



THE NEST - by Dave & Claudia Littlefair, CALGARY

ABOUT THE CLUB

The Banff Trailers Club dance every second Saturday, and have New Dancer lessons every Monday night. Each September several New Dancers would join, but due to factors such as illness, time constraints, vacations, only some were able to complete the year. The club was looking for a new way to increase their numbers, and when

'The Nest' idea was presented they agreed to give it a try during the 2014-15 dance year.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

This program was designed by an American square dancer, Dale Bennett, in 2012. It is run with a Caller and several Narrators. The Mainstream Program is broken down into one-couple, two-couple and four-couple calls. The Narrators, who are trained square angels, teach the one and two-couple calls at stations, using a script of patter. They read the script and stop when they reach a new call. The Narrator teaches the call, and then the script is read again until the next new call. After several new calls, the same script can be re-read with patter music, to reinforce the calls that were taught. On completion of the one and two-couple calls, the New Dancer is ready to move on to the last station - the Four-Couple calls which is taught by the Caller.

Square angels were needed to fill in at the Narrator Stations, which operated with a minimum of two couples. We usually ran with two Narrator Stations plus the Caller Station. At the beginning of the year, there were no dancers who were ready for the Four-Couple Caller-Station, so that time was used to review the more complicated calls with any of the square angels who weren't needed at the Narrator Stations.

We modified the program format to include dancing together as one group. A typical evening is broken down as follows:

- First 1/2 Hour - danced all together in the main room, using the Sicilian Circle and introducing basic moves.
- Next Hour - Station Work.
- Last 1/2 Hour - danced together in the main room, this time in squares, up to the level of calls that were taught at the Narrator Stations, or with quick teaches for moves that weren't covered.
- Pooled Lunch.

ADVANTAGES

- Multiple Entry Points: A New Dancer can start any Monday night during the entire dance year. This also means they can bring friends any time they want to (friends don't have to wait until next fall to join).
- Can encourage New Dancers, every week, to bring their friends. New concept!
- Learn at own pace. Can go thru the MS program in 8 weeks or 8 months - whatever time it takes.
- If absent (eg. vacation, sickness) it's not an issue. The dancer can pick up from wherever he or she left off, or can review the moves and then continue on.

DISADVANTAGES

- Advertising must be done throughout the year, not just at the beginning. This increases costs and also the work done by club volunteers.
- Does not follow the same order as the Callerlab Mainstream list. If New Dancers are going to beginner-level dances outside of the Club, any 'missing' calls need to be taught.
- Requires a designated New Dancer night, without Mainstream, in order for this to work.

RESULTS & OBSERVATIONS

- 35 people tried out the program. Of the 35, 15 came once or twice and dropped out for various reasons. 20 stayed - or 57%.
- Of the 20 who came regularly, 11 completed the MS program. The non-completes either started too late to finish or had too many absences to complete the program.
- If we had done the dance year the "old way" with one entry point, only 5 people would have started, and none of them would have completed the program, due to sicknesses and vacations. Because of the flexibility that the Nest offers, three of these 5 completed the year, the other two quit for health reasons.
- 25% of the people who came, some of whom stayed, were friends of the New Dancers.
- We attracted younger ages – our group of New Dancers ranged from early-20's to 70+ years.
- The younger the dancers, the faster they went through the program. It seemed to take the same amount of explanation and walk-thrus, but the younger dancers were much better at remembering and retaining the information from week to week.