

## **Whitmore Pioneers Square Dance Club 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

Do you remember where you were 60 years ago?

The price of gas was \$0.07 a liter, you could get a loaf of bread for \$0.22. A new car costs \$3,200 and a new home was less than \$20,000.

Whitmore Square Dance Club began its operation in the fall of 1962. The Men's club of Whitmore United Church formed the club and it initially danced in a portable church building until the new church and hall was available in January 1963. In the beginning the club danced every second Saturday and later began dancing every Friday night.

Membership cost was \$12 per couple per year and the guest fees were \$1.

The first caller couple was Bill and Audrey Isaac who also called for Happy Hearts and Saint James as well as two other clubs outside the city at the time. Bill and Audrey would be the caller couple for the next 26 years.

Callers take note; Bill was paid the princely sum of \$12.50 a night for calling and the church was paid \$25 for the use of the hall for the entire year

Our beautiful banner which we still have today and is hanging up at the back of the hall here was designed and made by Bill's wife Audrey.

It's worth noting since the club was affiliated with Whitmore Park United Church, any profit from the club's operation was given to the church as a donation every year. This meant the club would start each year with a \$0.00 balance in the bank and this practice continued up until 2013.

The club was originally a mainstream club. Plus calls were not introduced until the early 1990s and the club didn't become a Plus club until the early 2000s

Over the years the club thrived, and membership grew. Membership ranged from 5 to 8 squares for any given year, with many guests on any given night.

The club sponsored many workshops and dances, internationals, theme dances such as Hawaiian nights, Halloween, Chinese Auctions, box socials, annual summer and Christmas dances. The early Christmas dances were very special involving the entire family; dancers, their children, and grandchildren, with Santa handing out candies to the kids.

The club was also involved with many community events, such as dancing on a float for Regina Exhibition, ½ time entertainment at Taylor field, Agribition and many demos for the public.

In 1966 the club established a formal beginner club and operated one on and off up until the late 70s when the Provincial Federation was established. Zone 7 executive then

took over the responsibility of operating the beginner's club, ensuring a more consistent approach.

In 1978 rounds were introduced to the club, running 1/2 hour prior to the square dance.

In 1989 Bill and Audrey Isaac retired after 26 years of calling and a young and up and coming caller Norm Wood and his wife Helen (later Barbara) became the new caller couple. It was Norm who immediately introduced plus tips to the club which proved to be very popular at the time. Initially there was a plus tip at the end of the evening and then these plus tips moved to 1/2-hour workshop prior to the regular mainstream dance.

It is worth noting that Les Hillman sometimes called a tip or two for the club in the early '90s.

In the fall of 2012, Norm and Barb Wood retired after 23 years of calling for the club. His retirement coincided with the club's 50th anniversary so both were celebrated together that fall. Over 200 people attended that event. That is 20 plus squares!

In the spring of 2013, the club's executive posed the question at the club's AGM ; "Are you in favor of disbanding the club"? With Norm's retirement, and an aging membership, some thought this was the time to end the club. There was much discussion that occurred, but by the end of the AGM meeting, a new executive was formed with Ron and Margaret Hopkinson as president couple. The club would carry on with a shorter season, and a revised membership and guest fee structure.

In my opinion, if it wasn't for Ron stepping up at the meeting, the vote could have gone the other way, and the club could have easily folded that night.

Thanks Ron for saving the club !!

That same spring Bill and Shirley Treleven became only the third caller couple for the club.

Over the next three years the club continued to operate with a declining membership. In 2016 Bill Treleven retired from calling and at this point the club and I quote from our executive meeting "Was financially hanging together by a shoestring". We only had 4 full members and 3 half members. We could no longer continue with the existing format.

Ron proposed we start using recorded patters and singers and possibly alternate with guest callers. He was stealing a play out of Moose Jaw's, Buttons and Bows, play book. They had successfully used this format for years. So with the aid of Bert Johnson, we were able to obtain their music library and with Ron and now Ken Ganshirt's help, off we went to a very uncertain future.

Later in that 2016-17 season we moved from Whitmore United Church to Eastview Community Center and moved the dance from Friday nights to Wednesday nights.

The following fall we moved to Grand Coulee. The hall was larger than Eastview and it had a proper kitchen. Ken Ganshirt formally stepped in to lead the programming of the square

dance music, and he also ensured we had legal copies and permission from the callers to use their recorded material. That same year Elwood and I joined Ken as music coordinators and the “Ungrateful Dead” was born (that is a name Ken called us). Together we developed the plus training program to assure anyone joining the club would be progressively taught plus moves and be successful. We also had Val Wright, guest call every second week to supplement our recorded program. Val’s contribution as a guest caller during these years cannot be understated.

Over the next two seasons the club grew and became financially viable.

In the spring of 2020, the pandemic struck, and the club shut down as did everything else. Ken found out that some callers were doing virtual zoom square dances and in the fall of 2021 the club started up again with recorded two couple phantom dancing. With the pandemic numbers rising later that fall the club again shut down.

In the spring of 2022, the club started up again with full squares utilizing recorded music and now with a Johnny Preston, a caller from California calling for our club via Zoom. We were utilizing technology like never before, thanks to Ken. All Johnny needs is a camera to see the hall floor and dancers and he can site call from his home. It still amazes me how he can remotely site call and still know which dancers are screwing up in the

back square. Since Covid was still a concern, masks were worn, portable filtered fans were used, as well as hand sanitizer.

Today, we are happy to say, our club is back to “normal”, and we have two to three squares on any given Wednesday. Elwood and I continue Ken's legacy, preparing the weekly programming of plus patters and recorded singing call selection. We have Johnny Preston as our regular club caller via Zoom and get Val back once a month as well.

As you have heard, the club has evolved over the years and is quite different from where it all began 60 years ago. The club had to adapt and utilize technology to survive. It has thrived only because of the people who enjoy dancing and the social aspects that come with it and the dedicated people who volunteer their time and effort to operate the club.

The square dance community is an awesome community and as long as, there are people wanting to dance, have fun, laugh, enjoy life and develop lifelong friendships, this club will continue to endure.

Thank You

Barry & Donna Gruell

President Couple