

Friendship Set to Music Continued from page 17

work of square dancing aficionados—listed in the program as Our Committee So Far—have been busy planning activities and securing space and personnel.

While a square dancing convention might sound fairly simple, it isn't. The men and women who call the dances, for instance, have to be lined up three to five years in advance—that's how much square dancing is going on.

"The annual conventions are sheer madness," Philips says. "It's three days of almost nonstop dancing, and by Sunday afternoon your feet are begging you to stop and your heart is begging you to continue. It's a wonderful feeling."

Philips has been dancing for 10 years. At 58, he wears his beard neatly trimmed and is in full possession of a physique far younger looking than his years suggest.

After working as a high school band teacher, Philips transferred to a junior high and found that his evenings were free. Square dancing with the gay and lesbian club Rosetown Ramblers, he says, provided a nice alternative to the bars.

"Plus, it's one of the few places I see men and women coming together in our community," he says. "Gay men and lesbians seem to have isolated themselves from one another over the years, and square dancing seems to bring them together."

The lineup for this year's convention, entitled *Weave the Rose*, is impressive. Guests will arrive in Portland throughout the week.

Opening ceremonies take place on Friday, July 3, followed by a wide array of activities that have at their core, well, square dancing.

"Of course," Philips says, "the main focus is dancing."

Friday night features a grand march, during which attendees from across the nation and around the world march in wearing their official club T-shirts. The banquet is held on Saturday night, as is the Honky Tonk Queen contest, which Philips describes as "a drag show which only gets worse." Past contestants include Virginia the Ham, Tammy Why Not?, and Rose Bush, who, according to Philips, wore a trellis on her back complete with vines and roses and was escorted by someone who called herself Barbara.

The Fun Badge Tour takes place on Sunday. Chartered coaches carry participants to five up-until-then secret scenic locations throughout the area, where they stop for 10 minutes or so, dance, and take in the natural beauty.

"Hopefully, people will get a good look at gays and lesbians having a good time square dancing," Philips says.

One unique feature of this year's convention is the official addition of a women's pro-



Tripping the light florescent in preparation for *Weave the Rose*

gram. Coordinated by Portlander Bonnie Tinker, the program features a hospitality suite for women and two hours of all-female dancing.

Of the 85 Rosetown Ramblers members, just 27 are women. Tinker says the men in the group are supportive of her quest to encourage more women to dance.

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Tinker, executive director of Love Makes a Family, adds that square dancing has offered her an opportunity to interact with others outside of verbal and political channels.

"I've enjoyed dancing with the men," she says. "They've clearly been working with us to increase women's participation, but for now

we're all 'bidancual.'"

One Rosetown Rambler, Kate Yule, offers a particularly poignant take on queer dancing. As a college student, Yule did some dancing in Germany and later moved to Portland, where, in the autumn of 1989, she began dancing with the Ramblers. Yule says she enjoyed the group's relaxed and accepting environment.

"There's lots of sexism in standard square dance calling," she says. "But with gay dancing the terms 'boy' and 'girl' are just technical terms. They're nothing to get your feathers ruffled over."

The only problem: Yule is a married, heterosexual woman.

"I hid it for a long time," she says. "I kept meaning to tell them, but before long I was using gender-neutral pronouns. It just seemed easier to not rock the boat."

In the early 1990s, she came out.

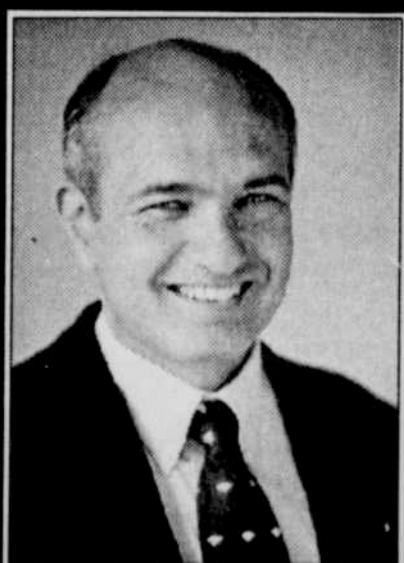
"No one blinked," she laughs.

Yule continues to dance with the Ramblers—as does her husband, David Levine. Like most of the Ramblers, Yule found square dancing offered her a community she'd been seeking for a long while, one in which there is mutual respect, the freedom to be yourself and, of course, plenty of dancing.

Queer square dancing is believed to have gotten its official start in 1976 at a Miami bar called the Double-R. The nation's premier queer square dance club, the Florida Mustangs, introduced square dancing as an alternative to disco.

At first the square dancing clubs were a

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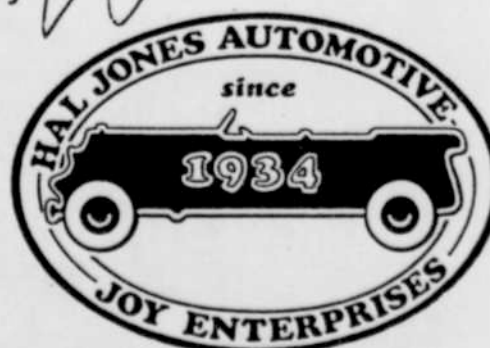
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