

CDSS Annual Board Meeting 2013

by David Chandler, Secretary

The Board welcomed two new members: Nate Puffer, from Taos, New Mexico, and Natty Smith, from Somerville, Massachusetts; see their bios at <http://www.cdss.org/governing-board.html>. President David Millstone introduced Thursday's meeting by saying that while Executive Director Rima Dael had been pushing and working closely with the staff during her first year in office (producing a great deal of enthusiasm and new energy and ideas), she was now ready to start pushing the Board. A key task is for the Board to produce greater clarity on the strategic plan for CDSS in the coming years. The upcoming Centennial celebration in 2015 will occupy both staff and Board for the next year or two, so we are talking about the years after that.

The first agenda item was about the governance of the Board.

A task group presented proposals for a job description for Board members so prospective Board members know what is involved, and an updated Board members statement of commitment; these were both approved. A recommendation that the task group become a permanent Governance Committee was also approved. The Nominating Committee then led a discussion of the qualities needed in Board members during the next few years.

Highlighted were ability to help with fundraising and experience with nonprofit organizations and their boards, in addition to the diversity in geography and dance, music and song interests that is always sought. The Nominating Committee will be seeking potential members with these and other qualities over the next few months. [Editor's note: Deadline to submit suggestions of nominees for 2014 is June 30, 2013; see note on page 5 or go to <http://www.cdss.org/governing-board.html>].

The rest of the morning was devoted to hearing Rima and staff members explain more about their work and the challenges of the year ahead. For a

summary of Rima's talk, see her report on page 6; staff highlights are at the end of this summary. The Board was impressed by how much work is accomplished by a staff that is not all fulltime.

Part of the afternoon consisted of a discussion led by Matt Blumenfeld, a consultant working with CDSS on Centennial fundraising and the anticipated work with many volunteers. The meeting adjourned for the day; later, Board members, staff and hosts gathered at a local member's home for dinner and singing.

Friday started with a review of our financial situation by Linda Maguire, CDSS Treasurer. We are doing quite well, though with concerns: camp enrollment, which provides a large part of our income, is down compared to last year at this time (April).

However, the unaudited 2012 financial report, confirmed by Linda, shows a tiny surplus.

Because the Board oversees the financial condition of CDSS, it has occasional education sessions about financial issues. This year CDSS Business Manager Bob Blondin took us through the difference between a profit and loss view of the budget vs. a cash flow approach. Because of one-time expenses over the last two years (executive transition and move to Easthampton), CDSS

has experienced seasonal cash flow issues; these were handled by obtaining a line of credit (now repaid) to tide us over until camp income began coming in. Plans were shared about building stronger year-round cash flow over the next two years.

Starting with data gathered from Wednesday's pre-meeting discussion of Centennial possibilities, Rima and the staff presented their recommended project list (while recognizing that accomplishing them is dependent on raising the money to be able to afford them). For Centennial goals, see <http://www.cdss.org/centennial-goals.html>. Highlights of the project list are:

- CDSS-sponsored tours throughout the US



Singing at the Thursday night potluck; photo by Christine Dadmun

and Canada that could include a variety of community events; for more information see <http://www.cdss.org/centennial-tour.html>.

- “Toolkits” to help communities celebrate the CDSS Centennial in their own way, and in conjunction with others around the US and Canada.
- Conferences and symposia in partnership with other organizations.
- A “Young ’Uns” section of the website, offering stories, games and teaching resources about dance, music and song.
- A “Sights and Sounds” section for community groups to post video and audio about their events and find out about what others are doing.

The afternoon continued with a discussion of strategic issues as the Board first looked at the challenges and rewards of forming strategic partnerships with related organizations. The Board listed a large number of such organizations and were interested to see that many of the same groups showed up on lists of affiliates, colleagues, project partners and competitors.

There were additional reports from committees and task groups, including Awards (a proposal for special posthumous awards is being considered), Contra Dance (doing a survey of callers’ needs), Dance Musicians (looking at ways CDSS could be helpful), Song (exploring the relationship between CDSS and song in its many forms), Web Technology (working on ways to help affiliates set up websites without having much technical expertise), and New Camp (exploring the possibility of a camp in the Midwest). Also reporting were the Personnel Committee (which does the annual evaluation of the Executive Director) and a CDSS representative on the Pinewoods Camp Inc. board.

The meeting ended with more discussion of strategic planning, with a focus on the future: in 2017 and in 2020; what things will CDSS be doing that it is not doing currently, and what things will it no longer be doing that it is doing now?

Throughout the meeting Board members were making pledges for donations to support the Centennial and CDSS; the total raised was \$42,000 (since raised to \$62,000).

The Board will meet again in April 2014, with the Executive Committee and task groups continuing the Board’s work during the year. The Exec will meet in person twice (in Ames, Iowa in November, and Pittsburgh in February), and will have four online meetings.

The meeting adjourned mid-Friday afternoon, and several Board members traveled on to the New England Folk Festival.

Staff Highlights of the Last Several Months

- Robin Hayden, Director of Development, is responsible for bringing in all CDSS contributed income from individual donations and membership. She emphasized that our fundraising, which is necessary to allow continuation of current programs and adding new Centennial ideas, is on a stable footing, but much more will be needed.
- Christine Dadmun, the new Database and Membership Administrator, is looking to increase members’ benefits.
- Jeff Martell, Store and Group Services Manager, has upgraded the liability insurance policy available to affiliates and arranged an experimental insurance program for Canadian affiliates. Sales of books and CDs made a profit last year despite lower volume, and Jeff hopes to experiment with downloadable content this year.
- Caroline Batson, Director of Communications, highlighted new publicity tools (expandable banner, tabletop displays, enlarged photos), better use of our limited resources to promote CDSS, expansion of newsletter content online, more user-friendly eblasts, and increased blog and Facebook postings.
- Steve Howe, Director of Programs (i.e., summer camps) said that last year’s camps were great, but registration for some weeks this year is behind budget despite outstanding programs; see our website for which weeks have space, www.cdss.org/camp.
- Pat MacPherson, Director of the Education Department, edits our print and online book and CD publications, is assisting Rima to steward the next phase of Centennial planning, and working with the fiscal agent program. She thanked her staff, Nils Fredland and Mary Wesley, and the many volunteers who work with her; several exciting new publications are well on their way.
- Linda Henry, Outreach Manager, is responsible for managing CDSS grants (200 in the last five years), leadership conferences, and scholarship program for camps. (Scholarships are still available for this summer; see <http://www.cdss.org/scholarship.html>.)



Read and listen to Mary Wesley’s Board blog at <http://blog.cdss.org/?p=4487>.

Mary interviewing Rob Harper, Board member from Atlanta; photo by Wendy Graham.

To see the Board roster and photos, go to <http://www.cdss.org/governing-board.html> (and scroll down).