audience of active folks that we can get involved and participating!

We bring at least two squares of our most outgoing, enthusiastic, fun-loving dancers, with ages ranging from teens to 80-ish (but still mobile and having a ton of fun). Our dress ranges from the full, traditional garb to summer casual, to appeal to as many tastes as possible.

Our Club Caller is our pride and joy and our biggest asset, perfect for demos! A rollicking, rocking, yodeling dynamo, with boundless enthusiasm and energy, Bill Gordon draws crowds to us and around us. Between tips we go into the audience and hand out fliers, and then each dancer brings a wide-eyed neophyte back to square up and discover just how easy and painless it is to do this stuff.

Some advice here: Although nearly everyone resists when first asked to come out of the audience and participate, understand that it's just human nature. Everyone likes to be coaxed and cajoled. Assure them they'll do just fine and they'll have a great time. Most will not only give in, but they'll thank you afterward for getting them involved.

It's absolutely essential that we show our product in its best light. The public must see our more attractive, appealing, joyful and competent participants. The opportunities we have to show our hobby off are limited. We try to make the most of the chances we do get. Remember this might be the viewer's first impression of our activity, and we all know how very important first impressions are.

Newspaper Articles – Every year, in the week or two just before our open house(s), we try to get an article about MWSD into the “Entertainment” section of our local Sunday newspaper. Sometimes it has been about Do-Pas-O (especially in the year of our 50th Anniversary); other times it was about square dancing in general. Sometimes it's written by a staff reporter, and sometimes by a dancer. Always it's a marvelous opportunity to let the public in on many of the attractions of this wonderful pastime.

Think about this: There is no ad we could take out in that newspaper, and pay dearly for, that will reach more people than this article will for nothing!.

Other Free Advertising – Ordinarily, to “advertise” in the newspaper or on the radio requires big \$\$\$! But square dancing clubs are nonprofit organizations, and local newspapers and radio stations offer free public service announcements for nonprofits. Here, our local newspapers (morning and evening) have “Happenings” and “Weekend” sections where we list all of our activities every week throughout the year, and local radio stations announce our events on their “Bulletin Board” and “Community Calendar of Events”.

Our local AAA magazine lists our events free, as does the local cable network, continuously scrolling upcoming events. This is just a handful of the available

avenues to get free advertising or listing of events. You have similar opportunities wherever you are, if you will just take the initiative to find them.

We tried a few other things but discarded them: placemats one year and a \$400 newspaper ad another. Both were costly and attracted no one. A club we respect has had some success with lawn signs in high traffic areas. We're considering that, but haven't yet worked out the message we want to use.

Well, that's it! That's what works for us. As we said last month, there are no startling revelations here, nothing unique or particularly brilliant. Anybody could have thought of the things we do. Anybody (and any club) can do them. What is required is dedication, consistency, and lots of hard work! The entire club, starting with the officers, has to be absolutely committed to the program, and everybody has to pitch in and do his/her fair share. Everybody has to distribute fliers and posters. Everybody has to be looking for demo opportunities. Everybody has to be willing to spread the word and sing the praises of MWSD.

When people come to our open houses, we record where or how they learned about us. We've discovered it has been pretty equally spread over the five tools we've listed, with perhaps a small edge to the fliers and posters. We can't emphasize this enough: It is not one thing but the entire body of work that brings the numbers we get to our open houses! There is no quick, easy fix!

The purpose of any advertising is to create awareness and pique interest. The repetition, the saturation and the bombardment we lay upon our area helps to do that. When the public continuously hears or sees "square dancing", it builds a notion of both credibility and staying power in the eyes of the beholder. Repeating it year after year reinforces that. I believe that's why the numbers coming to our open houses increases each year: Some are the fruits of seeds planted in previous years.

So, we'll grant you the times have changed, and people are no longer lined up just waiting to come into our hobby. We now have to go out, find them, and convince them we've got something really good going here. It is a whole lot more difficult than it used to be. But don't try to tell us it can't be done.

Every couple, every individual we can coax to come and check us out is an extremely precious commodity. But getting them there was only the first half of a huge challenge. Keeping them there long enough for each to discover for themselves the real beauty and joy of MWSD is the other. Apparently Do-Pas-O's retention rate is also better than most. Next month, we'll relate how our Club opens its arms to new dancers, and helps them to choose MWSD as their favorite and most fulfilling hobby and pastime.

