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## Club invites dancers to drop in

(by Lisa Kintish - August 06, 2008)

"Face your partner and do-si-do," announced the caller as 74 people followed his direction. Square dancing had taken over the Senior House in Montville Township.

This evening was particularly special in that it was the fifth Tuesday of the month, meaning it was a "Drop-In Square Dance" hosted by the Lakeland Squares Western Square Dance Club, and was open to the public, no experience required. People came from all over - Parsippany, Wayne, and Paramus, to name just a few of the towns.

"It is a way to introduce people to square dancing," said Kathy Keener, Lakeland's president. "Everybody is so busy, this is more casual than signing up for regular classes."

Lakeland was incorporated in 1978 and currently has about 35 members, ranging in age from 40 on up. Dances, for those who have completed classes, are held every first, second, and fourth Tuesday of the month, except for an August break and on holidays. There is much camaraderie among square dancers, so other clubs often join in the dances for an average attendance of anywhere from 24 to 32 dancers.



According to Keener, who lives in Mine Hill, "There are several program levels of square dancing difficulty. The first level is Mainstream, consisting of 69 different calls which can be choreographed in any order. This is the program level that Lakeland dances at. We offer a class every year running from September through April to teach these 69 calls. Upon graduation the dancers can dance at any Mainstream dance all over the United States and indeed, all over the world. The calls are standardized and sung in English everywhere. I have danced in Japan and Nova Scotia and felt right at home."

She continued, "Many members in our club have learned the 31 calls in the next program level, Plus. We have a 15-Minute Plus Workshop at every regular dance and the caller calls one tip in Plus for the Plus dancers."

On the third and fifth Tuesdays of the month, the uninitiated public can join in. The Drop-In Dances follow a smaller number of standardized calls.

"It will be dancing for fun and immediate pleasure, rather than having the drill of a class. Dancers can come to as few or as many dances as they wish and always find they can fit in. It is similar in concept to the line dancing held in bars. Children and teens are welcome with an adult. No partner is necessary. No special type of attire is required. It costs \$5, with no cost for children 12 and under. Dancers who get their dance card signed three times can dance the fourth night free of charge," said Keener.

There used to be only about four Drop-In Dances a year, but more have been added. In fact, this night was the first of an 11-month series.

There are two types of square dancing, the kind done by the club which is Modern Western and then there is Traditional also called Old Time Square Dance.

Keener said, "Our Modern Western Square Dance, which grew out of the traditional square dance or barn dance became popular in the 1950s. Since then, its popularity has ebbed and flowed."

Square dancing got a boost in 1982 when President Reagan signed an act making square dance the official folk dance of the United States. It is also New Jersey's official folk dance. Sig Eisele is someone who understands the appeal of square dancing. A club member, the Rockaway resident has been dancing for 20 years.

"You get to know people. There's friendship. Friendship set to music, really," she said.

Arlene Remington who traveled from Glen Rock to attend the dance is a member of the Belles and Beaux Club. Relatively new to square dance, Remington finished the class this past May.

"I love it. I love dancing of every kind," she said, offering additional reasons for doing it, "I wanted exercise. Everybody is so friendly and social."

Along with Remington was her friend Dottie Surdez, who has attended a couple of Drop-In Dances.

"I enjoy the exercise. I feel comfortable. I know I can walk in alone and not be alone, that's the feeling you get, you come and someone will ask you to dance. You're not a wallflower."

As for Keener, she said, "I love square dancing! The endless patterns in which the calls can be combined are mentally challenging and stimulating. It is fun to see what the caller can come up with next. Moving to music is an interesting, satisfying type of exercise. Square dancing is teamwork. You have to cooperate with the other seven people in your square to successfully complete the dance."

She added, "Square dancers are some of the most open, accepting, friendly people I know. Whenever I square dance, I become totally involved and the cares of the day slip away. I am particularly fond of Lakeland Squares. It is my 'mother club,' meaning I first learned to dance there. I feel a strong sense of identity and loyalty to Lakeland. Lakeland Squares is particularly hospitable. Everyone is warmly welcomed and made to feel special. We make sure that everyone has a chance to dance and has a good time. I find that the members of our club are like a second family to me. They are unfailingly friendly and helpful. I look forward to dancing with them every week."

For more information, contact Keener at 973-366-8064 or by e-mail at [lakelandsquares@hotmail.com](mailto:lakelandsquares@hotmail.com).

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Photos by David Vnencak

Photo 1: A crowd of beginners and experienced square dancers take advantage of the drop-in dance.

Photo 2: The crowd at the Lakeland Squares' recent drop-in dance, held at the Senior House in Montville Township, proves that square dancing is alive and well.

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