

Class in Three Days
Four Corners Dancers
(Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Arizona)
(February 2004)

The Four Corners Dancers is a small square dance club. Until this year we had been holding 20 week instruction sessions, (basic-mainstream). We tried starting in September which was good. Everyone was gung-ho but then along come the 2 months of hunting seasons. And hunting being a big recreation in our area we would have several couples not attend lessons because they were hunting, or they would attend just intermittently. Through this we would usually lose some of the new dancers altogether. Then along would come the Holidays and again conflict, so we would lose a few more. By the time we finished the 20 week cycle of lessons we were lucky if we had retained 2 or 3 new dancers. Retention has always been a problem for us. A large percent of those finishing lessons were no longer dancing at the end of a year. Then we tried starting in January, with about the same results. People just got tired before the 20 week commitment was up.

So in the fall of 2003 the club decided to try a different approach. We had heard about the accelerated lesson program at the 52nd National Square Dance Convention[®] and continued to hear good things about it. We decided to try it in September. We advertised in the local newspapers, but we did not have any new dancers show up so we only did the one day. We felt some of our weaker dancers from the two previous classes really benefited from that one day so it was not a loss.

When we made the decision to try again in January 2004, the club members had made personal contact with people and had several couples lined up to take the lessons. We set the session for Saturday, Sunday, and the following Saturday going for about 6 hours per day. The Club furnished lunch and we took a 30 minute break. At the end of the six hours the new dancers were pretty saturated and we felt it would not be beneficial to continue. We had a different caller for each day. Previously, the caller who did our lessons charged a flat fee for up to one square and then an additional amount for each person over one square. This time the callers charged a flat fee per day and it was no more expensive than the 20 lessons cycle was.

We began the January session with 4 couples and one single. One couple dropped out because one of them couldn't deal with the crowd. One couple didn't come back the second day because of a work conflict and of course they were too far behind to continue. But they had lots of fun that one day and have indicated they will be back in the future. Everyone had a good time with the lessons. It wasn't the drag that 20 week lessons can be and no one got uptight if everything wasn't quite perfect. We finished the 3 day session with two couples and one single. We knew these dancers weren't going to retain everything that was covered in that three days. However, we encouraged them to start coming to our club dances and keep dancing.

We have had two club dances since we finished the lessons and both couples have been at both of those and the single has attended one. One of the guys whom had told us at the beginning of lessons that he didn't ever smile much, was laughing before the second club dance was over. He shared that he felt pretty nervous the first night, but that he was much more comfortable the second night. He indicated that they were going to travel to another club in our area this coming week-end and dance with them.

We feel that the 3 day class was a success for our club and plan to try it again. We are encouraged that the new dancers seem to be having lots of fun , thereby causing us to have more fun. We also feel fairly confident these dancers will still be dancing with us in the years to come. We will have to put forth some effort at each dance to assure they are dancing nearly every tip. Which means that we will probably eliminate our every third tip being a plus tip, for awhile in order to give them more dance time.