HOW DO YOU KEEP 'EM, ONCE YOU GET 'EM?
Part I of Two Parts
By Pete Wex

You tried the things we suggested last month. Everybody got on board and gave it some serious effort. Your fliers and posters, demos and free advertising did the job, and now you have a packed open house! Break out the champagne (okay, milk and cookies 'cause you're square dancers); the Club is saved!

I hate to rain on your parade, but so far you're only part way toward achieving anything meaningful. Now you have to deal with the next issue: How many of these people will you keep and turn into long-term square dancers?

Be prepared for an immediate reality check: You will probably lose up to two thirds of them after the very first night. As much as we love it, Modern Western square Dance isn't for everyone. There's a multitude of reasons why they won't be back, and there's little you can do about it. They won't return because...

- Your regular dance night is impossible for them.
- They have youngsters at home and no sitter on school nights.
- They came tonight because it was free.
- They were curious...not really interested...just curious.
- "There, I tried it once! Now get off my back!"

and lots of other reasons, all valid from their perspectives.

That's why if you want a meaningful number going forward, you should have three or four times that many the first night. Don't waste any time bemoaning what couldn't be. Focus your efforts and energies on keeping and nurturing those who do have an interest in and an aptitude or potential for becoming square dancers. It's with these folks that you have an opportunity to accomplish something. But be prepared that it, too, won't come easily.

Whenever I see the appalling nationwide statistics of how few new dancers are still dancing after a year, and how many total are lost within the first two years, I'm utterly dismayed at the sheer ineptitude of our clubs, our callers and teachers, and our leadership across the country. How could so many have messed up this wonderful activity so badly?

It makes me nuts! Every one of the people who continued on beyond the first few nights clearly said by his/her presence alone

- "I'm interested in doing this."
- "It appears to be a good fit for me."
- "I'd like to do more of it."

Out of these, some will have either learning or physical disabilities that preclude their ever becoming competent square dancers, and some will be lost to injury or

sickness, and a few will move away. None of that can be helped or avoided. What makes me boil is all those others who began our activity with so much enthusiasm, and within a year or two were reduced to "I'm not interested in this after all, and I'm not going to do it any longer!"

I believe wholeheartedly that it doesn't have to be that way. There is nothing inherently wrong with MWSD itself. The notion that today's MWSD has become too complicated is a boatload of hooey, the product of a desperation mentality that cries, "Let's latch onto something quick and easy, even if it's incredibly flawed. That notion's appeal is that it neatly deflects attention and responsibility away from the much tougher real issues: Our hobby today has become dominated by unenthused, lethargic, lazy clubs, taught by uninspiring, talentless, even incompetent callers, under the "leadership" of disinterested, unimaginative, serving-only-by-default officers. Dumbing the dancing down won't help one iota with any of the truly critical issues MWSD faces. If anything, it will disgust and drive away the devotees the activity does have.

Okay, you aren't reading this for a rehash of the problems. We (Do-Pas-O), too, have struggled with the retention of dancers issue. Apparently, when compared to nationwide experience, we are doing more than most to overcome it.

There's a wonderful term that modern technology has brought into everyday language: "user-friendly". Everybody understands what it means. When products, activities and ideas are marketed, they are touted as user-friendly. Nowhere is user-friendliness more important than in recreational activities, which are entirely discretionary on the participant's part. Every one of us will choose to do those things (and only those things) that give us the most pleasure and satisfaction. Why would we choose anything else when selecting our leisure pursuits?

Have you heard of "20 Questions"? Well, we're going to play "20 Answers". We will describe 20 things that Do-Pas-O does, or has, or changed, or avoids. Everything is aimed at maximizing the user-friendliness of the Club and the entire square dancing experience, much of it especially for new dancers. The order in which they appear is roughly the order in which the new dancer encounters them.

- 1.) After working very hard to entice our guests into our house (our dancing site), it's now up to us to do everything we can to make them feel entirely at home as soon as possible. At the very least, the first night has to be so much fun that they'll want to see much more of both square dancing and of us.

- 2.) The caller makes the single, most influential early impression on the new dancer. Our Bill Gordon is an enthusiastic, talented, humorous, endlessly patient teacher and ambassador. In his 13 years with us, not one impatient or sarcastic word has passed his lips. Typical of Bill is his calming reassurance whenever

some dancers aren't getting it right away: "Don't worry; we'll do this until I get it right."

3.) For our parts, the rest of us just love 'em to death (figuratively, of course). We promptly give them name badges (and we always wear our Club badges), so that we can quickly learn their names and always greet them by name. We're an outgoing, friendly, hugging bunch. It takes little time for most of the newcomers to get caught up in the warmth and friendliness. We try to spot right away those few who find hugging a little too much an encroachment on their personal space, and we show our appreciation for them in ways they find less intrusive.

