

## History of Classes Given by Village Swingers Square Dance Club

The Village Swingers danced at Sligo Middle School until 2005. At this location we attracted dancers from northern Virginia, Prince Georges County, and upper Montgomery County. Due to the increased expenses for the rental of the school, we moved to the Kensington Fire Department in the fall, 2005. The room was too small as they gave us less space than originally stated. Therefore, we moved in 2006 to our current location, Rockville Nursing Home. The distance was too far for some and some of our members relocated or weren't dancing any more. Therefore, our attendance declined.

In 2008, the Village Swingers did a 3 day BLAST workshop. The members provided lunch each day and helped with the students. There were students who had some experience and some who had none. Three days was not enough time to teach the calls to these students whether they had some experience or not. Therefore, we did not recruit any new dancers.

In September, 2011 the Village Swingers had reduced to 1 1/2 squares and chose to dance once a month. Betty Mastrobattista attended a WASCA workshop suggesting that clubs give lessons on the night of their regular dances. She asked Kenny Farris, with Steve Lucius, to give classes from 7:00 to 8:00pm before the regular club dances. The Village Swingers danced the first Saturday of the month, and the Saturday-in-Style danced the third Saturday of the month. Some months, due to holidays, only one lesson was given a month. This was too long between the lessons. This was not acceptable. There were 21 students who started the class. Only 5 completed the class.

Betty went to Kenny and asked him if he would teach classes on a weekly basis. Due to Mary and Kenny retiring, Kenny felt they wanted to do other things, and said he would get us a caller to teach a class. Eva Murray was the caller and a very excellent choice. This is the third year of classes and it has been very successful. Village Swingers is back to dancing twice a month.

The club members and Eva work together on advertising and angeling at the classes. The members who angel try to make the students comfortable and encourage the students as they dance. They greet them and talk to them during the breaks. Eva will cover this in more detail.

The club caller, the class instructor, officers, and club members, all are working together. Some club members may not be able to angel but help with advertising or other areas where they are needed.

The advertising and the continuing support of the club members and the two callers, Kenny Farris and Eva Murray, have been successful. When the students reach a certain level of dancing, they are invited to the regular Village Swingers club dances. Eva and Kenny discuss which calls the students learned and Kenny calls at their level during some of the tips. This gives the students experience in a club environment. The club has increased its membership from 1 1/2 squares to 4 squares.

As presidents, Lou and Betty send an e-mail to members and guests the week of the dance to remind them of the dance. We call members who had missed a dance twice. Also, we call

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guests who have not been attending to encourage them to come and dance with us again. Those members who do not have e-mails receive a copy of the reminder in the mail.

Taking the new members along with the club members to banner steals, introduces them to other clubs and callers, and increases their exposure to the square dance community.

We expect some of the students of the current class to join our club in the fall, 2015.

The Village Swingers now has an updated web site which will encourage people, who look at it, to join the square dance community.

## ADVERTISING is just the ON RAMP:

A positive, upbeat, encouraging support system must be in place from the very first contact with a prospective dancer and every single time there after and at any/all dance halls they frequent. This is necessary until they are fully integrated with the community and feel like they really belong, a good two years. Every single dancer, caller, and club officer plays a vital role in retaining new dancers, every single time they interact with them. A single unpleasant experience or comment from anyone during this formative time could result in the loss of a dancer. We all spend a great deal of time and resources developing new dancers and to lose a new dancer over something like that is extremely dis-heartening. We were all new dancers once. It takes a lot of courage and dedication to become a square dancer.

### QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do you actively seek out new dancers and invite them into your square, specifically asking them to dance with you?
- 2) When you see dancers hanging back, not dancing much or at all and not engaged in conversation, do you go talk to them? Do you make a point to introduce yourself to those you do not know at the dance and try to get to know them a bit? Do you greet people and thank them by name, as often as you can?
- 3) Do you frown and are you annoyed when your square breaks down or do you smile, laugh and go with the flow?
- 4) The leaders in our community, which includes everyone here today, must cultivate such a culture among the entire population of dancers. We lead by example and then by encouraging others to do the same. Our dance community must know what the desired behavior is, needs to know what the desired behavior looks like and then must be rewarded for exhibiting such behavior with recognition, thanks and appreciation, often!
- 5) We have to aggressively push information out to our new dancers and verify that they are actually getting the information about dances and events. Calls and Cues, club email lists and mailings, the wascadances email list and web sites are all vital in distributing information.

### ADVERTISING:

- 1) Planning for your advertising campaign runs year around, and starts now!
- 2) Serious advertising starts, in earnest, 2 months in advance
- 3) Get organized! Keep track of every single lead, beginning today! Put 1 person in charge of this.
  - o Get as much information from the prospect as they will provide (name, email, phone, mailing address)
  - o Document the date and any comments they make. It could be useful information when you contact them in the future. Relationship building begins with this very first contact.
  - o Ask them for their phone number and ask them if they want a phone call reminder for the upcoming open house dance.
  - o Ask if you can send them an email, get their email address. Ask them to confirm receipt.
  - o Ask if you can send them a flyer, get their mailing address. Send a flyer immediately.
  - o Retain information on all leads even after the lessons start, year around, even if it's going to be a long time before the lessons start up again.
  - o Send all prospects that did not join the classes this year a flyer, an email and/or give them a call the next time classes start. Do that every time classes start until it becomes apparent that they are absolutely no longer interested. It could take several years before they finally decide they want to participate.
- 4) Get organized! Plan all of your advertising now! Put 1 person in charge of this.
  - o Generate a list of everything you are going to do, now,
  - o Document everything so it is repeatable, so you can just execute it when it's time to advertise!
- 5) Advertising costs money and money must be spent. Lack of adequate advertising results in a small class which is significantly most costly than having spent enough money for a successful ad campaign and ending up with a larger class. The larger the class is, the more successful it will be. It's just more fun for everyone.
- 6) When we started the new classes in 2011, the club presidents (Betty and Lou Mastrobattista) and I did all of the traditional advertising that is free. When it came time to taking risks and spending money on advertising, I just did it myself. I didn't ask the club to pay for it. The club didn't have the budget for it and there was no way for me to know if it was money well spent. I personally took the risk. That also meant that a committee of 1 was making all of the decisions and running with them. Don't let a committee get in the way of making decisions. Don't let unknowns and differences of opinion on how to advertise result in complete inertia. Don't let the lack of a budget get in the way. Don't let the "we already tried that and it didn't work" comments get in the way. If needed, raise the money, starting immediately. I spent 1,000 this year on recurring advertising expenses.

Complete redesign of the web sites cost another 300.00. Some of my expense will be reimbursed but most is covered with student fees.

