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Title: GRAB YOUR PARTNER AND DO-SI-DO  
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SQUARE DANCING COULD add 10 years to your life. So says Dr. Arron Blackburn in an article in the United Square Dancers Association News.

While admitting that brisk walks, bicycling, swimming and other forms of exercise were just as good, he said most people aren't able to stick with them.

"Contrast such workouts with three hours of square dancing that fly by, with calories burned equal to a comparable painless 3 1/2-mile run," he said. "It's so much fun, you can't wait to come back for more."

Sounds like a winner. Combine that with genuine hospitality, and you have a grand champion. Newcomers to the St. Peters Squares at Chapel of the Cross Lutheran Church get a taste almost immediately. The participants are given a bright yellow slip of paper, not quite 3 inches long. Printed on it are a simple line drawing and the words, "Pass a yellow rock on."

What on earth does that mean? The answer came in the form of a bear hug from Mike Gunter, a member of the group. "This is our way of greeting," said Gunter, who was dressed in a red cowboy shirt, black trousers and a cowboy hat. "We also include it in our dances. When the caller says to give your partner a yellow rock, or give your corner (the person to the left) a yellow rock, we know to give them a hug. Some people even wear badges that read, 'Free yellow rock instructions.' Why the symbol is yellow and not red or green is anyone's guess." Although he loves square dancing now, the O'Fallon, Mo., resident sheepishly admitted that the only reason he joined in the first place 13 years ago was because his wife, Sandy, nagged him for two months. "I explained to her that I couldn't dance and that whenever I tried, my sisters made fun of me," he said. "Finally, I said I'd go and she'd find out just how bad I was. Well, by the third lesson, I was the one telling her to hurry or we'd be late. I was drawn in in spite of myself, and enjoyed everything about it. Where else can a couple meet a lot of great people, spend about \$8 to dance for two and a half hours, and get fed to boot?" Aficionados call square dancing "friendship set to music." But that's just one of its many benefits.

"Square dancing contributes to a more healthy and independent lifestyle," says Dr. Lewis Maharam, a sports medicine specialist in New York City and president of the Greater New York regional chapter of the American College of Sports Medicine. "Anything that keeps you active will keep you healthier and feeling younger. In most cases, if you can walk, you can square dance. But it's good advice to talk to your doctor before beginning any new exercise regimen."

What sets square dancing apart from some other forms of exercise is that though low-impact, it raises the heart rate as any good aerobic exercise should, and the quick directional changes loosen and tone up muscles without damaging the joints.

In addition, dancers are mentally stimulated because teamwork and following the caller's instructions are paramount to a smooth transition from one step to another.

Other positives include the fact that the dance appeals to a wide spectrum of people, allowing them to shed their inhibitions and kick up their heels. Corporate types who wear suits during the day gladly don jeans, cotton shirts and boots with spurs. Female members can proudly show off legs and ruffles.

The outfits are what appeal most to Nancy Dunbar, a homemaker from St. Peters, who has been vice president and president of the St. Peters Squares.

"The clothes make me feel like a young girl who is dressing up for the first time," she said. "I usually make my own dresses, but the crinolines come from vendors at conventions and jamborees. We are expecting nearly 2,000 participants at the next big, statewide gathering this October in Lebanon, Mo."

Dunbar's husband, George, a music teacher in the Fort Zumwalt school district, is one of the square-dance callers.

"He (calls) for anniversary and birthday parties, family reunions and many church activities," his wife said.

The Dunbars' oldest son, Stephen, 29, never showed much interest in square dancing, but son Jason, 25, tried it for a while.

"He dropped out because he wanted to hang around with friends his own age," Nancy Dunbar said. "Someday we hope to appeal to more young people."

In some quarters, the dance not thought of as elegant, like ballroom dancing; or hip, like salsa dancing; or sexy, like belly dancing. But as a direct descendant of French court dances and quadrilles and the ballad dances of England, square dancing has a pedigree all its own.

More than that, it is about as friendly an endeavor as you will ever come across. Each dance ends with opposite couples clasping hands and saying, "Thank you."

"That is traditional," explained Jim Meinert of O'Fallon, Ill., a retired junior-college teacher. "It takes four couples to make a square. The 'thank you' is a way of letting everyone know (that each person) is needed for the dance.

"What appeals to me," he continued, "is that it's a great workout. I'll never be lonely as long as I have my group." Square dancing burns 200 calories an hour. Here is a basic step.

#### THE DO-SI-DO

Two dancers start facing each other. They advance and pass right shoulders. Without turning, each dancer moves to the right, passing in back of the other dancer. Then, moving backward, each dancer passes left shoulders to return to starting position. WHAT TO WEAR: Women wear peasant blouses, long prairie skirts or short ruffled skirts with crinolines and matching ruffled pantaloons. Men wear long-sleeved shirts and ties; often, their slacks or tie will match their partner's outfit. Footwear includes sneakers, cowboy boots, regular boots and dance shoes. STATS: There are more than 20 square-dance groups in the St. Louis area. The organizations have local callers, but they hire national callers for special dances. It takes about three months for dancers to become proficient. Club members visit one another's events as often as possible.

WHERE TO FIND LESSONS: Chapel of the Cross Lutheran Church, St. Peters, 636-978-5222  
Trinity Lutheran Church, Chesterfield, 314-895-3942  
Old St. Ferdinand Shrine School House, Florissant, 314-895-3942  
Kirkwood Community Center, 636-677-8846  
MUSIC:

All types of music are included. Chances are you already have something appropriate on your shelf, including swing, old-time rock 'n' roll, gospel, standard country and western, classical, hip-hop, disco and music of the '50s and '60s. FEES: Under the 50/50 system, dancers buy tickets when entering the venue. Normally, the cost is \$1 for 3 tickets, or \$2 for 7 tickets. Half of the money goes to the sponsoring club and the other half to the person with a winning number that is announced at the end of the evening.

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