

By Diane Silver & Pam Paulson, CDSS Board Members

On February 7-9, 2020, the CDSS Executive Committee met in Cincinnati for its semi-annual in-person meeting. The Exec. Committee meets monthly by conference call and strives to meet twice a year in person. Meeting in person gives us a chance to reinforce the collaborative nature of our work, dig more deeply into the business of the Board, and discuss issues and ideas with a stronger feeling of cohesion. Equally important (likely more!), we hold the meeting in different locations across the U.S. and Canada, with the specific goal of getting to know one of our local communities personally and giving them a chance to connect with CDSS in a more direct way. We hope it is a labor of love. We know for sure that it is added labor, to host 10 itinerant music/dance guests all at the same time. Cincinnati Contra Dancers and Cincinnati English Country Dancers joined forces to make us welcome. We are grateful for their tremendous hospitality.

Cincinnati was one of the five founding cities that created CDSS in 1915, and traditional music and dance continue to thrive in the Queen City. They hold weekly ECD and contra dances, a more advanced contra dance one Saturday per month, plus an annual ECD weekend in the fall and contra weekend (Pigtown Fling) in the spring. Whew.

Work Time/ Play Time

Our time in Cincinnati included three dances, three potlucks, two luncheons, and a lovely brunch! We were incredibly well fed and sheltered, and enjoyed several terrific bands and callers (see full list of gratitude below). Those were our rewards for two days of committee meetings plus a valuable community listening session. Highlights include:

- **Annual Plan:** We reviewed the current annual plan to ensure that we are making steady progress on our big-picture goals, and we received a preview of the annual plan for 2020 from Executive Director Katy German.
- **Finances:** We did a careful review of our budget and finances, with attention to plans for keeping our budget balanced once the final year of our special Sage grant is complete. CDSS had a strong start to the year, and we also have ambitious goals for programs and services to our Affiliates and members that require robust fundraising. The Board Treasurer, Finance Committee,

and Fund Development Committee work in concert to monitor our financial details. They also plan a range of revenue strategies and lead the effort to meet our operational expenses and fund scholarships for camps and grant programs for Affiliates and members.

- **Affiliate Renewals:** We discussed a proposal from the Executive Director (ED) to combine the renewal dates for membership, insurance, and 501(c)(3) status for Affiliates. This means Affiliate groups have just one renewal date to deal with each year, rather than three. We also discussed providing the authority for the ED to adjust the Affiliate membership fee for groups facing financial straits and to adjust the Affiliate fee for Canadian groups to compensate for the U.S.-Canada exchange rate that has made affiliation more expensive for Canadian groups. Both of these proposals were subsequently approved by the full Board and enacted by staff this spring.
- **Inclusivity Statement:** We decided to begin work to develop an inclusivity statement for CDSS programs and to commit to Board and staff training in this area (held during the Annual Meeting in April).
- **Committee and Task Group Reports:** We reviewed reports from all of our committees and task groups, where the bulk of the Board work is done. The plans and accomplishments of this work include:
 - A joint Board-staff task group is working on creating mission and vision statements for our camps, to provide more guidance and clear messaging for one of our oldest programs.
 - The Community Culture and Safety Task Group is making steady progress on a writing guide to help local organizers craft courtesy and etiquette guidelines for their communities to especially address issues of safety and inclusion.
 - The Governance Committee has done yeoman's work crafting a new strategy for succession planning for the Board officer positions. This draft plan received a good deal of discussion, with many ideas providing guidance for the committee. This is a good example of the kind of deep work which meeting in person facilitates.

Community Engagement

Our weekend culminated in a productive community meeting on Sunday with leaders and interested participants from both local dance groups discussing issues and concerns of the local community. CDSS Board President Gaye Fifer and ED Katy German co-facilitated the discussion, starting with a brainstorm list of successes and then moving to challenges.

Successes include a thriving ECD group, with a corps of callers big enough to support a weekly dance, and a growing corps of musicians. In the contra community, successes include acquiring a new sound system, continuing success of the annual Pigtown Fling, and a strong start to exploring gender-free dance. Both groups enjoy a growing cadre of volunteers, a quality of dancing that welcomes new dancers and raises the level of dancing in the hall, and a strong regional network of mutually supportive dances, with coordination and collaboration across four cities. There is a strong and deeply rooted sense of kindness and caring in this community from its long history of community dancing.

Challenges include local board burnout, over-extended leadership, the need to engage new ideas and energy (especially getting younger dancers on the board), the need for guidance regarding use of copyrighted tunes by local bands, financial stressors, growing and nurturing the pool of local callers, connection between the ECD and contra communities, and, significantly, a recent debate and decision-making process regarding the adoption of gender-neutral terms within the contra community, which has left some wounds that will require healing.

CDSS does not have magic answers to these difficult issues, but we were able to provide some insights from the benefit of external distance, and more importantly, reassurance that these issues are not unique to this community. It is tremendously helpful to the CDSS Board to have the trust of local members to share these challenges so openly and honestly. It helps us understand the struggles at the local level and focus our efforts to provide whatever resources we can to many communities. Knowing how Cincinnati deals with its challenges will become a resource for other groups encountering similar issues. In this way, Cincinnati once again demonstrates

its national leadership, as it did 100 years ago in helping to establish CDSS.

We are so grateful to everyone who provided us with housing, food, song, and dance during our visit: Christine Armstrong, Debra Barrett, Sam Bartlett, Jeneene Brengelman, Rick Boyce, John Brockman, Joanne Degreg, Amy Foltz, Diane Frick, Ken Irwin, Hazel and Aren Jodock, Betsy Lehman, John McCain, Mary Rekers, Nicholas Rockstroh, Mike Self, Terry Spiegel, Susan and Jim Vogt, Charles Wallner, Mike White, Jim and Linda Coppock, Kathy Woods, Bob Frankenhoff, Rick Boyce, Tim Jamison, MM Jamison, Joan Griggs, Dave Marcus, Ed Strelau, Kathy Woods, Astrid Mast, Doug Mast, Joanne Degreg. Read the expanded version of this article online at cdss.org/cincinnati.

The full Board gathers in person each April in Massachusetts (when not thwarted by a pandemic). The Executive Committee meets in person twice throughout the year in different communities across the continent. All other meetings during the year are held via teleconference. The Executive Committee is charged with conducting the business of CDSS between Annual Meetings. For more information about your CDSS Board, go to cdss.org/governing-board.

BELOW: Supertrad (Sam Bartlett, banjo; Eric Schedler, accordion; and Brian Lindsay, fiddle) play for Cincinnati's Saturday night contra dance. Hear a tune from the dance at bit.ly/SupertradInCincinnati. *Photo by Avia Moore.*

