

Club marks 60 years of square dancing

BY GINA FARTHING
For The News Virginian

It's that time of year again: kids have returned to school, leaves are preparing to change to autumn colors and the Circle 8 Square Dance Club plans to host its annual two free September lessons.

But this year, the club marks a significant milestone.

Circle 8 invites the community to help it celebrate its diamond anniversary, 60 years of square dancing, at a special gathering from 7 to 10 p.m. Oct. 12 at Kate Collins Middle School in Waynesboro. The shindig will feature Deedee Dougherty-Lott as the night's caller. For \$10, participants can dance the night away and those people who have two left feet can watch for free. Refreshments, a 50-50 drawing and door prizes will be available.

Visitors to the event, needn't be sidelined or relegated to sitting out, tapping their feet only because of an empty dance card.

Circle 8 will see to that. From 7 to 9 p.m. Sept. 17 and 24 at the middle school, two free lessons will be hosted by the club, for couples, singles and families. All are welcome



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Members of the Circle Eight Square Dance Club perform during a recent gathering.

to come try out their dancing shoes with no previous square dancing experience needed. George Jordan will be the caller and instructor



Jordan

on-hand to help people learn-by-doing.

For those really courageous enough, the club offers a series of 15 more lessons that increase in progression for \$75 per person with family rates available.

Bob Riston club vice

president, says it's no longer your fathers dance routine.

"We're trying to mix things up, do things differently," said Riston. "We want to get more members."

Remembering the past

Things have changed since the club began around 1953.

"A lot of DuPonters brought [square dancing] here," said Jordan. "We used to have about 20 squares going at one time."

Jordan said square dancing activities were

more popular in northern schools then here because of the numbers of people available to participate.

"It moved here from there," Jordan said.

Even attire has changed.

"We're moving away from crinolines and cowboy uniforms," said Riston.

Jordan agreed. "Prairie skirts are worn now."

Riston said some costumes are still worn at semimonthly club dances. The two monthly member dances are held from 7 to 10 p.m. from September through June on the second and fourth

Saturdays of each month at Woodmen of the World in Waynesboro.

Other changes that have occurred, said Jordan, include new dances and moves, such as line dances and the use of computers for music.

"We can change speed, pitch and volume now," said Jordan, who learned calling in New Hampshire. "A caller from the Netherlands even has a program other callers all over the world can use. Western square dancing is done all over the world, in most any country, where there are American bases."

Some of the biggest countries where square dancing is performed include Japan, Sweden and Australia.

Jordan uses mostly Country music and Bluegrass for his calling.

"Several records were made just for square dancing," he said. "It used to be all 45s that were used and sold that way. Now there are CDs and MP3s."

Riston said square dancing has evolved over the years.

"If we don't accommodate changes, we will die," he said. "It's a competition for time."

June Baum, the club's immediate past president with her husband, Harry, said membership

is cyclical. "Families with children are busy with other things. Then there are times when we have more single women than men. We're calling people from older rosters to come," she said. "It's kind of like a reunion but it is not a spectator sport."

All three members said square dancing is mentally and physically challenging that involves thinking and teamwork. It can't be done alone. It's a team of eight dancers in each square depending on each person to keep moving and keep time with the music and it helps keep people physically fit reacting quickly to the dance calls.

Though some things have changed over the years, there are some traditional hoedowns, barn dancing and some golden oldies. But music also includes genres from Elvis to the Beach Boys, the classics to music as current as today.

Members say it's for all ages, the young and the "young at heart" and it's a hobby families can enjoy together.

"Some of our best friends are square dancers," said Baum. "We span in age from early teens to 90. One 90-year-old man comes from Charlottesville and he's still dancing."