

Restructuring El Camino Reelers' Classes

Version 4.3, Allan Hurst and Kurt Gollhardt, 3/29/19

Introduction	2
How This Document Came to Be	2
Our Club's Original Situation	3
Yes, but DID IT WORK?	3
Track 1: Monthly "Drop-In Fun Nights"	4
Schedule for Fun Nights.....	4
Fun Nights: Free or Paid?	4
Who Calls Fun Nights?	4
Track 2: Partitioned Blast Classes.....	5
Partitioned Blast Class Length	5
Partitioned Blast Class Logistics/Participation.....	7
Blast Class Follow-Up.....	8
Cost.....	9
Partitioned Blast Class Cycles	9
Location	9
Partitioned Blast Class Teachers.....	10
External resources for information on blast classes.....	10
Advantages of partitioned blast classes	10
Disadvantages of partitioned blast classes.....	11
The Hidden Demographic.....	11
The Results	11
Track 3: Club Nights.....	12
Extra Credit: APD/DBD Workshop.....	13
Fun Night Marketing & Advertising.....	14
Managing Social Media	14
Social Media Cycle, Step 1: Create the Event Flyer	15
Social Media Cycle, Step 2: Create the Form Letter	16
Social Media Cycle, Step 3: Post on Facebook, Meetup, and Twitter	17
Boosting Facebook Posts.....	17
Blast Class and Fun Night Marketing.....	18
Fun Night Email Followup	19
What about Advanced classes?.....	20
Potential Objections.....	21
Financial Impact	22
Contact Information.....	23

Introduction

It's no secret that square dancing is having trouble recruiting and retaining new dancers. This is true for both the LGBTQ+ and straight square dance communities.

How This Document Came to Be

Back in 2015, Allan Hurst, one of two historians for the IAGSDC, attended a 2015 SF Bay Area regional discussion conference, "Circle the Wagons", to discuss how to recruit and retain dancers¹. That conference featured two marketing and organizational consultants. The event was funded by the corporation that ran the 2013 IAGSDC convention, *Weave Your Heart in San Francisco*.

When Allan attended CALLERLAB in 2017, he had the opportunity to discuss our club's situation with a set of terrific callers who are more experienced than he was regarding teaching. At that convention, Allan learned what did and didn't work for many clubs.

These same discussions had also been taking place during IAGSDC conventions, including the 2017 IAGSDC convention, *Palm Springs Swing & Mix*.²

This document has been updated several times. Interim versions were for draft/review purposes, and are not listed here.

Version 2.0 (5/29/17) ... Original draft released to the El Camino Reelers board.

Version 2.1 (5/29/17) ... Revised draft released to the club membership for discussion.

Version 3.4 (4/14/18) ... Document revised to show interim results of program, released to board and posted to club website. This is the version that was released to other clubs at the Seattle 2018 IAGSDC Convention during the Club Recruiting workshops.

Version 4.0 (12/16/18). Internal draft reviewed by Kurt Gollhardt and ECR board member Eric Hudson to produce this version of the document in preparation for CALLERLAB 2019.

¹ <http://reelers.org/Classes/NotesFromBayAreaCircleTheWagons2015.pdf>

² <http://reelers.org/Classes/ClubRetentionAndRecruitmentSessionNotes2017-07-02.pdf>

Our Club's Original Situation

In 2017, Allan joined the board of El Camino Reelers ("ECR" for short), which had been experiencing a constant decline both in terms of class sizes and club membership from year to year. Our club was losing money from year to year, especially on classes, but also on club nights.

A number of members had died, experienced medical issues preventing them from dancing, or retired and moved out of the area.

Obviously, we needed a completely new approach to recruiting new members.

With significant input from Kurt Gollhardt's experiences teaching classes for Oaktown 8s and other clubs, we, the board of El Camino Reelers, created a new class plan for our club.

The original version of this document³ offered a plan to our membership for consideration.

This version of the document presents the results of the decisions made by the ECR Board.

Rather than the traditional once-a-year, 9-month class format, which we already knew wasn't working, we moved to utilize a three-track approach to recruiting and retaining dancers:

1. Monthly "Fun Nights" with no experience required.
2. A series of three partitioned blast classes, *gradually* taking dancers to Plus.
3. Club nights with both blast-level and full level Plus/Advanced dancing.

Let's go through these tracks one at a time.

Yes, but DID IT WORK?

Sorry, we're putting in a spoiler early on: *Yes, it worked.*

Our first full sequence resulted in our graduating 11 dancers at Plus, all of whom became club members. A couple of dancers moved out of the area or chose not to continue due to commute logistics, but the majority of our first blast class students are still happily dancing with the club.

Our second sequence is still in process, and has produced 3 dancers who have completed GDP, are about to complete Mainstream, and are expected to move on to Plus this summer.

³ <http://www.reelers.org/Classes/RestructuringElCaminoReelersClassesVer2.1.pdf>

Track 1: Monthly "Drop-In Fun Nights"

Unlike traditional Intro Nights, these aim to be fun as an ongoing standalone activity, with enough variety in the material to keep them interesting for people who come multiple nights (including experienced dancers), including (at the caller's discretion) things like line dances, mixers, couples dances, contras, high-level calls, made-up calls, simple games, etc. Anything that can be taught and used in a single night.