- 7) Many forms of advertising are required for a larger and more successful reach. Advertising is most effective when people see the advertising often and in different forms. The same advertising must be done in a very public/visible way every year. It builds an overall awareness of square dancing in the area. People who see it year after year may eventually decide to try it out. People who see more than one form of advertising are more likely to call and inquire. Quite a few of our new dancers have told me that they saw at least 2 forms of advertising for the class. I think that is a big reason for the success of the advertising campaign.
- 8) Get everyone in the club involved in the advertising, ask for help and ideas. Always be on the lookout for new advertising opportunities, year around. My goal is to add something new to the advertising mix every year. Ask everyone in the lessons for ideas on advertising. Give them the text so they can easily send out emails to their friends and email lists.
- 9) We cannot rely solely on our existing dancers to invite their friends to the classes. They have probably invited all of their friends repeatedly and simply don't have anyone else to invite. The number of new dancers brought in by existing dancers will simply dry up over time! We can only exponentially expand the dance community by bringing in new dancers who have no prior association with square dancing. They are the most difficult to reach and bring in, but, if we can reach them and get them involved, they are the one's who have friends to invite; friends who have not been invited repeatedly to give square dancing a try. I don't know what the numbers really are, but I do know that we must reach a very large number of people just to generate 1 prospect who actually shows up at an open house. It takes a great deal of courage to try something new when you don't know a single sole! Out of all of those who show up at the open house, maybe 75% actually take the lessons and of those that start the lessons maybe only 80% complete them. Of those that complete the lessons, maybe only 80% stick with the activity for any length of time. We must cast a GIGANTIC net to grow our clubs!
- 10) The contact phone number on the advertising should be a Google voice number. A Google voice number allows you to rotate the person who receives the call and lets you know that the caller is a square dance prospect before you answer the call. It is free.
- 11) All phone calls from prospects must be answered! Callers who get the answering machine generally do not leave messages. The person answering the phone must be upbeat and pleasant, not desperate. They must be able to send emails and send text messages. If a call is missed and no voice message is left, call the number back anyways, as soon as possible. They probably still want to hear from you!
- 12) Emails must be answered as quickly as possible, within hours if at all possible and definitely the same day! The person who monitors the email must be responsive. Emails must be forwarded to an alternate when the primary is not able to respond to emails. Set up automatic forwarding and/or use a generic Gmail email address that several folks can manage and respond to. Send out reminder emails before every open house dance and before every class night dance. Do not assume any prior knowledge on the part of your readers. Write complete emails with background, context and address/contact information. You never know who else may end up reading your email.
- 13) We charge for the open house dances. I believe that anyone who is willing to give square dancing a try is going to come out regardless of the cost, as long as it is reasonable. This also gives me the option to offer a promotion, which I did for the Money Mailer advertising for the 2014 class.
- 14) I encourage new dances to pay for the 8 weeks up front, but, if someone really can't/doesn't want to, I let them pay per dance. We do not require advance payment when they register for the open house or lesson series. Payment is made when they show up the first night.
- 15) When I advertise for the classes, I only advertise an 8-week lesson series and ask for people to commit to 8 weeks of lessons. I do tell them during the open house about the fact that I am teaching a specific curriculum and about the festival in the spring and about dancing with the mainstream club in December, but they don't really understand yet that to complete the curriculum it requires a 24 week commitment. We have to remember that their reason/goal for learning to square dance probably differs from our goal. They may not necessarily want to dance at the regular dances and at festivals all around the region/country/world. When it's time to start the second set of 8 weeks, I tell them that we hope they will continue with the dancing and that there is more to learn. Virtually everyone continues, but not all. The club I teach for is a mainstream club and the new dancers are invited to attend the club dances beginning in December. The caller calls a class level dance

and includes everyone in the dancing from that evening forward. Since a large number of the club members attend the Thursday night classes, there is lot of encouragement to get the new dancers to attend the regular club night dances.

