

Do the do-si-do

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by Marilyn McMahan

Some people think square dancing is not the panacea for all the world's problems, but they'll have a hard time convincing members of the Fair's 'n' Squares, Santa Barbara's oldest square club.

"The wonderful thing about square dancing is it knows no social barriers. The prominent doctor dances next to the truck driver or with his gardener's wife and thinks nothing of it. All of them have a wonderful time," said Bruce Johnson who formed Fairs 'n' Squares.

"Square dancing is the best medicine for high-strung professional people and others who find it difficult to get their minds off their problems. It requires one's complete attention. You have to keep your mind on the calls and really watch what you're doing so everything else is blanked out," said Johnson.

"And it's a great way to meet new friends. You don't dance with one partner all evening," he said. "In square dancing, you're changing partners all the time. Many a friendship has begun right on the dance floor. It's also a great way for newcomers to get acquainted in the city."

Shy people lose their inhibitions and become out-going during the dancing.

"Men, especially, are often reluctant to try it. The wives practically have to drag them to the floor. But after a few times around, the men usually become even more enthusiastic than the women," Johnson said. sometimes romances blossoms. That's where Pat and Patti Acton, longtime members of the Fairs 'n' Squares, and presidents for five terms, met.

"The last thing I wanted to do was square dance," recalled Mrs. Acton. "My mother was a member of the club when I was a teenager, and she thought square dancing was the answer to everyone's prayers. She used to put copies of the square dance magazine by my bedside. naturally, because she loved it so much, I hated it."

It wasn't until she was divorced and "changed my life" that Mrs. Acton allowed a friend to "push and shove me to the Peabody School auditorium one Saturday night." That's where she met Pat, already a square dance devotee.

Since then the couple wouldn't think of missing a session and frequently plan their vacations around square dance events. One of them was a jaunt to Japan.

"The Japanese people are absolutely crazy about square dancing, but the callers have a real problem. The Japanese have trouble saying the English letter "l". Our favorite memory is hearing a Japanese caller trying to call 'allemande left,'" said Mrs. Acton.

She said the American folk dance is also extremely popular in Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

Johnson believes square dancing is the easiest thing in the world -- the only requirement is being able to walk.

"And that doesn't really seem to be necessary at all," he said. "In Los Angeles, there are square dance groups for disabled persons in wheelchairs, and some of those do better than dancers who are on their feet."

although Johnson frequently travels around the country calling for special events and presenting workshops, he considers himself "essentially and above all, a club caller."

Especially for the Fairs 'n' Squares group, which will have its 39th officer installation Sunday at Fess Parker's Red Lion Resort. Bill and Doris Griffis will take over as presidents.

Other officers will be Harold and Janet Thelin, Art and Pat Edick, and Harry and Virginia Johnson.

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