



# HOMO HOE DOWN

Country western dancing: Portland's gay men and lesbians find that it's fun, good exercise and can help mend a broken heart

by Andy Mangels • photos by Linda Kliever

**D**espite its West Coast location, Portland has never been terribly "western." Although the rural areas of Oregon can be as country as it gets, the major cities have all been more laid back. It wasn't until the early '80s that country came to gay Portland.

At the turn of the '80s, gay and lesbian rodeos and square dancing were really coming into vogue. Even the straight world was grabbing onto country, with the popularity of the 1980 movie *Urban Cowboy* and the country craze that followed it. Portland's first country bar was C.C. Slaughters, opened by John L. Adams Sr. in July of 1981. The bar was named after an early 1900s Texas cattle baron, and the decor reflected the flavor of down-South Texas. Although both JR's West and Slabtown tried to feature country music and dancing in the early '80s, they changed formats, leaving Slaughters the only place in town for the boot-

scootin' cowboys and cowgirls.

Over the years, Slaughters became home for the gay square-dancing group Rosetown Ramblers, as well as the two-steppers. When line dancing came along, it was seen on the Slaughters dance floor. About three years ago, two dance instructors—Sue Baker and Delmar Gordy—were hired to teach traditional two-step dances, chachas, waltzes, swing and the ever-evolving line dances. They're the ones who will teach you the meaning of "grapevines" and "pigeon-toes" and "hitches."

Sue Baker hasn't always been a huge country fan, but in 1990 she was introduced to the music of Reba McEntire.

"I've always kind of liked country, but that's basically all I listen to now," Sue laughs. Heartache is a staple of country music, so it's perhaps predictable that it was a relationship breakup that

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