

'Pioneers' have something to dance about

Napanee square dance club set to mark 50 years with anniversary celebration this month

BY SETH DUCHENE

Editor

After a half-century, the Napanee Pioneer Square Dancers have plenty to celebrate.

Every Friday for the past 50 years, its members have come together to do the thing they love — listening to the caller and moving to the music. The club's history will be on full display with a 50th anniversary party at Napanee District Secondary School on Oct. 22.

Among those expected to attend will be some of the club's founding members, including Madeleine Stinson, the club's first president, who helped get the club off the ground with her husband, Bert, in September 1966.

Stinson said she and her husband didn't know much about square dancing until they and a handful of other couples were introduced to it through a caller from another club. "We just asked friends and it gradually got going," she said.

The club initially had about 40-50 members in its first year, and they'd meet each week at The Prince Charles School. "Everyone was a rookie," she said. "The whole thing was, it was supposed to be for fun."

"It still is," added Elwood Hughes, who's been a club member with his wife, Marg, for the past 33 years. "It's a good form of exercise, and it's fun."

Later, he said, "You don't



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Members of the first Napanee Pioneers Square Dance Club gathered for a photograph not long after the club formed in September 1966. Although the venue for their regular dances have changed over the years, the club has always met every Friday night to dance for the past five decades.

need any special skills to square dance... if you can walk, you can dance."

That's not to say there isn't a learning curve. "You go at a pretty slow pace (when you're learning to square dance)," he said. "You only do a couple of calls a night, maybe three or four at the most. There is a lot of repetition at the start."

"It's a good way to meet new people, and it's good mental exercise," added Marg.

That's confirmed by cur-

rent club president Donna McHale, who has only been a member for the past four years. She said she saw an advertisement for the club in the newspaper and decided to give them a call.

"When I got there, I was just made (to feel) so welcome," she said, adding that she didn't have a partner when she signed up. "I've made all sorts of great new friends, and I've met people that I probably would have never had a chance to meet, except through that. It's great exercise, it's great fun, I love it."

She added, "It's a very doable thing, if you're willing to pay a bit of attention and put a bit of time into it. I just fell in love in it."

Elwood said that the club's membership has fluctuated. Although at one time it had a high of 108 members, it currently sits at about half that number. He suggests that prospective new club members often find it difficult to commit to weekly dances. That said,

Elwood indicates the activity is rewarding. "When (Marg and I) were both working and we'd both come home on Friday night, and we didn't know whether we

wanted to go to square dancing or not, we'd go and we'd feel a lot better," he said.

Not only is the club hoping that it might attract a

few new members with the 50th anniversary celebration, it's hoping that former members might make a point of coming out and taking a trip down memory lane.

"We have quite a lot of memorabilia rounded up from all through the years. We're going to have one hall at the high school that's going to be all just that, for the former dancers that come back," said Elwood.

So far, about 130 tickets have been sold, and they anticipate as many as 200 will be there for the party.

"It is very exciting," says McHale of the anniversary event. "When I was asked to be president, probably my major goal was to get us to the 50th anniversary. With the incredible help with all the members and the executive, we made it. I find that really exciting, and I sort of feel like we accomplished what we set out to do two years ago."

For tickets, call McHale at (613) 354-7139 or Muriel Brough at (613) 354-4595, or stop in at the club's Friday evening dance at Southview Public School.

Tickets can also be purchased at the door the day of the dance.



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From left are current club president Donna McHale, first-ever president Madeleine Stinson, and longtime club members Marg and Elwood Hughes.