Homecoming Dance

by Mac McKeever

The Childgrove Country Dancers have been sponsoring contra dances in the Saint Louis metro area since some time in the mid 1970s. As with any dance group, a lot of dancers, musicians, callers and administrators have come and gone over the years. Fortunately, a few have remained active almost since the beginning.

Friends who move on are missed. There are, of course, stories about things that happened in the past and those who built the group to what it is today. So, when one of our long time supporters suggested we need to have a homecoming dance to bring back a lot of the wonderful people who rarely or never make it to the dances anymore, it seemed to be the obvious thing to do. The biggest question I had was why we didn't think of it sooner.

After selecting a date in the fall (don't all homecoming dances have to be in the fall?), we started looking for an appropriate band. Cousin Curtis and the Cash Rebates played at a lot of the early dances and are still playing together today. We don't get them to play our dances much recently so they seemed to be the perfect fit (and their old time music is about as good as it gets). For callers we decided to invite all of the local callers, both current and past, to call one or two dances. We didn't worry too much about programming, we just let everyone call what they wanted. Many chose to call dances that had a connection to our group.

A planning committee was formed consisting mostly of dancers who have been involved since early on. The biggest (and most enjoyable) task was to identify and contact dancers we hadn't seen for a while. A memorial display was assembled to acknowledge those who have passed away.

The big day was Saturday, November 9. We started with a potluck dinner to give everyone a chance to visit. The founder of our group has moved out of state and could not make it back for the dance, so we called him and passed the phone around to allow everyone a chance to talk to him. Photos and scrapbooks were available for browsing and reminiscing.

Once the dance started it was obvious this was not just another dance. The attendance was very impressive. The feeling is hard to describe, but it was like a big community party. Newer dancers realized they were part of continuing this tradition. Former dancers remembered how much they enjoyed the music, dancing and friends. We realized this was something we needed to do more often.

It is likely this will become an annual event. Our biggest problem may be finding an appropriate venue. This first homecoming dance was so successful that we can expect it to continue to grow. We were at the limits of the capacity of our current hall so we will probably have to find a larger site next year. Wherever it is, I know I am looking forward to our second annual Homecoming Dance!

Childgrove Country Dancers dance regularly on first, third and fourth Sundays and second Saturdays in Webster Groves, Missouri, 7-10 pm (workshops at 6 pm) at the Monday Club, 37 South Maple, Saint Louis. For information, call or write Mac McKeever, 314-537-1643, childgr@aol.com, or see their website at www.childgrove.org. "Homecoming Dance" was published in the CDSS News, issue #171, March/April 2003.