- 16) A professional web site(s) with lots of fun pictures is essential. The web site is your primary marketing tool. It speaks volumes and should be written with the new dancer/guest dancer in mind, the person who is trying to decide if they want to sign up for lessons and join the group or attend your dance for the first time.
- 17) A simple, very easy to remember web site URL for the lessons is essential. It goes on all the advertising. The URL should be made up of the keywords that people might use to find your lessons. The URL and it's correlation to search terms impacts where your site ends up in the search results.
  - We use [www.RockvilleSquareDance.com](http://www.RockvilleSquareDance.com) for the lessons held in Rockville Maryland. This site has an online registration form for the lessons. The online registration form is important to the younger, more technically savvy prospects. Your web site has about 8 seconds to convince your visitor to read more. Send them directly to the lesson page.
  - We use a different URL for the square dance club and the two sites have links to each other. The square dance club site is [www.VillageSwingersSquareDance.com](http://www.VillageSwingersSquareDance.com). They are linked together.
  - The interested prospect will follow the links and they will decide if they want to participate based upon the information they find. The information must paint a positive, attractive picture.
  - Pay attention to where your web site shows up in the search engines. Lots of good, appropriate Key words are important, page titles, page names and lots of meaningful text on each of the pages are all important to your site's success.
- 18) If you don't have money for advertising and you don't have someone personally willing to put forth the money, raise money! It's easy. Ask for donations from your square dancers and then sell them on ebay or craigs list. Take donated items to "I sold it on ebay" or some such similar shop if no one has the time or expertise to sell them on behalf of the club.
- 19) Once you get people to come out, you have to keep them! You do this by providing a positive and friendly environment. Everyone should be talking to them, showing interest in them and building friendships. Everything about the class and everyone in the hall plays a vital role here. The caller must be patient and be careful that no one is embarrassed or singled out. The caller must balance the teaching pace to ensure that the dancers progress but are not overwhelmed. The caller and the group must find a way to bring dancers who miss a night or two up to speed. I do this by encouraging questions and actually doing quick help/demo sessions during the breaks as needed. Many of the angels answer questions during the breaks too. I encourage everyone to ask questions of anyone. We also keep everyone posted regarding those who are ill and undergoing operations and such and provide cards for everyone to sign, which we then send along.
- 20) Hold lesson night every week, year around! This is absolutely vital. Taking time off over the summer is a killer. You must keep your dancers involved and engaged. We learn and dance mainstream for 24 weeks. Even if we are done learning mainstream material early, we continue to dance at the mainstream level. We cover plus in about 16 weeks. Once we are done with the plus material, we simply keep on dancing until the end of the summer when it's time to start a new class. Once the new dancers stop attending on lesson night, they forget how much fun they were having and about their new friends. We are in the relationship business. The relationships are really what keep people involved in the square dance activity.
- 21) We haven't been able to do this successfully yet, but, I am sure that if you can incorporate some social activity with the dance/lesson, i.e. an after the dance get together at a restaurant, on a regular basis, then you really add a whole new dimension to the fun and fellowship for everyone involved. Make it happen!
- 22) The dress code has got to go, especially at the entry-level dances where new dancers are most likely to frequent. There are so many folks out there who won't even try square dancing because of the dress code and stereotypes! Experienced dancers have got to stop giving new dancers a hard time about what they are wear to a dance, especially in the beginning. The new dancer is still trying to decide if they even like square dancing. It only takes one comment from someone to turn him or her off and away from square dancing. This is extremely dis-heartening to those of us who are working so very hard to grow the activity so we can all keep dancing for years and years to come.
- 23) When a new dancer shows up at the club dance for the first time, the reception by the experienced dancers is vital. Everyone in the club must be sensitized to this and welcome the new dancers. The experienced dances

must ACTIVELY and PROACTIVELY invite new dancers into their square and be extremely friendly and happy towards them even if the square breaks down! When new dancers attend their first dances, the treatment and reception of the club members determine if they will even consider returning to that dance or to the activity.

- 24) I accept singles, couples and children 9 years and older with a participating adult. There would be no class if I required everyone to come as a couple. Even some married folks are participating without their spouse.
- 25) I have the unique and really great ability to send my new dancers over to Gerrymanders to dance on Wednesday nights. They dance at the level of the newest dancer in the room from 7-8:30. This also gives me a dance to send new prospects to if they contact me after the lessons have started. I explain the difference between the two groups, since not everyone is going to be comfortable with the Gerrymanders approach. Some opt to wait for the next startup of the Thursday night lessons while others head right on out to Gerrymanders.
- 26) All dancers can opt to dance as angels, no matter how well they dance. I do not require them to pay for the lessons again, even if they are still very weak, but they pay if they want to secure a spot in a square.

2011 – Caller, Eva Murray, secured to provide lessons for the club in mid-august.

We decided to hold class on Thursday nights from 7-9pm

Mainstream Lessons started 9/22/2011 and ended on 4/5/2012, 24 weeks

26 new dancers danced with us at least once, 14 started lessons and 7 dancers graduated Mainstream.

The first two dances were open houses. I accepted students who joined several weeks into the class.

We started PLUS on 4/12/2012 and danced every Thursday thru 8/30/2012.

