

**Social Square Dancing (SSD)
Getting Dancers On Board
Tom Manning**

I have said for some time that square dancing had to die to survive. With the pandemic it almost did. In fact, long before the pandemic Square Dancing was on life support, at least in Southeast Iowa. I am not an expert at Social Square Dancing (SSD), but I felt I learned from one. Jerry Story lived about 50 miles from me and we talked about SSD and getting new dancers into the activity and keeping them in the activity.

I guess I am here to give you my testimonial that SSD works. The club I call for in Wever, Iowa was a struggling "Plus" club. We dance every Tuesday night. Many nights we were lucky to have square. I decided that we had to do something. So with the blessing of only the club President and not many others, we started having SSD lesson. Our lessons run from 6:30 until 8:00 and then we have a dance from 8:00 until 10:00 for past SSD graduated dancers. We had 4 classes prior to the pandemic and we had to stop one class about 7 weeks into lessons. At that point, we went from worrying about having a square to having 3-4 squares every Tuesday. After the pandemic we are running 4-5 squares on a Tuesday night.

Is all this success from dancing the SSD program? No, not at all. A lot of the success comes from the club members getting out and getting people to take lessons. The SSD program's success comes from retaining those dancers that would have never stayed with square dancing if we would have pushed them onto other programs.

To make SSD succeed, we as callers must do a couple of things. Do your homework. Once dancers are proficient with the SSD call, do different things with the calls, different not difficult. We must come up with different choreography, not the same old stuff. As callers we must be enthusiastic. The stand-alone SSD program can be the base of square dancing if we let it. Sure, people will move on to Mainstream and Plus, but let the dancer enjoy SSD until there is a need for another level. There has to be a place for all dancers to enjoy the best activity around, in my opinion, Square Dancing.

I am not sure why I am on this panel, even with the little success we have had, I can't get experienced dancers to buy in. They still want their plus and Advanced dancing, but they want to push these new SSD dancers into these programs also. I have tried to explain, many of the dancers that are coming to the weekly club dance wouldn't be able to move to the next program. These new dancers are excited and enjoy what we are doing. If we push them on they won't be in the activity at all. I would love to give the experienced dancers their Plus and Advance dancing, but it has to be on a separate night. It isn't fair to new dancers to have to sit out 1/3 of the tips because others want to have Plus star tips. Having star tips also encourage those dancers not proficient at SSD to want to move to the next level because they see that they aren't as good as those dancing the star tip. We know that isn't true, or do we?

We have done it this way for 40 years. Something isn't working. If your club is being successful, no need to change, but if you are looking for something that might grow your club, look at SSD.