

## Daily Record

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### Square dancing appealing to young adults *LISE GREENE SPECIAL TO THE DAILY RECORD*

Linda Leslie, like many college students, was looking for something fun to do one evening. A senior at Douglass College, she went with a friend to a square dance on campus.

"Boy, was I surprised by the number of dancers," she recalled. "I had never realized so many young adults thought square dancing was fun."

As a bonus, she met Rick Murphy at the dance, and the two are still dosado-ing together 28 years later.

Morris County has three square dance clubs, each one specializing in a different "program" or level of dancing. Lakeland Squares in Montville is geared toward the first program, called Mainstream. Those who have mastered the next program, called Plus, can dance at the Reelers in Randolph. Mountain Squares in Whippany offers dancing at the next highest program, called Advanced.

All three organizations are members of the Northern New Jersey Square Dancers Association (NNJSDA), which comprises 22 clubs throughout the region. Dancers freely circulate among the clubs, though most have a home club.

What is square dancing, anyway?

Square dancing means dancing in a square? Yes, but the dancers are not always in a square formation, and they're actually walking to the beat of the music rather than dancing in the usual sense.

Following the directions of a caller, the eight dancers (two on each side of the square) move in various patterns, either alone or interacting with their partner or others in the square.

The music can be virtually anything from country-Western and folk to rock and new age. In modern Western square dancing -- the style used in Morris County's clubs -- the emphasis is more on modern and less on hee-haw.

As square dancers arrive for an evening out, some are dressed in traditional garb (crinolines and bolos), though many wear prairie skirts or ordinary street clothes. Dancers range in age from teens through very senior citizens, but the common threads running through comments from all dancers are fun, friendship, exercise and travel.

For about \$5 or \$6, a dancer can enjoy an evening out, and many frazzled parents are especially eager to have a wholesome activity away from their kids at a nominal charge. All 22 clubs in the NNJSDA spread a bountiful refreshment table, included in the price of admission. Alcoholic beverages are not allowed, but dancers can typically indulge in homemade cakes and cookies, fruit, vegetables, cheese and crackers.

In some places, there are square dance clubs dedicated to singles, teens, and campers. In New York, the Times Squares was founded by gay dancers, but welcomes everyone. Dance vacation resorts are available worldwide.

Lakeland Squares, Montville

Lakeland Squares caters to both new dancers and those who are experienced at the Mainstream level. Dances are held most Tuesdays from September through July at the Senior House in Montville, and always include the teaching of some Plus moves.

But on third and fifth Tuesdays, the club holds "Drop-In ABC" dances for the public. A few basic calls are taught at each dance so that anyone can be swinging and sashaying all evening without ever taking formal lessons.

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Kathy Keener of Mine Hill started dancing about 20 years ago.

"The other dancers were so friendly and the dancing so much fun that square dancing has become a lifelong hobby," she said. She is currently the president of Lakeland Squares.

As with many other single dancers, Keener has no problem finding partners on the dance floor. Although her own club is Mainstream, she has taken lessons through the Advanced level and enjoys visiting many other square dance clubs.

Lakeland's former president, Monte Montagnino, dances with his wife Janet, who is legally blind.

"We enjoy it," he said. "We love the exercise, and it's an activity we can do together."

Sophia and Patrick Chen of Montville agree.

"When we first discovered square dancing four years ago," Patrick said, "I told my wife that we had finally found a very good activity we could do for the rest of our lives. Lakeland Squares brings happiness to so many people."

Reelers Square Dance Club, Randolph

The Reelers dance at the Plus level on first and third Friday nights from September through June at Ironia School in Randolph.

"We joined the Reelers primarily because the dances were on a Friday night," said Linda Murphy, who lives in Morristown. "With work and children, Friday was a night that brought with it the knowledge that we could wake up late the next morning if we were worn out."

The problem was that the Murphys had been away from dancing for several years while raising their family, and their earlier dancing was at the Mainstream level. Happily for them, the Reelers offer classes beginning with Mainstream each fall and continuing on to Plus in January. Rick and Linda completed the Plus lessons in 2005, and then encountered another setback.

"We didn't become active dancers until 2006 due to my bout with breast cancer," Linda Murphy said. Their new square dance friends were supportive during that hard year, and "it's been a lot of fun ever since." They recently became the club's presidents.

The Reelers and many other clubs alternate square dancing with round dancing, which uses ballroom steps done to cues. (Around dance cuer serves the same function as a square dance caller. Separate lessons are needed to master round dancing.) The Reelers attract many visitors, such as the Chens, who enjoy round dancing and getting some floor time with Plus calls.

Mountain Squares, Whippany

Local square dancers who continue climbing the mountain of dance levels, so to speak, have found a home at Mountain Squares. The club dances the Advanced program at Lady of Mercy Parish Center in Whippany every first and third Wednesday from September through June, with a two-month winter break.

"But if members of another club join us, we dance most of the evening at their level," said Mary Jane Roome of Brookside, who with husband Greg belongs to both Mountain Squares and Reelers. In those cases, the caller will sneak in a few Advanced moves to give the uninitiated a taste of some higher level dancing. There will also be opportunities for the Advanced dancers to strut their stuff alone on the dance floor.

The Roomes started square dancing when they were caring for her elderly parents.

"I wanted something we could enjoy once a week by ourselves, something that would take our total concentration," Mary Jane Roome said. "Square dance lessons did it. While dancing, I couldn't think about anything else."

Like the Roomes, many square dancers belong to multiple clubs. Paul and Jan Sanderson of Westfield and George and LouEllen Stoms of Roselle Park belong to a Mainstream/Plus club in Union County as well as Mountain Squares in Morris County.

"We met each other while taking lessons," George Stoms said. "Then we went to other clubs together once or twice a

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week during the summer. After that we were hooked, and now travel to a dance weekend once a month."

"Two couples getting out for dinner and a dance make it even more fun," Paul Sanderson said.

Both couples have danced throughout the country, including attendance at the annual National Square Dance Conventions that draw thousands of participants. They've also danced around the world. No matter where in the world a square dance club is located, the calls are standardized in English.

SQUARE DANCE LESSONS IN MORRIS COUNTY Lakeland Squares Introductory dance: Monday, 7:30 p.m. (no charge) Classes start: Oct. 6, 7:30 p.m. (\$45 per semester, September-December and January-April) Location: Church of the Transfiguration, 9 Two Bridges Road, Towaco Contact: Kathy Keener, (973) 366-8064; kek2512@aol.com Reelers Mainstream classes start: Oct. 7, 7:30 p.m. (\$50 per semester; no charge for first class) Plus classes start: January 2009 (\$50 per semester) Location: Ironia School, 303 Dover-Chester Road (Route 513), Randolph Contact: Bonnie and Charlie Van Stone, (908) 832-5313, bcvan40@embarqmail.com Mountain Squares No classes offered Dances every first and third Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. Location: Our Lady of Mercy Parish Center, Whippany Road, Whippany Contact: Bill and Hilda Groth, (973) 746-0656

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