

## Sashay for fitness and friendship

### Square-dance club keeps members on their toes

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Ahhhh, memories of the Grand March. Two lines form down the middle of a smelly junior high gymnasium, boys in one, girls in the other. A needle drops on the record and a boy and girl meet at the front of the line, becoming square-dancing partners for the next hour. Teen girls frantically count back in the line and switch places to customize the result — pretty cutthroat for PE class.

Square dancing was a physical education program back in the early 1980s. Fading away in most schools, it's now a PE credit if you are homeschooled, I hear.

Wearing inmate-style striped uniforms in gym class, we were forced to sashay around in polyester shorts as we do-si-do'd on command.

We were broken of teen arrogance through country music and a coach with a clipboard tucked into the back of his gray polyester shorts shouting dance commands instead of basketball plays. Once we checked our cool at the locker room door, it was kind of fun.

#### **Things have changed**

Back then, it was all set to country music, but today, I enter the Richardson Senior Center and the music is fast-paced hip-hop.

Mike Bramlett, the Rebel Rousers' caller, co-founded the group in 1989. (A caller calls the steps that the dancers will do next.) He's called all over the globe, even in China and Japan. His resonant voice calls out the next sequence of steps as I marvel at the precision of the dancers grouped in squares.

"Then a right, then a left ... cross-fire ... trade ... roll ... take a peek ... girls sashay ... double pass ... peel off ... cross the ocean ... come back around and load the boat," Bramlett calls.

Square-dancing clubs at this event have names like Texas Reelers, Trail Blazers and the Swinging Stars, to name a few. They are dancing "all positions," which allows partners to enjoy both sides of the dance.

"We are doing the highest level of social square dancing that you can do," says Jack Duncan, 63, a longtime dancing member of the Swinging Stars club.

"Double pass through ... good ... look at who ya got," Bramlett calls.

Think about the many generations of people who have come together to dance like this through the ages.

"Back-back-down ... slip the clutch ... spin the top ... Ferris wheel," Bramlett calls, then takes a sip of water.

#### **Calls it as he sees it**

Bramlett sees the dance in his mind before he instructs many dancers to follow his lead. One wrong call, and it could be chaos.

Colleen Wilson, 70, president of the Rebel Rousers, has a wired assortment of small tags connected to one another on her holiday blouse. Some of the tags denote awards. Two of them are for Best Club in the Dallas area, awarded by Nortex,



Photos by Nathan Hunsinger/Staff Photographer

the regional square-dancing association for North Texas.

Carol Sutton, another Rebel Rousers co-founder, has her own tags: "An Aggie's Mother," "Crash" (a nickname for dancing with a broken arm for a time) and "Life Member" are dangling from her shoulder area.

I tell Sutton that all that signage looks like flair on the suspenders of a T.G.I. Friday's employee. She laughed and agreed. The tags summarize the members' passion.

"Everybody cares about everybody. They are our family," Wilson says.

They care about others, too. The Rebel Rousers hold food drives and in January will host a "Sock Hop," where members bring warm socks to be taken to a shelter.

It takes about 16 weeks in introductory classes to learn the calls with the Rebel Rousers. Students get to sample real dances about halfway through. On Tuesday, the club will start its classes for newbies.

I don't see any of the colorful, petticoat-lined swinging skirts that I remember from serious square dancers in the past. Wilson said that some still enjoy that look, but broomstick skirts and slacks are more prominent. Wilson's club has members from 14 years of age to people in their 90s.

#### **'Whoopee'**

After a dance is over, I hear the Rebel Rousers say, "Whoopee-Whoopee."

"If you go to a convention and you hear Whoopee-Whoopee, you know where everyone is," Sutton says.

I now get why Wilson has a tag that says "Whoopee." Honestly, I was afraid to ask about that one.

I asked John Smith, who has danced for 62 years, if he had a new year's resolution. He said simply (while chewing gum almost to the beat of the song playing), "Dance more."

Nortex named the Rebel Rousers the Fun Club of the year for two years in a row. I can see why. This club and others have a contagious energy as they promenade us all right into the new year.