

## Club Retention & Recruitment – Session from Swing & Mix Convention

Sunday 7/2/17 at 12:00 Noon

Thom Dang, Cuesta Squares - coordinator

Two clubs have had great success this year: Desert Valley Squares and Redwood Rainbows

Leslie/Redwood Rainbows

-- Leslie & Lucy (super-angels) ... we're unique in that we own our own dance hall, so we can offer dancing 3 nights a week plus Saturdays. 2 callers (Harlan and another caller), so we have dancing 5 days a week. 2 new classes a year. Dance Basic through C2. One of their new dancers, when asked what kept him there, said, "It's the love". We have Lucy and one of two other "super angels" there every class night, plus we have a huge group of experienced dancers who angel our classes.

-- Lucy: we have a class that started in January with 26 people, and lost over the next few weeks, we lost 4 dancers, and then decided to do a blast class (with 7 people), and of that 4 people came back into the regular class. We finished Basic with 26 people, and have 23 who are currently dancing Mainstream. We have 29 regular angels. 11 are plus level dancers, 8 are advanced, 7 are C1, and 2 are C2.

-- Leslie: We have 5 to 6 squares every Monday night.

-- Lucy: We do what's called a "kitchen review", where while the calling is calling full Plus level, we offer a 45 minute class review with at least 2 squares every Monday night. We also have dance cards, which allows us to balance out each square so every new dancer has sufficient angels to dance with. This has reduced breakdowns. We try to get half angels, half newbies.

-- Lucy: Mondays we have a plus graduate school for 90 minutes, then the class runs from 7 pm to 8:30 pm. Tuesdays is club night (Plus/Advanced), Thursdays is club night (C1/APD Plus).

-- Leslie: We just clarified our fee structure: if you paid your class fee, you can dance for free any club night. We charge fees by the week (\$8 members, \$10 non-members) or by the months (\$30). We're experimenting with \$120/13 weeks including a blast class. We had a one-day (3 hour) blast class that caught people up to where our traditional class was. 2 sets of 13 weeks takes students to (almost) Mainstream. We offer 3 weekly intro classes.

-- Leslie: We have a lot of communication in the club. I send out a newsletter every Friday, with upcoming dance events, weekly schedule, and birthdays/anniversaries. Lucy sends out emails every week giving the links for this week's calls to Taminations and other online videos for students who want to study ahead. Continued communication with members is critical. Our board really steps up and does what they're suppose to do. We raised \$110,000 over 3 years to make ADA modifications to the dance hall.

-- Lucy: Across the board, we've found one-on-one communication is the most critical recruiting method. We tell club members to go talk with five friends or acquaintances.

-- Leslie: We're in Sebastopol's annual parade and Guerneville's pride parade every year. We have a lot of straight couples and singles who dance with us because we're welcoming. I'm in a lot of Meetups, and I take flyers with me to every Meetup and other social group that I go to.

-- Lucy: Your class members having fun are the best way to advertise to other new people. Our club has been traditionally mostly women, but with a bunch of men recruiting recently, now we're closer to a 50/50 gender ratio. The majority of our marketing is one-on-one referrals.

- Lucy: We don't have a MeetUp group, but I post things on other meetup groups. Capital City has a Meetup group that they use. (Getting several other people in the club to like Meetup events and comments/posts to make the post bubble up to the top of the list.)
- [unknown woman in audience] Also, if you can get your posting in a meetup sponsored by one of the meetup's organizers, it will pop up to the top automatically.
- Lucy: We also try to have non-dancing events such as potlucks with dancers, and game nights, etcetera.
- [How much time is needed to do all of this?] Leslie: I didn't realize how much time it would take. I do try to put a lot of time into my newsletter each week. I'm there at least one night a week, mostly two. And I'm there for every event. But our super-angels make a huge difference. Lucy: Things like the dance cards are pretty time consuming.
- [Times Squares] We compressed our classes from 26 weeks to 12 weeks, and we're still getting people complaining.
- Leslie: Mainstream starts in January and September, and Plus starts each January.

#### Ed Ziegler:

From an IAGSDC standpoint, we've taken over club development. It's the IAGSDC that will fund things if you need something out there. The current program guidelines say "no advertising", and we're probably going to pull that requirement. Back in the Bay Area, we hired a speaker who's in advertising and marketing. A couple of things she touched on was to shoot for people she said to target new people within 10 years of your average club age, and to make your website more welcoming.

\*\*\* Allan Hurst will send a reprint of the Call Sheet article on the Bay Area marketing meeting \*\*\*

Kurt: In Oakland, we offered a 12 weeks class of "square dance fundamentals" on Saturday afternoons for 2 hours, getting people to a good subset.

#### Paul from Chi-Town:

Advanced and Challenge meet on Monday. First Thursday of each month is No Experience Needed; very social from 7:30 PM to 9:00 PM. This includes squares, Sicilian Circles, etcetera. Twice a year we do a blast class, which is two weekends (Friday 7 pm -9 pm, Saturday 9 am -5 pm, and Sunday 1 pm -5 pm) to get people all the way to Mainstream.

