

The gender-diverse club celebrates at Portland Pride.

For those who attend the convention every year, it's like having an extremely large family reunion, as friends and acquaintances from previous conventions catch each other up on the developments of the past year.

"That's half the fun of conventions: You've got a whole family of friends scattered around the country and Canada," says Philips, 67, who barely traveled at all before he became involved with square dancing.

Now, he's visited places he never would have gone without the pull of square dancing.

Tami Hazen, the Rosetown Ramblers' vice president, feels similarly. She and her partner, Jenni Bush, attended a convention this summer in Denver.

"It's such an awesome opportunity to go where you're going to meet people and make new friends, see a new city," she says. "I don't know that I would have seen Denver in my lifetime unless I was going there to dance."

Looking Back, Facing Forward

Only about 20 percent of convention attendees are women. That's because, historically speaking, gay square dancing was mostly an activity for men.

Rosetown Ramblers, for example, was founded by "guys who were tired of doing the bar scene," as Hawes puts it. Occasionally, women would drop in. But when they saw that there were few to no other women in the club, they wouldn't come back.

Today, the Rosetown Ramblers has a more balanced membership—approximately 40 percent women to 60 percent men—which puts the group at

Square Dance 101

Why is it called square dancing?

The square is the initial dance formation, made up of four couples.

Why would I want to do something called "mainstream" dancing?

It isn't a comment on the dancers' lifestyle. Square dancing is broken down into different skill levels: basic, mainstream, plus, advanced, challenge 1, challenge 2 and challenge 3a.

Who is that person up there hollerin' like a cross between an auctioneer and an MC?

That's the "caller," who lets the dancers know which dance formation is coming up next.

Do I have to wear a bolo tie, or a crinoline, to be a square dancer?

No! Gay and lesbian square dance is characterized by its casual style of dress. Shorts, T-shirts or sweat pants are perfectly acceptable, although you are welcome to dress up if you feel like it.

the forefront nationally in terms of gender equality.

Philips, for one, likes that balance: "It's a great opportunity for men and women to interact, because normally in gay organizations they don't."

Square dancing also forms a bridge between the gay and straight communities.

Philips and Hawes run Heads to the Center, an advanced club that sometimes shares venues and callers with the Rosetown Ramblers. It's not uncommon for straight square dancers to attend Heads to the Center events.

That wasn't always the case.

"When the club first started, we were certainly vilified for doing the thing other people did," recalls Burdon.

But the Rosetown Ramblers wanted to dance. So if the straight community was having a dance, sometimes the gay club would bring its own group to the event, and dance together, off in the corner.

Eventually "they got used to us," explains Philips. For instance, if a straight woman's husband got tired, she might ask one of the gay dancers to fill in for him.


"First, they realize that we're really good dancers," Philips adds. "Then they get to know us and find out we're just like them."

These days, gay and straight groups share a common problem: a decline in numbers combined with aging participants. The average gay square dancer is in his or her 50s or 60s; straight dancers are mostly in their 70s or 80s.

Philips, who is secretary of the IAGSDC, speculates that the Internet might be partially to blame for the decline in membership, because it allows people to socialize online instead of leaving the house.

Hawes, 56, sees it as more of a cycle: "Wherever they [younger people] go, to the bar or whatever, there probably will become a time when they'll get bored with it...and we'll be ready and willing to bring them in."

At age 42, Hazen is bucking the age trend—although she did have her doubts before she started taking classes two years ago: "I thought it was nerdy and not for me."

But she gave it a shot because her 36-year-old partner was having so much fun. Now Hazen can't imagine not dancing: "Gay and lesbian square dancing is a whole new world that I really enjoy." 

The Rosetown Ramblers present TASTE OF SQUARE DANCE featuring a free potluck and introductory dance lessons from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. Sept. 26 and Oct. 3. No prior square dance experience is necessary. For more information call 503-236-3272 or visit www.rosetownramblers.com.

REBECCA RAGAIN enjoys writing about all kinds of dance for Just Out. Contact her via www.rebeccaragain.com.

North Coast Seafood Festival

October 6-7 • Indoors at Tillamook Fairgrounds

Saturday, 11am-6pm • Sunday, 11am-5pm



- Music and dance from around the world
 - International food court featuring seafood
 - Oregon microbreweries and wineries
 - Marketplace of select Oregon Coast artists
- Adults \$6 Saturday - \$5 Sunday
Seniors \$4 • Kids (ages 6-12) \$4

Call (503) 398-5223 or visit www.northcoastseafoodfestival.com



Sponsored in part by
Headlight-Herald



Squishfest Harvest Party

Saturday, Oct. 13th 3pm - 8pm

This is your chance to experience crush at an urban winery. Come on down and get sticky with the Hip Chicks!

Admission is \$10 and includes wine tasting, light appetizers, grape juice tasting, punch down the cap and grapes galore!

- Winery and Tasting Room Open Daily 11am - 6pm
- 4510 SE 23RD AVE. PORTLAND • 503-234-3790
- www.hipchicksdowine.com
(see our website for directions & events)

SING ON!

Portland Gay Men's Chorus

Bob Mensel, Artistic Director • Michael Barnes, Principal Accompanist

A Season of Friends

Our 28th Season

An Evening With Friends

Saturday, September 29, 2007 8pm

Brass, Bells and Wassail

Friday, December 14, 2007 8pm • Saturday, December 15, 2007 8pm

Sunday, December 16, 2007 2pm

Movie Madness

Saturday, March 1, 2008 8pm

Legacy

Friday, May 2, 2008 8pm • Saturday, May 3, 2008 2pm

Festival

Wednesday, July 9, 2008 7:30pm

For tickets visit www.pdxgmc.org or call 503-226-2588.

Our 28th Season Sponsors

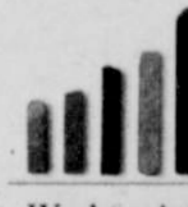
Portland Tribune



SPIRIT MOUNTAIN
COMMUNITY FUND



REGIONAL ARTS & CULTURE COUNCIL



Work for Art
Funding the arts
empowering business