



American Caller's Association

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January-March 2025 Newsletter

Happy New Year!

We hope this New Year has welcomed everyone happy, healthy and dancing! With this start of the new year, we do want to remind everyone that ACA's new year doesn't start till April 1, therefore if you purchased license from us last year, they are still current until March 31st. We will be uploading the new 2025-2026 application as well as emailing the application to you in a few weeks for those who want to go ahead and get it in but just remember that the new calendar year is April 1, 2025, and will cover till March 31, 2026.

As we all know we live in an ever-changing world, but we would love to see square dancing keep alive and well in it. Basic and Mainstream has always been the catalyst that has kept dancers interested in the world of square dancing and we see no reason for this to change. Dancers love to have fun, meet new dancers and be able to dance in all arenas.

You will also notice that this newsletter will become more of an informative correspondence. Therefore, if any of our members have an upcoming special event that they would like to share with us we would be glad to look at it and possibly share it with our members.

Mac Letson

TO BECOME A SUCCESSFUL CALLER

To become a successful caller, you must have a song in your heart and want to sing it to the square dancing world. This does not mean that you must be a beautiful singer, but you must have a heart for square dancing. For the dancer to have a truly lasting relationship with square dancing it must all come together with music, and it is the caller's responsibility to see that this happens.

Here a few bullet points:

- Become a dedicated leader for proven longevity of the activity
- Develop discipline and proper conduct not only in your dancing habits and attitude but also in your daily living for others to follow
- Have good mic technique, knowing the mechanics, the physical and mental (tone, volume, breath control, enunciation, pitch, rhythm, just to name a few)
- Remember first impressions are lasting ones and proper techniques used early can do much to give the dancer confidence in you
- Music selection has much to do with your equipment and how much you know about the capabilities of that equipment. Music more than any other factor sets the mood of the next dance. Choose your music for quality and variety.
- Choreography is probably the first thing most callers are willing to spend money for but keep in mind that it must have good body flow, proper timing, clarity and music rhythm

These few points could be expounded on for sure, but let's start here.

We, as callers, should share common goals; to be the best we can be and to get more people dancing and keep them dancing.

Now, let's get to calling!

A win-win proposal

By Marty Northrup

On a podcast which I recorded with the late Jerry Story at the National Square Dance Convention in Atlanta, Jerry stated that the people were being pushed too fast. They were not graduates; they were survivors. With a retention rate of 50 percent or less from every starting class, we are not doing our activity any justice. Jerry and I discussed what happens when a new dancer leaves our activity. Are they spreading a positive message to the remaining population that we are feverishly recruiting? Are they telling their friends that they should not try square dancing? Would we not be better served by slowing down our teaching pace and retaining more of our beginning dancers? They are our best asset for recruiting. Once we get our excited, new graduates working a year as angels, we are certainly back on track.

Here is our predicament, “Our club only dances plus, and the new graduates need to be at full plus level before they can dance with us.” The club members that have been dancing a long time need to remember the early years when their club backed the level down so they could dance. Would it not be smarter to let the new dancers dance at a strong entry level program for a year? They would not be discouraged and quit. Furthermore, they would be around to help promote square dancing.

As our club membership has declined, we have fewer dancers that can recruit. On top of that, all their friends have heard the square dance pitch before and would have joined in already if they were interested. For the fortunate few that can get their friends to finally come in an join us, they become discouraged as well when their friends decided to leave. Double whammy!

When I first started dancing in the late 1970’s, I recall how excited I was to be a new dancer and could not wait until the next Thursday night to roll around. I was a senior in high school.

It first started with a demonstration at a block dance in my hometown in upstate NY. Our local caller came to town. Lessons were soon offered that fall and we took a full 30 weeks of lessons. It was an exciting time. In fact, there were three beginner classes within 30 miles of my hometown, and I attended all three the first year.

July of the following year our family took a trip to Nashville, TN. We square danced there and I bought my first record. We returned home and we attended a club dance where two of the local dancers were going to go to caller's school in Harrisonburg, VA.

With one singing call and one patter record, I joined the other callers. I am not only a dancer, but, I am also a caller. How my life has changed in a such a short time. In 14

months from starting, I was now a leader.

My love for the square dance activity had grown and I wanted to share my newfound knowledge with as many people as I could.

We had several clubs within the South Central NY area. Most clubs danced mainstream. Some were experimenting with plus and one club had an advanced group. The entire area's classes were coordinated by our local caller's association, and we held two major dances a year.

As I taught several classes in local towns, I began to realize that some of the dancers moved away. That was okay as they found new clubs in the new cities to which they had moved. Great, they were square dancers. Were they property of the local club, the caller who trained them, or were they simply dancers for our wonderful activity?

If we focus on the dancers and not our own ego, square dancing will once again flourish. We need to break the current cycle of rushing all dancers through the mill and let them enjoy our activity.

When was square dancing at its peak? It was when we had the original Sets in Order 75 basic list and the dancers danced a full year or more before being introduced into plus and beyond. Once the separation of dancers into different programs, we began the decline. It has been a steady downward spiral.

During the peak period, we were recruiting record numbers of dancers, retaining them, and from that pool came callers. Have you noticed that the number of dancers have dropped, the number of clubs has dropped, and the number of callers has also dropped?

As callers we need to be leaders as well. Should we take a minute and sit down with the board of our club? We are smart and with a reasonable time frame, we can rebuild square dancing. Let us end the fast escalator ride to the higher levels. Let the dancers dance. They will naturally recruit their friends if we keep them having fun.

We have a great activity, and we have a product that can be tailored to each dancer's needs, wants, and desires. How wonderful it would be if we could get entire families to join in and stay away from all the social media traps.

We only win if we let the dancers win.

Stay well, stay dancing, until we meet again,

Marty

74th National Square Dance Convention®

June 25-28, 2025

SHREVEPORT

Photo courtesy of Shreveport-Bossier Convention & Tourist Bureau



Visit our website, www.74thNSDC.com, for registration and general information, Join our Facebook group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/750145379807873/> for the latest events and details

Come 'Dance on the Wild Side' with the 74th NSDC