Every First Thursday we have about 5 squares. All of our sessions are \$8. Some board members would like First Thursdays to be free to first timers.

We use two different callers for the blast weekends, so the students have exposure to more than one caller.

On a weekend, a blast class will have about 24 new students. Out of the 24, we usually retain about 60-70% of those new students year around. By the time they come into the blast, they know us, we know them, and we've had several months to create relationships with them. People in our club want to hang out afterwards and socialize in a restaurant or bar.

Blast for the two weekends is \$75. If you pay \$100, we include a \$75 first year's membership to Chi-Town. This includes a club badge and everything else. This also gets students free admission to our Crossfire fly-in in September, so they can dance Mainstream.

We do Plus classes once a year. We occasionally will do informal member-home-hosted Plus classes several times to bring specific members up to speed on Plus.

We have heavy marketing on Facebook, Twitter, and we have people who do nothing but social media.

We have dances once a month and we bring people in from all over the country.

In Marketing, repetition is your friend. We pay Facebook about \$200/month to be boosted.

We're going to interface our Google calendar with the Queer Contra and the Gay C&W groups so that we can coordinate dances better. We also had members go to Contra and C&W tea dancers, and they've come to our First Thursdays, which has been a great way to cross-promote all of our groups within a like-minded community. We also did a performance of square dancing at a huge C&W dance festival in Saugatuck, Michigan.

Bonnie:

CALLERLAB has a club marketing manual which I can email to you.

Kurt:

There's also [knowledgebase.callerlab.org](http://knowledgebase.callerlab.org) My experience has been that social marketing is a very powerful tool. It takes a lot of savvy to use it correctly.

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[end 1:12 PM]

**A Regional Effort to Revive Club Membership**

**Allan Hurst** - [allanhurst@gmail.com](mailto:allanhurst@gmail.com)



On January 11, 2015, the IAGSDC clubs of Northern California held a summit called *Swing and Circle the Wagons* to discuss the state of LGBTQ square dancing, and potential methods for sustaining and growing the clubs. The summit was organized by Bay Pearls, the 501(c)(3) corporation originally established to host *Weave Your Heart in San Francisco*.

Organized and hosted by the Bay Pearls Planning Committee: Lorenzo Taylor, Dan Mutschler, and Karen Schmidt, the event was held at the beautiful Lake Merritt Dance Center in Oakland.

Thirty-seven attendees represented Western Star Dancers, Foggy City Squares, El Camino Reelers, Capital City Squares, Prime 8's, Redwood Rainbows, Oaktown 8's, Diablo Dancers, and Midnight Squares. Gordon Macaw of All Join Hands was an honored guest.



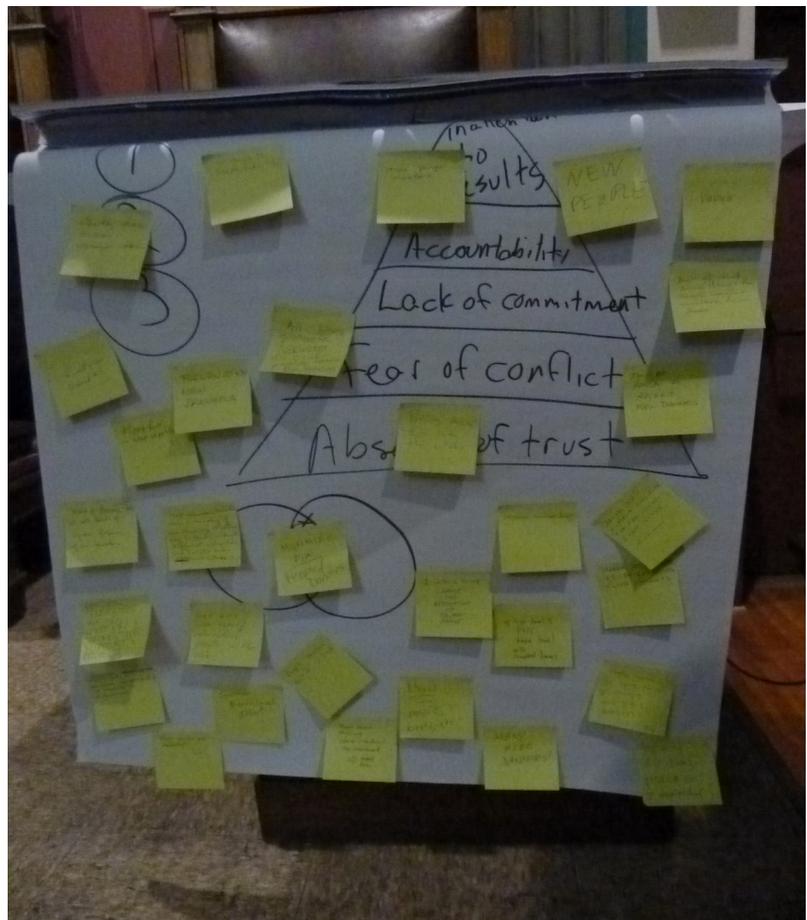
*Representatives from all of the IAGSDC clubs of Northern California.*  
Photo courtesy of Dan Mutschler

The summit kicked off with introductions around the room, then moved into a thought-provoking presentation on Leadership delivered by Sean Lemson of Coaction Coaching (<http://coactioncoaching.com/>). Sean taught several tools for interpersonal communication and problem solving, explained the five dysfunctions of a team, and made everyone think (and *re-think!*) what the duties of club boards are today, and what they *need* to be to keep clubs moving forward.