4.) Strategically, we go one day at a time, studiously avoiding any references to "classes" or "lessons", and we ask for no commitment whatsoever. At the end of the first night (a Saturday), we urge them to come to our next "new dancers" night, if they enjoyed themselves tonight. When they come to the next one (a Monday), we explain that we hold "new dancer" dances every Monday night, and we invite them to keep coming as long as it continues to be fun! Because the Caller will introduce some new calls each night, we encourage them to miss as few nights as possible, so that they can keep up with everyone. Experience has shown that asking for a long-term commitment too early can push people into bowing out right then and there, before they have a chance to fall in love with the hobby. When we tell them they only have to come as long as they're having fun, we can't beat them off with a stick!

5.) We view asking for financial commitments (paying for blocks of weeks in advance, or paying for nights missed) to be equally as counterproductive as asking for time commitments. It can send the message that we're more interested in their money than in them or in their dancing with us. We don't care if we break even or not. If there's a single dollar in the treasury, there isn't any other investment a club can make that is as absolutely essential to its survival as are its new dancers.

6.) Speaking of investment, how soon to (or whether to at all) purchase "proper square dance attire" is not an issue for our new dancers. Do-Pas-O has no dress code for any of its activities, be they classes, workshops or dances. We don't believe clothes do make the man (or dancer, in this case). For example, we visited a club a few years ago where its women were quite scandalized that several of our dancers sported prairie skirts. Two years later that club no longer existed, while we and our prairie skirts are flourishing. Tradition is good, but multiple uses practicality is much more user-friendly.

7.) For those dancers who know they're committed and want square dancing apparel, we hold a big clothing sale every year, usually in late January. The Club has amassed an impressive collection, entirely through voluntary donations by former dancers (or by dancers who've experienced meaningful growth, of a physical nature). The prices border on give-away. The new dancers acquire

wardrobes at an amazingly low cost; the Club's treasury gets a little boost from the sheer volume sold. Everybody wins!

8.) Do-Pas-O's Caller and dancers fit together beautifully. Both he and we favor energetic, upbeat music and a quick pace. Not only is it livelier and much more fun for the dancers, but they also learn to both process information and move about the square more quickly, which in turn lead to better flow and fewer breakdowns. There's another advantage: Dancers who are experienced at a quicker pace have no problem adjusting to something slower (although they might find it boring or tedious), whereas dancers who know only a slower pace are dead in the water when confronted with having to pick it up.

9.) In the first few months, we absolutely avoid demonstrating to the new dancers what the Club's experienced dancers can do, even if they ask us to. It's tempting to show off a little, to try to impress them with how much we've learned and how "good" we are. But, in reality, the impact on the new dancers is a very negative one. To them, it will look hugely and hopelessly complicated. Rather than impressing them with our skills, it will seriously intimidate and discourage them by revealing how little they really do know at this point, and how far they will have to go. The first time they see us dance our level rather than theirs is at the Club's Christmas dance, open to everyone. By that time, we've stroked and complimented them enough on their progress, and they trust us enough to rely on our assurances that they'll get to and master the level they just saw quicker and easier than they now think. Now, hopefully it becomes more a "goal" and less an intimidation.

10.) There is one thing we do (that we have to do) that we dread: the culling out and cutting loose the few folks who, for one reason or another, will never become dancers. In any group of new dancers, it soon becomes evident who's getting it and who isn't. The "isn'ts" are the ones who can't complete any calls on their own, and who break down every square they're in. As distasteful as we may find it, the Club's leadership has the responsibility to deal with the realities. We owe the rest of our participants the opportunity to progress and experience the satisfaction and joy of "dancing". The longer we delay, the more frustration has to be tolerated and the more valid the question, "If I was doing so badly, why did you let me go this long?" If done quickly, quietly, and tactfully, it inflicts the least pain possible, all around.

We promised you 20 "answers". Because of time and length, we're stopping here this month. These first 10 are particularly useful with new dancers, so this is a logical place to pause.

Next month, we'll share 10 more answers, applicable to both newer and experienced dancers. Check in to see how many of these user-friendly approaches your club already practices, and how many others could add something positive for you.

Article 4 of 4

How Do you Keep ‘Em, Once You Get ‘Em?

