

News From New Jersey
RUTGERS PROMENADERS
By Ken Robinson
March 2, 2015

Here are a few things that I think helped turn the club around:

- 1) We moved our dances from Thursday evening (which worked well when the club was still a college club) to Sunday afternoon. The original thought was that we would get families with young kids to come then. Initially, that didn't work; we got senior citizens who didn't want to drive at night.
- 2) The club always encouraged families with young kids to come to the dances, even if the kids didn't dance. There was always an adult to watch the kids; many of those kids are now dancing. We now say we are a "family friendly" club.
- 3) About six or seven years ago, a family of with home schooled kids showed up at one of our dances and asked when we were starting lessons. We hadn't planned on doing lessons that year, but we said "Today"; that was the start of the club's growth. The kids in that family got their friends to come and the momentum built from there. Then some of the teens got their parents to learn!
- 4) We hold our lessons before our regular dance. One hour of lessons and then there are class level tips during our regular dance. This way the class members feel like they are in the club from day one. They also get used to coming to the dance on our regular dance day, not some other day/time. We don't quite get through the Mainstream program by the end of the dance season, but we graduate the class anyway and encourage them to get out and dance. Our retention rate has been very good over the last few years. I don't have exact figures, but I would guess that it's on the order of about 90%.
- 5) Although we are technically a "couples" club, we do not require people to be coupled up before getting into a square. There are almost always people who are willing to fill a spot in a square, and many of our regular dancers can dance either part.
- 6) Since almost everyone in the club has an e-mail address, communication is done via e-mail.
- 7) We dance the Mainstream program and welcome dancers who are coming back into the activity. We've had some members ask if we would dance any Plus tips at the dance and both Betsy and Dan have said "No Way"!

8) We are a fun club to dance with and we dance with our visitors!

9) We moved to a nice facility with no steps, a good floor, and good lighting. It was more than double the cost of our old dance hall, but the increased attendance at our dances more than paid for the move.

Here are a few things we don't do:

1) We don't require any specific dress code. While personally, I don't think this matters all that much, I've noticed that teens like to dress up and the new dancers love to buy square dance outfits.

2) We don't have committees and require members to be on them.

3) We don't require members to bring refreshment, but almost everyone does. We have one couple who has been refreshment chairs for years and they set up the punch bowl and some refreshments, but there's no sign-up sheets

4) We don't push new dancers into leadership roles. For example, a few years ago a new graduate came up to me and asked what her job was for the following year. I told her that her job was to come to dances and have fun!

5) We don't discourage rowdiness in the squares. If the kids (and those of us who never grew up) want to horse around in a square (dancing as couples, nine pin, trading between squares), we let them.