Advertising began late August:

- 1) Newspaper (Washington post calendar and gazette)
- 2) Flyers (black text on colored paper)
- 3) Facebook event
- 4) Meetup-group (I opened up a meetup group with a 3 month trial and then cancelled it)
- 5) Folklore Society of Greater Washington newsletter
- 6) Emails sent to email lists (wasca dances, neighborhood womens club)
- 7) Friends
- 8) Betty, Lou and Eva called and personally invited everyone we could think of to fill the class and to angel for us. We called and sent email reminders before every dance.

The first year was difficult. We mostly danced 2 squares but there were a few nights where we only had 1 square. The caller frequently had to dance to fill either the first or the second square. We checked the head count before every class to make sure we could fill the squares. There were many nights when we were calling for angels at 6pm before the 7pm dance.

2012 - Mainstream Lessons started 9/13/2012 and ended on 3/28/2013, 24 weeks

20 new dancers danced with us at least once, 13 started lessons and 10 dancers graduated Mainstream.

The first 2 dances were open house dances. I accepted students who joined several weeks late.

We started PLUS on 4/4/2013 and danced every Thursday thru 8/29/2013.

Advertising began Mid July:

- 1) Newspaper (press releases sent out)
- 2) Flyers (new modern, sleek design with multiple color print on white paper)
- 3) Facebook event and postings on appropriate/related facebook pages
- 4) Meetup-group (I opened up a new meetup group, put lots of time and effort into making it a quality site with proper text, search terms, pictures and text)
- 5) Folklore Society of Greater Washington newsletter
- 6) Emails sent to email lists (wasca dances, neighborhood womens club)
- 7) Friends
- 8) Online Calendars on as many sites as possible
- 9) Created the RockvilleSquareDance.com web site just for the lessons and advertising
- 10) We called and sent email reminders before every dance.
- 11) During the plus lessons, 3 tips were plus and 2 tips were “extended” mainstream. We did mini squares for those dancers who were not ready to proceed with Plus when the group was dancing

the plus tips. That kept our mainstream dancers involved and dancing even as we taught plus. The second year was much easier than the first. We frequently danced 3 squares. The caller sometimes had to dance to fill a square. We checked the head count before every class to make sure we could fill the squares. We were sometimes looking for extra angels the afternoon of the lesson.

2013 - Mainstream Lessons started 9/12/2013 and ended on 4/10/2014, 24 weeks  
49 new dancers danced with us at least once, 25 started lessons and 19 dancers graduated Mainstream.  
The first 2 dances were open house dances. I accepted students who joined several weeks late.  
We started PLUS on 4/17/2014 and danced every Thursday thru 8/28/2014.

Advertising began Mid July:

- 1) Newspaper (press releases sent out)
- 2) Flyers (new modern, sleek design with multiple color print on white paper)
- 3) Facebook event and postings on appropriate/related facebook pages
- 4) Meetup-group (I opened up a new meetup group, put lots of time and effort into making it a quality site with proper text, search terms, pictures and text)
- 5) Folklore Society of Greater Washington newsletter
- 6) Emails sent to email lists (wasca dances, neighborhood womens club)
- 7) Friends
- 8) Online Calendars on as many sites as possible
- 9) Created the RockvilleSquareDance.com web site just for the lessons and advertising
- 10) Church Bulletins
- 11) We called and sent email reminders before every dance.
- 12) 85 yellow and black 24x18 street signs all around town
- 13) During the plus lessons, 3 tips were plus and 2 tips were "extended" mainstream. We did mini squares for those dancers who were not ready to proceed with Plus when the group was dancing the plus tips. That kept our mainstream dancers involved and dancing even as we taught plus.

