

West Coast Square Dancing Story

Gord Ruedig

We've been using West Coast in our region since 2012. Most clubs use it as a teaching order for the first half of the year and then forge ahead with Mainstream lessons in the second half while providing our new dancers with West Coast level dances on a rotation through various clubs in the region. This has been reasonably successful as a way of retaining new dancers and opening their eyes at an early stage to the larger world of square dance beyond the class setting.

It was not my original intention for West Coast to be used in this fashion but it was the best deal I could broker with the clubs in my region when I came up with the plan.

My club uses West Coast as a destination program for most of our new dancers. I say most because we've found that of the new dancers who walk through the door, 70% are there for a little bit of exercise and have no intention of making square dancing their lifetime passion so we roll with it. The calls selected for West Coast are sufficient to provide everyone who attends with a reasonable dance experience regardless of their ability without asking for too much of their time to learn the language. My club has grown by 30% since adopting the program in spite of the fact that we've lost just about all of the old guard to attrition over the past six years.

For those dancers who have an inclination to travel, I also teach Mainstream Completion on a separate evening. We don't push people to take this step until they've danced with the club for a couple years. With some basic dance skills and language under their belts it is absolutely amazing how fast they pick up the remaining calls.

The "Flexible Learning" program is a new twist I've been experimenting with this year. I've already seen some positive results, for example: after completing the first module one of my new dancers had an accident and was laid up for a few weeks. Under the old system that might have spelled the end for her and her partner's season or put a serious strain on the class when they returned. They came back, took the third module, rejoined us in the new year and have completed the entire course and are now attending club dances. More commonly, people head south for a little break from winter and return ready to carry on where they left off - if we give them the opportunity to!

I think the flexible learning concept has great potential and that it could also be applied equally as effectively to teaching plans for Mainstream and beyond if someone wanted to put a little effort into developing such.