Exec Committee Travels to Ann Arbor and Houston

The Exec in Ann Arbor, November 2010
by Lynn Ackerson

Wow, do those Ann Arbor dancers know the meaning of the word "hospitality"! The Executive Committee of the CDSS Governing Board had its fall meeting in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Our weekend began with a wonderful welcome dinner at the Concourse Hall, a building owned and operated by AACTMAD (Ann Arbor Council for Traditional Music and Dance, a CDSS group affiliate). AACTMAD is a nonprofit organization whose goal is to support traditional music, dance, and song. The building has a lovely dance space that is also used for concerts.

After dinner on Friday night, the board members who call English dance joined with the local callers and musicians (Steve Schneider, Susie Lorand, and Martha Stokely) to lead a dance floor full of dancers for the evening. Because of the long day of traveling to Ann Arbor, I left early to get a good night's sleep. I had the great pleasure of staying at the home of Gretchen Preston and Greg Meisner. It's a marvelous old house that they remodeled and filled with cozy antique pieces. Everywhere you look in that house, there are fascinating things to catch your eye and interest. The bedroom I was in had the most comfortable bed I've ever slept in. I never wanted to get up, but the Executive Committee had meetings scheduled all day, and it seemed prudent to attend, especially since I'd flown this far and this was my first meeting as a new member of the Exec.

So what do we do at these meetings? Well, at last year's annual meeting of the entire Governing Board, we decided to delegate more of the day-to-day decisions to the Executive Committee so that when we all gather for the annual meeting, we can focus on more "big picture" topics. So, at this meeting, we discussed such things as finances, nomination of new board members, personnel openings and changes at the CDSS office, and the new CDSS week at Pinewoods, Harmony of Song and Dance.

During the day, we had to take a break so we could eat some more delicious homecooking, this time homemade soup, salad, and sandwiches. Oh my, didn't we just finish breakfast? At the end of the day, they fed us more delectable treats at Gretchen and Greg's house. With a roaring fire and friendly conversation, we had such a lovely meal. But then it was time for more dancing. This time it was a contra dance run by Don Theyken at the Pittsfield Grange. Don invited those of us board members who call contras and squares to do a guest spot that evening. With high energy music by the Sharon Hollow Stringband (Paul Winder, Garth Gerber, Myron Grant, Brad Battey), and very welcoming Ann Arbor dancers, we had a terrific time.

Sleep quickly. There's more food to be eaten. Sunday morning was a huge brunch spread with everything you could possibly want to eat. Oh my! Please save me from myself.

As you travel around the country to various dance communities and camps, it becomes clear what a small world it is. Between bites at the meals, I was able to catch up a little with several people I'd met on my journeys. There was Susie Lorand; we co-organized a camper night at Buffalo Gap one year, the year when twenty-four callers wanted to be on the program. And the Corays, Phil and Jan, who I met at the Ralph Page Dance Legacy Weekend [in New Hampshire]. There was even someone I was on the Bay Area Country Dance Society board about ten years ago, Nilos Nevertheless.

Brunch was followed by a community meeting led by Brad Foster, the Executive and Artistic Director of CDSS. More than forty people from Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, and possibly some of the other neighboring states, came to share successes in their dance communities. We heard of dances with homeschoolers, morris ales, and dancing in the streets (they had a contra line with eight hundred dancers stretching three blocks long). There was also time for the participants to ask questions of CDSS, and what CDSS can do to support their dance communities. How to teach style? How to recruit people to our dances

who aren't just like us (politically, racially, etc.)? How to effectively run an organization?

The meeting ended with a song led by Tom Siess (a former CDSS president) and his wife Anne, who had driven down from London, Ontario.

I want to send another heartfelt thanks to the Ann Arbor community who took such good care of us. You are an amazing group of people!

The Exec in Houston, February 2011
by David Means

From all corners of the United States, CDSS Exec members converged on Houston, Texas for this meeting, one of two each year that CDSS arranges so that Governing Board members of the Executive Committee can meet face-to-face with one another to take care of business and with a hosting community for dancing and conversations.

We were met at the airports by our host drivers, and ferried from there to Oxford Hall, the gathering site for the evening's activities. Oxford Hall is a large building behind a beautiful large house in a neighborhood in northwest Houston (remember that everything is large in Texas). The hosts for the weekend were Alice Bohlae and Mike Head, a delightful couple who provided food, space and good cheer for dances and meetings all weekend long.

As we talked and ate on the back porch, more people kept arriving, so that the circles of conversation kept widening until it was time to move across the backyard into the dance hall. English country dance was the entertainment for the evening, attended by a fine collection of local dancers and the CDSS Exec folk. A great young duo, Alicia Katz and Kendall Rogers, gave us fine renditions of English tunes, and we all danced until late.

Saturday morning we all gathered for breakfast and then our business meeting, then lunch, and more meeting. Did I mention the food? Alice, it turns out, is a professional caterer, and an entertaining and gracious hostess as well. We all were extremely well fed throughout the weekend.

Saturday night was devoted to a fine contra dance at a local hall. The same young players proved that they not only had command of the English country music, but also could get down and give us great contra music. Again we danced so long that we were nearly worn out, but could not stop as long as the music lasted.

Sunday morning we gathered again at Oxford Hall for yet another meal and then a community discussion. Brad Foster led a great session focusing on what successes the Houston dance community was proudest of and what CDSS could contribute to their future successes. The discussion was spirited; I was sure it was a success when the local community began talking to one another about how things worked and how they could be improved, as the Exec members just listened.

Eventually, it came time for us all to return to our normal lives, and goodbyes took quite a while. We all came away with a keen appreciation of a wonderful dance community that knows how to have a good time, and how to extend gracious hospitality to their guests. If you ever find your way to Houston, drop in on an event here; you'll love it.

Lynn Ackerson is from El Cerrito, CA; David Means is from Seattle, Washington; they are at large members of the CDSS Governing Board and sit on the Executive Committee.

The next two Exec meetings will be in Winnipeg, Manitoba (November 12-13, 2011) and in New Mexico (February 2012).