The third year was easier yet. We had lots of extra single ladies. I had to turn away 1 single lady in order to keep the gender balance of the class. The one additional lady would have required an additional 4 gent and 3 lady angels to fill the square and I knew I didn't have enough angels to make that work. I also knew that she wasn't going to attend regularly and I couldn't afford to have her take the spot of another dancer who was committed to attending regularly. We danced anywhere from 3 to 5 squares every week. The caller only had to dance and call to fill a square occasionally, generally early or late in the evening when someone showed up late or left early. I no longer tried to keep tabs on who was going to show up and if there would be a gender balance. The group was too large to do that and too many people did not have email addresses or simply didn't tell me when they would or would not be in attendance.

2014 - Mainstream Lessons started 9/11/2014 and will end with the 24<sup>th</sup> class.  
40 new dancers danced with us at least once, 28 dancers have started the lessons  
The first 3 dances were open house dances and then the lesson series officially started  
We will start PLUS in the April time frame and dance until the end of the summer.

Advertising began in earnest Mid July:

- 1) Newspaper (press releases sent out)
- 2) Flyers (new modern, sleek design with multiple color print on white paper)
- 3) Facebook event and postings on appropriate/related facebook pages
- 4) Meetup-group (I continued to enhance the meet-up group with text and pictures)
- 5) Folklore society of greater Washington newsletter
- 6) Emails sent to email lists (wasca dances, neighborhood womens club)
- 7) Church Bulletins
- 8) Friends
- 9) Online Calendars on as many sites as possible, Craigs List event
- 10) Created the RockvilleSquareDance.com web site just for the lessons and advertising
- 11) We called and sent email reminders before every dance.

- 12) 95 yellow and black 24x18 street signs all around town
- 13) I updated my personal callers web site. It is very new and modern looking and has lots of pictures and video. I got a new web site put together for the Village Swingers club that is also very new and modern and has lots of pictures and video. I updated the Rockville Square Dance web site and added a registration form and links to the other web sites. It is all linked together and presents a very easy to follow and complete set of information for visitors.
- 14) I anticipate that I will do the same thing I did last year with the plus lessons: During the plus lessons, 3 tips were plus and 2 tips were "extended" mainstream. We did mini squares for those dancers who were not ready to proceed with PLUS when the group was dancing the plus tips. That kept our mainstream dancers involved and dancing even as we taught plus.

So far this year we are generally dancing 6 squares. We have danced as few as 4 squares and have nearly had enough dancers for a 7<sup>th</sup> square on a few nights. From what I can see and hear, everyone is having a good time and there is lots of energy in the room.

# of dancers who attended at least 1 dance and how they found us				
	2011	2012	2013	2014
Calls and Cues	0	2	0	0
Craigs List	X	X	X	0
Facebook	1	0	0	0
Flyers	3	6	3	9
Friends	8	10	21	18
FSGW newsletter	1	0	2	0
Gerrymanders	1	0	0	0
Meetup	3	0	7	7
Money Mailer	X	X	X	1
Newspaper	3	0	0	0
Online Calendar	0	0	0	0
Prior Association	7	2	3	2
Street Signs	X	X	8	7
Unknown	1	0	5	3
Sign on bumper of car	X	X	0	1
<b># MS graduates</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>TBD (28 in class)</b>

**Flyers:** Must attract attention, be pleasing to the eye, done in color ink, have little text and have a CALL TO ACTION! I actually hired a graphics designer on odesk.com for 40.00 to design the flyer. They had the software and skills I did not have. I am not very creative and I wanted to see what an outsider would come up with. Shop around and online for the best price on color printing. Do not skimp on flyers! Each year I purchase 1,000 color flyers for 85.92, including shipping from <http://www.docucopies.com/> or 1-877-222-4842. Use non-profit discount code NP10 for a 10% discount on your order. Visit <http://rockvillesquaredance.com/squaredance.pdf> to see our color flyer.



Post them in all of your libraries, at restaurants, grocery stores, hardware stores, any place you can! Mail them to every dancer on your mailing list and to all of your prospects. Montgomery County requires prior permission before posting flyers in the libraries and will actually distribute the flyers to all the branches for you. We actually send folks out to visit each branch to verify placement of our flyers and to give them more flyers for distribution. A permission letter had to accompany the flyers.