Part Two

By Pete Wex

Last month we revealed 10 of Do-Pas-O's "answers" to keep new dancers, after we succeeded in coaxing them to come out and give square dancing a try. We mentioned things the Club does, or doesn't do, or tries to avoid, in order to be as "user friendly" as possible. The first 10 were particularly accommodating to new dancers. Some of the 10 that follow also help the newer dancer, and others are useful for various stages of experience within the Club.

11.) From the beginning, all our dancers are encouraged to become involved in the activity as a whole, not just our Club's or our Caller's events. Our table usually sports at least 50 different sets of fliers for other clubs and their dances, festivals, conventions, etc. We print our own listing of area events suitable for the newer dancer's stage of readiness, and we announce those events regularly. We know that the more they dance around, the better dancers they will become. The better they become, the more they will enjoy and become addicted to the hobby. And, the more they will appreciate the unique advantages of their own Club and Caller. As the saying goes, "It's great to travel, but there's no place like home!"

12.) We "protect" our newer dancers. Whether it's at regular dances, festivals or conventions, or events such as Lancaster County's annual Heart Fund Dance, our more experienced dancers square up with and "look out for" our fledglings. Our protective nature is sometimes interpreted as "cliquey". Quite frankly, the long-term future of our neophytes concerns us a whole lot more than anyone else's opinions. We will always welcome in any other experienced dancers who enjoy encouraging and helping newcomers. It's exhilarating and recharges those of us who truly love MWSD when we see each new dancer's confidence and skills grow; we know that success breeds more success, and we're probably looking at a future long time dancer. We do begin to let loose a little when we're convinced they truly understand that the rude, impatient, thoughtless clod who has forgotten what it was like to be a new dancer is the fool, not they.

13.) Historically, according to its constitution, Do-Pas-O was a Plus level club, and a member had to have the skill level of a Plus level Modern Western Square Dancer. We realized that requirement closed the door for membership to anyone content to dance the Mainstream program and/or who hadn't completed Plus classes. It would force dancers to go on before they wanted to, whether prepared or not, or even to quit the Club. That seemed pretty foolish to us. We undertook a thorough, detailed revision of our entire constitution. Among many

changes, it now states that membership is open to anyone who has at least a Mainstream MWSD skill level.

Today, some our members dance only as Angels on Monday nights, or choose to go purely (and happily) to Mainstream or New Dancer level dances. Everybody's content! Everybody's doing what they want to, and the Club can accommodate more dancers. Our membership grows, and everybody wins!

14.) Directly related to #13, we (officers, Caller and New Dancer Coordinators) monitor the progress of the dancers closely. Ideally, each should experience growth in confidence and skill at a pace appropriate and comfortable for him/her. One thing we try to avoid is dancers moving up faster or higher than their current skills warrant. Letting them get in over their heads can have only bad consequences. They will either become discouraged themselves and quit dancing, or they will alienate and exasperate others to the point that the others lose interest. In either case, MWSD needlessly loses dancers.

By communicating with and guiding the dancers carefully, we try to help them choose the best niche for their skill level. Those not yet ready to move on we encourage instead to come back in September to help us as Angels, while at the same time reinforcing and strengthening their own skills. Those ready to begin Plus lessons we invite to do so, and then monitor their progress at that level. They, too, are encouraged to come back as Angels, to become even more proficient dancers.

15.) The term "New Dancer Coordinator" was introduced in #14. It's a nonExecutive Committee office we created nearly a decade ago, designed to provide special advocates, mentors, "father confessors" for the new dancers, to be a liaison between them and the Club. Experienced dancers, they are chosen for their tact and diplomacy, empathy and patience, enthusiasm, and dedication to MWSD. Their daunting task is to keep everybody happy. They might have to convey needs or concerns from the new dancers' perspectives to the parties who can achieve a resolution. Or, in reverse, they may have to mediate and convey Club concerns to the new group or individuals. Always, their objective is to keep everyone cognizant of the enjoyment and fulfillment MWSD offers, and the new dancer's place in it, now and for the future.

16.) The Club has become a haven for exuberant, fun-loving, youthful demeanor and outlook people. Members seem to understand it's healthy to play as hard as they work. Our dances are typically noisy, energetic events, with smiles and laughter abounding. We're complimented for our enthusiasm, friendliness and hospitality. We suspect a young-at-heart attitude has helped us in attracting and keeping our young dancers.

Which do you believe, that it's a full hall that creates the atmosphere and attitude, or that it's attitude and atmosphere that fill the hall? We firmly believe it's the

latter, and that allows us to control our own destiny. We know it's our responsibility to create an atmosphere that makes people want to dance with us, and come back again!

