Community ~ the Exec Goes North...

by Mary Louise Chown and Sue Staunton

The CDSS Executive Committee came to town last November and though we were excited about the weekend plans, we really didn't know what to expect. We had a helpful hosting booklet sent to us by Exec Meeting Coordinator Linda Lieberman shortly after we agreed to host the meeting, and there were many emails flying back and forth between our organizing committee and CDSS Exec members. But how would the weekend go? Would there be an blizzard to make travel difficult and discourage people from coming out to dance? What will the Exec members be like? Will they like us? What will they want to see while they're here? Will there be enough food?

Our committee met six months ahead of time and laid out a tentative plan. Most important was to get one of our sister groups, MIFDA (Manitoba International Folk Dance Association) interested in hosting a Friday night contra dance, then book the two halls for the Friday and Saturday night dances. Then summer came, and in Winnipeg that means gardening, going to the cottage, or traveling. When classes started up in September, we began to talk up the weekend to our members, explaining what CDSS was, and why it was important for them to visit our community. By late October we had host families for all of our visitors, and an idea of how the Exec members who were callers and musicians wanted to participate in the dances. We had also decided to add a Saturday potluck supper before the evening dance.

Board members arrived at varied times, beginning with the Wednesday before the weekend, and there were many shared meals, and excursions around Winnipeg to museums, historical sights, and even the chance to see a play at the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre. On Sunday evening fourteen of us met for a final meal together at a local Thai restaurant.

Some of us in the Village Green English Country Dance group have been fortunate enough to dance with English country groups in England, and the United States, but the majority has not had the opportunity to travel to other dance groups or attend dance camps, and have as their only experience dancing in Winnipeg. Because the CDSS Exec members were interested and curious about our dancing experience here in the heart of the continent, their visit has been a catalyst for us. They drew from us our stories of successful dances, fundraisers, the way in which we train new teachers, and the work of our resident choreographer, Liz Goossen. We have had an opportunity for our dance group to look at who we are and what are our strengths and priorities—a process that will continue long after the weekend.

Here is how our president, Sue Stanton described the experience:

"When you become a dancer you join a community; the CDSS weekend illustrated the vastness and richness of this vibrant community—it brought back memories of the beginnings of Village Green. In the mid-1970s, David Williams went to Pinewoods, run by CDSS, and experienced English dance. He was captivated and returned to Winnipeg and told John Trevenen. John went the next summer and he too was inspired; within a few years Village Green was meeting regularly, firmly rooting English dance in Winnipeg. None of this would have happened without CDSS. Two years ago when we were asked if we would like to host a board meeting we were happy to say yes! What an opportunity! What an honour!"

CDSS holds two meetings a year in communities throughout North America to build connections and strengthen the dance community and, without a doubt, their goal was met here in Winnipeg. The contra dance on Friday was spectacular, the callers so good and the evening so lively. The next day they worked until 4 pm; by 6 pm they were at the potluck—what great food, conversation, and dancing. Sunday morning brought a community meeting which turned out to be a highlight of the weekend. After breakfast we danced to music provided by our singing voices. The theme of the community meeting was building connections within the dance community. The Exec listened to our comments and learned about who we are. They asked about the dance manual, the instructional video, the teacher's training program, and the soon-to-be released CD and dance book. We heard of initiatives that other communities have undertaken. It was inspirational! Exciting! Energizing! The atmosphere became electrified when we discussed the future. My dream of a dance camp close to home found a receptive audience. Even more interesting for me was my discovery that this was a dream of others in our own group too.

What a wonderful weekend it was! Thanks to the organizing committee: Mary Louise Chown, Jeannie Gilbert, and Katherine Himelblau. Thanks to all who hosted, cooked, decorated, and participated. Thanks to CDSS for choosing Winnipeg for their meeting. Thanks for their vision and hard work. How wonderful to be part of such a dance community!

Village Green ECD was featured in the "News from Canada" column in the Fall 2011 issue.

...and then West

by Marie Dalton-Meyer, CDSS Interim Executive Director

At the CDSS Governing Board's annual meeting last spring I was intrigued by a big map on the wall with cities and dates and was told it showed the "traveling Exec meetings." There were two this year—one in Winnipeg in November and one last month in Albuquerque. I attended the latter, hosted by New Mexico FOLKMADS, and am so glad I did.

The event went like this. Nine members of the Exec Committee and I arrived on Friday afternoon. A cousin I haven't seen for forty years met me at the airport and delivered me to the home of my charming hosts, Peter and Trylla Esherick. Following a cup of tea and a change of clothes we were off to the Lloyd Shaw Center for a potluck and a dance called by legend Doc Litchman, backed by wonderful musicians. We mingled, we talked, we danced, and we laughed. We were greeted and welcomed by old and new friends in the vibrant Albuquerque dance community. A good time was had by all.

The Exec meeting itself was an all-day meeting on Saturday, graciously hosted by the Anthropology Department at the University of New Mexico and held in the Maxwell Museum, thanks to Erica Gerety who is an academic advisor for the department. The meeting encouraged dynamic discussions, decision making, and good thinking. Among the items on the agenda were the Search Committee's recommendation for the new CDSS executive director, committee reports, Q & A on my report, proposed committee slates, topics of governance and best practices, as well as all the nuts and bolts.

The meeting concluded with a rousing acknowledgement and gifts for Bruce Hamilton for his crucial leadership, dedication, and tireless work on behalf of CDSS during his tenure as president.

The meeting's discussions and decisions were all important for moving the work of CDSS forward. Equally important in creating momentum is the work and play that takes place on either side of the meeting and on Sunday. It takes place when CDSS representatives are out in the community and with the community.

It is the value of these bookends—the home stays, the potlucks and dances on Friday and Saturday nights, and the brunch on Sunday that nourish CDSS. On Saturday we joined enthusiasts at the Heights Community Center for a potluck, followed by a contra and English dance. Over dinner each CDSS Exec member introduced him or herself and told why CDSS is important to each of them and how CDSS resources might help dancers, callers, and musicians in the

Albuquerque and Santa Fe communities. CDSS Exec members who are callers were invited to call, adding to the camaraderie and fun of the evening.

On Sunday, FOLKMADS member Meg Adams hosted a brunch and community conversation at her house, during which all present shared ideas, challenges, hopes, and plans. This culminated in what the "traveling Exec meetings" are and do. It is all about what happens around and through the meeting:

- meeting new people
- connecting with old friends
- hearing new bands
- sharing resources
- experiencing the dance communities
- networking
- building outreach
- listening and connecting

CDSS is grateful for the gracious welcome and hospitality we received from the New Mexico FOLKMADS and the Albuquerque and Santa Fe communities. Thanks for living our mission—continuing the traditions and linking those who love them. It was a joy and pleasure to be part of it all.



Board members Linda Lieberman and Jenny Beer, May 2011, looking at the map of Exec meeting locations since 1996; photo by Max Newman

For hosting, coordinating, and arranging, many thanks to Dave, Noralyn, Meg, Becky, Donna, Kris, Kit, Mary, Peter, Trylla, Hamish, Deb, Simona, Trish, Donna, Doc, Merri, Bob C, Bob F, Linda S, Nancy, Jane, Erika, Gary; to the fine musicians: Scott, Linda A, Bruce, Della, Gemma; to the excellent people who fed us so well; and, again to the NMFOLKMADS community.

In November 2012, the CDSS Exec will be in Huntsville, Alabama; in February 2013, they'll visit the San Francisco area.