**Street Signs:** Must have large print, be extremely easy to read, done in high contrast colors, and have only essential information. Each year I ordered 100 18x24 yellow and black colorplast signs with 10x30 wire stakes and free shipping for \$350, package 5, from <http://www.yardsignwholesale.com/> or 407-894-0090 . Graphics waste space on a sign. I believe that double-sided signs are worth the extra money for the extra potential exposure. Most signs will be visible from both sides, so you are really missing 50% of your potential audience when you purchase single sided signs.



- If you decide to use street signs, find out what the sign regulations are in your area.
- In Montgomery County Maryland, we are not supposed to put the signs in the Montgomery county right of way (between the telephone poles) during the week. Anything outside of the telephone poles is private property and while the owner of that property may not like the sign there, they can't fine us for putting a sign there.

- Pay attention to where other signs are posted, especially when they seem to stay there for an extended period of time. That's where you want to put your signs.
- The best time to post signs is very early, 6am, on Saturday morning. There is almost no traffic so it's safer and faster to put up lots more signs in a variety of locations. I spent a total of 4 hours putting up signs.
- Get everyone to help with putting up street signs. A number of dancers took and put out signs.
- It is not worth your time and energy to post signs on Friday afternoon and then pick them up again on Sunday night or Monday morning, don't bother. Essentially all of the signs will disappear over time. Expect that.
- It is absolutely certain that some/most of your signs will end up posted illegally. You must be prepared to pay a fine for violating the sign laws. I received 1 phone call each year from the county regarding my signs. Each call was just a warning. They picked up the signs they found and asked me to "cease and desist" in putting out more. Just be real nice to them when/if they call and play dumb. I think they are really looking to fine the businesses/relators that are repeat offenders and should know better. I figure it's better to benefit from the advertising and if fined, it's just an advertising cost.

**Meetup** – you really should put together a Meetup group for your class. You cannot piggyback off of some other meetup group to save money. For various reasons having to do with search engine optimization and the way meet-up notifications are handled, it's not going to generate the traffic you want if you do that. Be sure to take the time to do professional job with the meet-up group. Add lots of pictures and text and encourage your dancers who are on the meetup to RSVP to the lessons and post feedback from time to time. You must be responsive to new members to your meetup group and communicate with them. Our meet-up is here:

<http://www.meetup.com/Rockville-Modern-Western-Square-Dancing-Lessons-and-Dances/>

It uses the following key words: Wellness · Group Fitness Training · Self-Improvement · New In Town · Social · Square Dancing · Dancing · Dance Lessons · Social Dancing · Folk Dancing · Fitness · Exercise · Healthy Living

**Websites** – A modern and attractive web site with meaningful domains is extremely important. We have 1 for the lessons, a separate web site for the square dance club that sponsors the lessons and another for the lesson instructor. These sites were designed for us by Scott Brown (a square dance caller in PA - <http://goldrushrecords.org>). He charged 150.00 to develop each site and charges 50.00 per year for ongoing updates. I really want total control over my own web presence and I'm extremely picky so I maintain these sites myself. I am a software developer by profession. [www.VillageSwingersSquareDance.com](http://www.VillageSwingersSquareDance.com), [www.EvaMurray.com](http://www.EvaMurray.com), [www.RockvilleSquareDance.com](http://www.RockvilleSquareDance.com)

**Newspapers** – We have sent out press releases every year to a large number of newspapers. That's done about 2 months in advance of the open house dates. All advertising must be verified to determine if it even occurred. This year I found just 1 newspaper that posted our press release (the Gazette). My gut tells me that the newspaper staff mostly ignores the press releases or the right person doesn't get it. The second year the gazette newspaper published a very nice article complete with pictures about our dances. That was a result of the press release we sent them and is good for overall awareness. I have concluded that: 1) we must continue with the press releases even though they might be ignored 2) we must verify our press release contact information and due dates every year or two at most 3) we must separately submit our dance events to the newspaper calendar because a press release submission does not generate a calendar event listing and I know that people read the calendar listing and the newspaper is much more likely to include

an event in the calendar. I did this the first year but not for subsequent years. I didn't really understand that distinction.  
4) We must be on the lookout for as many smaller newspapers as we can find to submit our information to.