17.) Everyone likes to see his/her name in print, and everybody wants to know what's going on or coming up. Every October Do-Pas-O publishes a Year Book containing all the members, new dancers, the year's schedule, birthdays, anniversaries, committee assignments, phone chain for notifications, the Club Constitution, etc., about 25 pages in all. At least quarterly (more frequently, if needed), a newsletter named "Patter Call" is published, full of information about the Club and its members, and also about MWSD in general. And, we urge you to visit the Club's website: www.dopaso.org. We'll let it speak for itself.

All three products not only reflect the talents and dedication of their respective authors/designers, but they also help to make every member feel pretty good (and maybe a little proud?) about the organization that they've chosen to be part of.

18.) A lot of clubs regularly lose their more capable and experienced dancers to the higher levels (Advanced and Challenge). Sometimes these people just want new stimulation and growth, and sometimes they're simply fed up with the weak, unimaginative, monotonous, even downright incompetent dancing and calling they've encountered all too often. Once in the higher level, most stop supporting their original clubs. This is a real loss: The Club is now without its potentially most competent Angels, and what could have been its most experienced and savvy leadership.

In the 15 years I'm familiar with, not one dancer or couple has left Do-Pas-O in favor of Advanced. In fact, a few Advanced dancers have joined the Club. As its dancers become more experienced and competent, those who wanted to challenge themselves more branched into arky, no hands, or phantom dancer tips. 2 ½ years ago, two Do-Pas-O couples founded an entirely separate Dance by Definition Club, named "Unconventional Squares". Do-Pas-O's strongest dancers (joined by some from other clubs up to 1 ½ hours away) have chosen this as their rejuvenation and stimulation. With DBD as their creative outlet, all remain loyal to and active in their original clubs.

19.) Do-Pas-O has been wise enough from its beginning to never have allowed term limits to be placed on its offices/officers. As a result, the Club has enjoyed remarkable stability and consistency in its leadership, philosophy, and direction. The membership is free to re-elect as often as they wish those who have shown a talent for, effectiveness in and dedication to an office. The Club's leadership is entirely proactive rather than reactive. Everything the Club does is revisited and reevaluated regularly, even if it's working just fine at the moment. Potential problems are headed off or minimized or, if they couldn't be anticipated, when they do arise, they are dealt with promptly and decisively. Bottom Line: Even

though the purpose of the Club is entirely fun and recreation, and it is a nonprofit organization, it is managed with the same attention to detail, goals, and sense of responsibility (fiscal and other) that would be needed to make a business successful.

20.) Last, but far from least, are some characteristics that quickly become evident when this Club as a whole is observed. One is that, whereas in many organizations it's common to have a small minority do a great majority of the work, in this one a great majority willingly steps forward to do its share, and more, whenever needed. Also, it has been and is a group that is astonishingly free of politics, factions and/or egos. From the officers to the newest dancers, all strive together harmoniously for the same goal: To get as much enjoyment out of this activity as they can, for themselves, their fellow dancers, and their Club.

A legitimate question (for which I admittedly haven't an answer) is, has the Club just been dumb lucky in attracting such a cooperative, harmonious group, or is there an attitude and atmosphere in the organization that everyone buys into and adopts as their own attitude and behavior? I certainly hope it's the latter. Dumb luck you don't have any control over, but when something is the result of something else you're doing, you can keep on doing it!!!

So, does any of this appear useful to you? We hope a lot of it does. We just want to stress again that these articles weren't written to applaud Do-Pas-O or hold it up as a model for everything done right. But we do hope the readers will look at and think about these things that work for us, and try any that might help their clubs. And we hope other clubs will continue to share what works effectively for them. We'll take all the help we can get.

We are all in this together, and if we want to dance in full halls and at flourishing festivals, we all have to be successful in reversing the continuing net loss of dancers. It does not have to be that way! But we all have to work harder and a whole lot smarter than ever before! If we care enough, we will!

In Memoriam

On April 11, Do-Pas-O and Square Dancing lost a leader and very active participant. Glenn Hemperly, (husband of Bonnie) had been Do-Pas-O's Treasurer for the past seven years, and was co-founder of Unconventional Squares, Lancaster's DBD club. He also co-managed the popular annual All Day-All DBD event.

Before Glenn's illness, he would load up his big Suburban (affectionately known as "The Bus") and haul a Do-Pas-O square off in whatever direction a good dance was going on. Glenn loved good festivals, too, and attended many in the PA, NJ, MD and VA areas. Whenever Arky, DBD or Hot Hash sessions were held, Glenn was right there!