

Dancing, flirting and good, clean family fun

by Deborah A. Sakamoto

The Dancing Bears regulars have an unwritten rule: Make sure all the newcomers dance at least once. That way, according to board member Gail Volt, people get hooked on the fun after a couple of dances and will probably return.

The group, which tries to have a dance each Friday, is made up of single and married adults and some families, she says. You don't have to have any dance experience since the beginners are taken aside and given some instruction before the dance starts. Volt has been attending the dances for three years, and says many people strike up friendships off the dance floor since the group attracts a certain kind of person.

"They are earth-muffins -- your intellectual down-to-earth professionals . . . conscientious about the environment and politics," she says of the Dancing Bears. "You don't get people who are into the heavy makeup and status scene with fur coats and suits. These people are more comfortable with their profession and having fun."

Volt, an environmental technician with the state Department of Environmental Conservation, hopes that tonight's family dance at Wendler Junior High will bring in some new faces, both young and old.

The square dance, with caller Bob Hume and the band Whistlepig, will be held from 7 to 9:30 p.m. All ages are welcome, but children must be supervised by an adult. Volt says the family dance usually attracts single parents or parents who want an alternative to sledding, the movies or staying home watching television.

"Now they can bring the kids to an adult event," she said. "We wanted to bring the families into the picture. The caller will call dances that smaller children can understand. Not 'Ring-Around-the-Rosy' stuff, but a version of the 'Virginia Reel.'"

Volt used to be a coordinator for a folk festival Outside, and was referred to Dancing Bears events by a friend.

"I decided to go for it and I was hooked. I had so much fun," she said. "I didn't know a soul. I was a pretty shy person then." Volt says a big attraction to Dancing Bears events is the safe, comfortable environment.

"We have a great time -- we flirt like crazy, (but) it's real innocent flirting," she said. "It's not like a bar scene where you don't want to even look at someone because they feel as if you're coming on to them."

On Feb. 12, Dancing Bears will have a '50s sock hop/swing dance at Wendler. Attire from the '50s is encouraged -- there will be a costume contest and a special performance by Craig Duncan and the Booher Brothers.