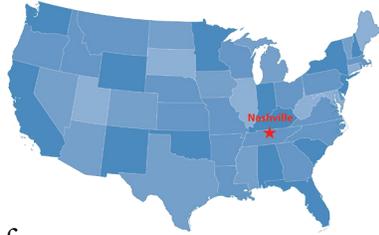


CDSS Executive Committee Kicks Off New Strategic Direction in Nashville, Tennessee

by Pam Paulson, CDSS Board Member

In January the CDSS Executive Committee gathered in Nashville, TN, to kick off our first year of the CDSS



Strategic Direction (our five-year strategic plan). Nashville is a busy, growing city with a vibrant music scene and thriving dance communities! Hosted by the Nashville Country Dancers (NCD), we can assure you that Southern hospitality is alive and well in this community; both in their homes and on the dance floor!

Getting Down to Business

The members of the committee and two guest Board members arrived on Thursday and were warmly welcomed in our local hosts' homes. On Friday and Saturday, we met to conduct business at the café in the 2nd Presbyterian Church, the location of the weekly contra dance. Executive Director Katy German and Treasurer Joel Bluestein presented a review of 2018, looking at both the financial state of the organization and an overview of the last year's new initiatives to increase support for organizers and group Affiliates. The CDSS budget for 2019 was discussed and approved. Katy also presented for discussion the staff work plan developed from the new Strategic Direction. The annual work plan is a framework that allows the staff and the board to stay in sync and share responsibility for keeping the mission, vision, values, and priority focus areas central to our work.

Exec Meetings are also a time to hear what our task groups are doing. The Archives Task Group has been very active as we move forward with our relationship with UNH, University of New Hampshire, and collaborate with them to help digitize UNH's Library of Traditional Music & Dance. The CDSS archives are a part of this collection, and this work relates to documenting and stewarding our living traditions. A new Marketing Advisory Group has been created to assist the CDSS Staff in revitalizing their marketing efforts, which is directly related to the Expand Our Impact focus area. Robust Camp Programs is

another focus area. Lively discussion was held on how to best tap into the Camp Advisory Committee, so that we can continue to have quality camp programs and utilize them to carry out our mission and vision. Katy also talked about ways that the staff is working on providing value and service to our members and Affiliates. The Board was also updated on the training that is being provided to the new Board members who will be starting their service in April. Both days we were well fed, with a delicious and healthy lunch being provided by local group Affiliate, the Nashville Country Dancers. A big thank you to Melissa Wilkinson, Joyce Eyler and Juliette Webb for preparing meals, rounding up snacks, having coffee, tea and water readily available and cleaning up afterwards. We felt well cared for!

Dancing in Nashville

The Nashville Country Dancers have one board for both the English and contra dances; this allows for easy cooperation between the two dance traditions. NCD took the visit by the Traveling Exec as a chance to promote the weekend as a special event, with activities to welcome regular dancers, dancers that had been inactive for a while, as well as new dancers. On Friday evening, there was a "homecoming" dance. This included a potluck supper and contra dance, with calling by CDSS Board members Dorcas Hand, Gaye Fifer, and Frannie Marr and music by Brian Christianson and Friends. The Friends include an ever changing slate of professional musicians who record, tour, and play at venues around Nashville. This time the Friends were Alan O'Bryant, Mike Compton, David Grier, and Dennis Crouch. There were three enthusiastic lines in the hall with lots of smiles. A backdrop for photos was set up, complete with props! Several people took advantage of the opportunity to have fun and snap a Polaroid!

After the regular dance, there was a unique offering: a DJ contra complete with lights, calling and music by Rachel Bergin. NCD regularly holds DJ contras in connection with special dance events, such as their Playford Ball weekend and their contra weekend, Music City Masquerade. On Saturday, NCD held their annual

Midwinter Day of English Dance, with an afternoon dance with CDSS Board member Beverly Francis calling and music by the Volponies (Anne Hoos, Susan Kevra, Jeff Rohrbough, and Bill Verdier). This was followed by a potluck supper and an evening dance, with calling by CDSS Board member Brooke Friendly and music again by the Volponies.

Hearing from the Community

At each travelling Exec Meeting, we make it a point to have a community meeting. These meetings give the CDSS Board members a chance to understand what is happening in the local dance and song community. In Nashville this happened on Sunday, and was preceded by an impressive potluck brunch organized and hosted by Juliette and John Webb. After brunch we had a lovely singing session led by Cathy Hollister, who provided printed lyrics and accompanied the singing on her small harp. Twenty one members of the local community were in attendance, representing contra and English dancers, singers, and musicians. There were long time dancers, newer dancers, and many in between.



Community meeting during the Exec (photo by Avia Moore)

There are typically three questions asked of the participants to help initiate conversation and discussion: what are you proud of, what are the challenges, and how CDSS can help. Things NCD is proud of include how the group is engaging with younger dancers, encouraging them to attend and mentoring them into leadership roles. Several people mentioned the supportive nature of the NCD Board: they say YES to new ideas and then ask how can they be of help. Positive and appropriate interactions with new dancers are modeled, and the culture of the community is positive and welcoming. The attendees valued the culture that exists, wanting it to grow and continue. Challenges brought forward included covering costs of the hall, caller, and bands. There are many

talented and willing professional musicians in Nashville, and this is definitely positive for the community. The challenge of paying the caller and the musicians appropriately, along with how to charge the dancers brought out many ideas including discussion related to sliding fees and season passes. There was also a lively discussion around barriers to access for underrepresented populations. This is one of the wonderful things that happens at the community meetings — topics come up, there is discussion, and notes are taken. It gets people thinking about and discussing things that sometimes aren't typically accessible. Notes taken at the meeting will be transcribed and sent to the NCD Board for future reference and use so that the conversations can continue.

Our time in Nashville was short and we packed a lot into it. Our hosts were warm and welcoming; the community was open and inviting. We were certainly well cared for while we were in town. The discussions and interactions with the community are exactly why we do the Traveling Exec meetings, and in many ways it's one of the best parts of being on the Executive Committee. Find out more about the Nashville Country Dancers and their upcoming events by going to nashvillecountrydancers.org.

Fall 2019 Travelling Exec Meeting: Lake Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

Our next stop will be in a bit different for us; we'll be going to Lady of the Lake Fall Dance and Music Weekend, October 4th-6th, on the shores of Coeur d' Alene Lake in Idaho. This is a weekend opportunity that will include representatives from communities across the region. CDSS is working with Lady of the Lake organizers to provide scholarships to regional organizers and affiliate leaders who would like to join the event and be a part of the regional community meeting. For details on the event, go to: ladyofthelake.org/fallwend.

The full Board gathers in person each April in Massachusetts. 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/about-us/governing-board.

Web Extra: *Downloadable PDF of the CDSS Strategic Direction*