

Notes on Two Recent Basic Blasts as a Means of Recruitment

- Jean Lander and Niall O'Reilly, February 2017

In an earlier email, I had reported on two clubs holding Community Dances, as a means to lure new dancers into square dancing. The problem that tried to address, was the difficulty of getting new dancers to sign up to 4 or 8 months of progressive Basic lessons. The difficulty with the Community Dance model, is that it leaves the casual dancer without a means of progressing to Mainstream and beyond.

Two clubs have recently held Basic blasts, as a means to fast track dancers to a level, where they can participate in full club activities in a short period of time. Below you'll find reports from two clubs: Otonabee Squares in Peterborough, and Triangle Squares in Toronto who have staged intensive blasts.

Otonabee Squares Recruitment and Retention (Jean Lander)

Our club hosted two days of a basic blast in January, Jan 14 and 21, 2017. Our new September dancers were encouraged to attend to review the moves.

We had 21 new dancers sign up. We did two hours morning and afternoon and over the two Saturdays covered about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the basic list. The intent was to catch them up to where the September dancers were, not to go through the whole list.

As most people brought their lunch with them it was a great opportunity to socialize during the hour we took for lunch. We feel socializing is an important of the overall experience of square dancing.

We have only had two club nights since the blast and 19 of the new dancers have come out to dance. One couple of this 19 has now gone to Florida until early March.

Some of the September new dancers commented that they thought this was a better way to learn than they do every week at the club dance. They felt the longer time period at one time was better for learning than the 6 tips they may get on a club night.

Since September we have 35 new members and 2 dancers returning to square dancing. Two dancers have joined from another club.

80% of new dancers are coming by word of mouth.

Triangle Squares Blast for Experienced Contra Dancers (Niall O'Reilly)

Several dancers are members of both Triangle Squares, and the Toronto Contra Dancers, and there have been cross-marketing attempts in the past between the two clubs. Many years, one or more contra dancer will show up at our Open houses in September, but find the dancing too rudimentary for them to want to join a beginner class. In fact, proficient contra dancers will know approximately 1/3 of the Callerlab Basic program already (as will Old Time Square dancers). After discussions, two dancers from the contra group decided to stage a full basic blast, with the aim of enabling the graduates to join the Basic class in progress, in time to begin mainstream lessons.

The blast was limited to two squares, and there was a waiting list. It was fully attended, and held over a single weekend, Sat & Sunday, Jan 21 & 22, 2017, 10am-5pm. The cost was \$50 per dancer, and 2 sit-down lunches were provided. The caller was Barry Clasper, who has an extensive teaching background. The proficiency of the contra dancers also made them quick learners, and very few angels were required.

Of the 16 dancers who completed the blast, 6 signed up for the mainstream class at Triangle Squares that began in February. Two more were from Peterborough, and have since joined the Otonabee Squares. Other options were given to the participants, including coupons to join the club dances, and invitation to attend the basic class as angels on an occasional basic. The knowledge fades quickly if not used, so it's yet to be seen if the other 8 dancers will reappear at sometime. The club will definitely explore other opportunities for blasts, as an alternative to returning an entire class back to a teach level.