**Money Mailer** – I put out a money mailer ad for the 2014 lessons that cost 250.00. One person responded and signed up for the lessons. If they end up graduating and then inviting friends, it was a worthwhile expense. I may or may not do this again. I suspect that there might be other direct mailer options that might be more successful.

**Online Sites/Calendars** – Add your open house dates to every online calendar you can find, and remember your audience when you write the online advertisement. Include images. Do NOT use that old square dance couple image that everyone uses that perpetuates the OLD stereotypes and screams OLD! Do searches to make sure your new/updated information exists rather than prior years information. I submitted to the PATCH, Gazette, the Beacon and a few other sites. Make sure your lessons are on “where’s the dance” and submit to Craigs list. Visit [http://www.squaredance.bc.ca/Clip\\_Art/logos.shtml](http://www.squaredance.bc.ca/Clip_Art/logos.shtml) for some free logos owned by the British Columbia Square and Round Dance Federation (BCS&RDF) that you can use. Email Nick and Mary Ann turner to let them know you would like to use it: [nmturmer@telus.net](mailto:nmturmer@telus.net).

**FACEBOOK** – I have used facebook events each year to advertise the open house dances and share with my facebook friends. That also allowed me to post the event on other facebook pages that people who might be interested in the lessons frequent. I now realize that I really need to do a facebook page for the square dance club and setup it up just as professionally as I have done the meetup group. I need to get everyone who is on facebook to like the page and post lots of pictures. The facebook page would be for the village swingers club and then I can create events for the open houses and the dances. Hopefully someone is taking lots of pictures at your dances so you have something fun to post regularly. I could then pay for some very targeted facebook advertising for our open houses next year, after the page has lots of likes and activity.

#### **SUMMARY-**

- We are in the relationship building business, first and foremost. We build relationships with square dancing as our common interest. We start building relationships from the very first phone call with a prospect. It is the relationships we have with one another that keeps us involved in the square dance activity.
- Advertising is just the on ramp, the beginning of a new relationship.
- You must do everything you possibly can to advertise. Doing just 1 form of advertising is not enough. You have to cast a huge net and people need to see the advertising in more than one place, several times before they take action. Advertising must be pervasive and massive and visible and must have a call to action to be successful. Just DO IT and DO IT ALL! Don't hem and haw over the money. Don't worry about the “risk” and don't worry about “We did this before and it doesn't work”. None of this costs that much money and you really have not done advertising in a MASSIVE, PERVASIVE and VISIBLE way before.
- Next year I plan to do everything I did this year, except that I may not do the money mailer. I also realized that I could be doing a lot more with Facebook and that I am not submitting newspaper calendars/event listings properly so we haven't been listed there. I am also on the look out for anything else I can add to the mix. My goal is to add something new every year to the marketing mix.
- Get excited about what you can accomplish with a robust advertising campaign and share that enthusiasm with the entire club. Make announcements, share details in emails and talk to everyone in the club one on one about it. Your enthusiasm will catch on and others will pitch in.
- Fund raise now and set aside 1,500 for advertising. There are lots of ways to raise money, especially if the entire club gets involved.
- If your club crams lessons into the Fall to Spring time frame, that's fine, but, you have absolutely must find a way to keep your new dancers dancing year around, every week, on lesson night, all summer long. Do what ever you have to do to make it happen. You simply cannot expect new dancers to show up at a plus dance after 3 months of no dancing and be successful and have a good time. It's extremely intimidating and daunting.
- Start NOW! Don't delay a single day. This all takes more time than it does money!
- Share your advertising ideas with the rest of the square dance community. Let's help each other out and make next year an even bigger year for new dancers.