After a break, there was a lively and interactive workshop on marketing by Deb Doyle (<http://stage2west.com/>), who quite persuasively explained that our initial target demographic for new dancers was probably a lot different than everyone originally thought. (Hint: Start with dancers within 10 years of your age range. Once you have that "generation" of new dancers established, use them to reach out to dancers who are within 10 years of *their* ages... and eventually you'll reach down to the younger dancers everyone wants to recruit into our clubs.)

While the summit didn't have *quite* enough time to deliver the answers we were all hoping to get, it certainly pointed out several potential paths to take to get those answers. Email discussions are already circulating regarding follow-up summits to explore some of the potential options in more detail.

The Northern California area is somewhat unique in it has so many clubs in a small geographic area, but I'd personally like to see regional versions of this summit held elsewhere in North America, and wouldn't mind seeing a version of this summit offered to club representatives at a future IAGSDC convention.



*In one exercise, participants were invited to submit "sticky notes" with major concerns for club maintenance and growth. Photo courtesy of Dan Mutschler*

**Getting Butts Into Intro Squares****Arlene Kaspik** - amkaspik@comcast.net

On May 4, 2017, I posted to Facebook:

*I just got home after calling the First Thursday dance for Chi-Town Squares.*

*First Thursdays are no experience necessary dance parties. Callers can use any calls they want so long as they teach them. The caller is also free to borrow from traditional squares or mixers or whatever they wish.*

*We had 4 squares at all times. Thirteen new dancers and enough Angels to fill in the squares plus a couple of extras.*

*What a fun night!*

*This time I pretty much stuck to modern western square dancing with the exception of a final Sicilian Circle.*

*We had a couple visiting from Germany who are about to motorcycle their way to San Francisco. Another couple (Diva and Michael) chose to celebrate their 26th anniversary with us. Someone found out and supplied a special cake in addition to the rest of the treats.*

*I think everyone stayed for the entire evening and it looked to me like a good time was had by all.*

*Long live First Thursdays!*

I should have known that our Call Sheet Editor would see the post and call me on it:

*Arlene, the Editor of the Call Sheet would like MORE INFORMATION PLEASE on how Chi-Town recruited thirteen new dancers to show up to the intro dance. :)*

Because I couldn't disappoint our Editor, here's the extended answer.

The First Thursdays hosted by Chi-Town Squares are a year-round ongoing event.

Although we hope people will have enough of a good time to sign up for the Blast class, it's not like the traditional intro parties held immediately before a new class series begins.

The basic ground rules are that the caller can call whatever they want *as long as they teach people everything they need to know that night.*

Sometimes I'll borrow from Contra, Traditional Squares, mixers of all types, and reels. Some callers do this. Others don't and stick to modern western square dancing. The variety is nice.

Sometimes when I call these events I try to find a call in the C2 program and up that is easy to

teach and levels the playing field for new and experienced dancers alike.

Some folks come to First Thursdays on a regular or semi-regular basis. Others once in a great while. Others come once with some friends and then explore Bowling the following week or month.

Yes, we hope these dances will help grow our club. However, we also felt there was an untapped market: people who just want to go out and dance once in a while but don't want to take a class (not even a Blast Class).

These ongoing dances are a way to reach out to folks whose lives/schedules don't include time for one more commitment in a busy schedule. They can come on and off at will and are always welcome and welcomed back. Sometimes club members will invite folks from work, neighbors, or friends.

We have plenty of treats on hand, we try to use really good music from a variety of genres. Most of all, we keep in mind: *We're offering people an entertaining evening.*

Yes, we use the event to grow our mailing list. Some people request we take their names off and, of course, we honor that. Others enjoy the reminders, even if they can't show up very often.

The evening starts at 7:00 pm with a meet and greet (and background music, often jazz or pop). Dancing runs from 7:30 pm until 9:00 pm.

Usually there is an opportunity to go out for a bite to eat or a drink afterwards.

It's about fun and fellowship and, if we attract some new dancers, so much the better!

This is NOT a hard sell (although we're now offering things like a Blast discount via a raffle, *if* people choose to participate). First Thursdays are about fun and entertainment.

Our club president, Jim Cosenza, added to the conversation:

*We use a number of different methods of outreach for First Thursdays.*

- *Chi-Town uses Facebook advertising to reach targeted Facebook members.*
- *We ask our members to invite friends.*
- *We send out email reminders to previous First Thursday attendees.*
- *We use word of mouth in the community.*
- *We have information about our Dance Parties and the schedule on multiple websites: our own, MCASD<sup>6</sup>, and <http://wheresthedance.com>.*
- *The Education and Marketing Committee meets regularly, reviewing marketing opportunities for our club.*



6 Metropolitan Chicago Association of Square Dancers - <http://www.squaredancechicago.com/>