This idea was lifted directly from Chi-Town Squares, who use this technique for their "First Thursdays" events, gathering names for their mailing list, and periodically advertising blast classes to that list.

For some time, Temple Squares used a similar idea called "ABC Dances"⁴, to recruit new dancers. ABC dances utilize a rotation between three different intro night programs, each night utilizing a number of common/overlapping calls paired with a few calls only taught and used on each individual night.

Schedule for Fun Nights

We had originally discussed replacing one of our weekly club nights with a Fun Night, or perhaps replacing our monthly Friday potluck dance with a Fun Night.

What we actually ended up doing was deciding to add a monthly Friday Fun Night on top of the existing schedule.

Fun Nights: Free or Paid?

We opted to charge the same amount for Fun Nights that we charge for club nights: \$8.00 or "Pay What You Can" sliding scale, with nobody turned away for lack of funds.

Who Calls Fun Nights?

We started off by utilizing guest callers who we knew had experience with other dance forms, like Andy Shore (contras), Arlene Kaspik (various forms from Chi-Town Squares Fun Nights), and Darren Gallina (line dances).

Once the viability of the Fun Night format was established, we started including our club callers and other area callers.

Our first Fun Night was called by Andy Shore, our second by Arlene Kaspik, and successive nights by Rob French, Michael Levy, Darren Gallina, Kurt Gollhardt, Rich Reel, Scot Byars, Harlan Kerr, and Eric Henerlau.

All of these callers rose to the challenge of combining MWSD intros with beginner instruction in other dance forms and delighted our Fun Night attendees.

⁴ See <http://abcsquaredancing.com/> for details.

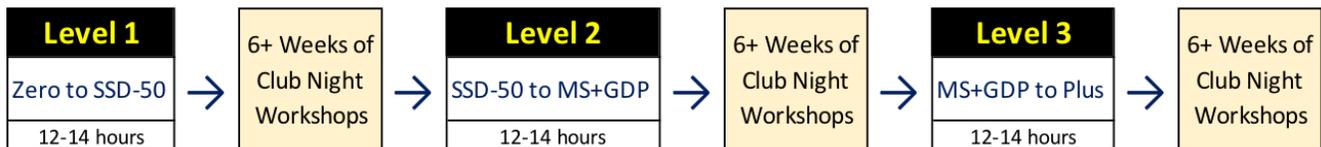
Track 2: Partitioned Blast Classes

Since the original edition of this document, we have found that “blast class” means different things to different people.

Among many professional callers, the term “blast class” is considered an obscenity, because many clubs, I’ve been informed, are using blast classes in a “rush to Plus”, graduating dancers of a shockingly poor quality.⁵

At CALLERLAB 2018, John Marshall, a veteran caller and member of the Board of Governors, very specifically warned me to use a different term, such as “Modified Blast Class Format”, to differentiate what we’re doing from the low-quality blast classes he’s observed in some parts of the country.

So, for purposes of El Camino Reelers...we are using a **partitioned blast class format** consisting of a two-day (weekend) intensive class intended to cover no more than a single dance level (or predefined subset) to get new dancers up to speed, paired with at least six weeks of weekly workshops to hone graduating dancers’ skills.



Partitioned Blast Class Length

Each of the ECR partitioned blast classes is two days. Our first Level 1 blast class was a Saturday and Sunday.

Our successive (Level 2 and Level 3) blast classes were held over two successive Sundays, which was at the request of our first Level 1 blast group. (More about blast levels below.) We are also experimenting with putting the blast days two weeks apart, to give students more review time between the sessions.

The last blast classes were held on Saturdays because, in our local area, finding dance space on a Sunday is exceedingly difficult.

Each blast day is 4-7 hours, with longer breaks every 2 hours or so. On longer days, one of the longer breaks is a meal break. The last hour of a longer day is for practice and additional applications only; no new calls are taught in that hour, because everyone’s brain is tired by that point.

We ended up partitioning the journey from zero to Plus into three levels of class, each covering about a third of the learning “load”, with six weeks of practice between each set of classes:

"Level 1": From zero experience to Sustainable Square Dance 50 (“SSD-50”). This is a subset of Basic and Mainstream calls taught with an emphasis on standard applications. One of our sister

⁵ This has *not* been a typical experience, however, of Chi-Town Squares or El Camino Reelers.

clubs in the area, Oaktown 8's, has been using this list for a more traditional 12-week class. (For 2019 Oaktown 8's is switching to a partitioned blast class format.)

We had several 50-call lists to choose from for the Level 1 class, including the CALLERLAB Basic Program, GDP (see Level 2, below), and the new SSD experimental list from CALLERLAB (based on Jerry Story's "Club 50").

We chose SSD due to its increasing popularity in a number of areas in the country, and its ability to produce a richer, more varied dance experience than pure Basic. We also decided the potential synergies with Oaktown 8's were too good to ignore. (More on that later.)

"Level 2": From SSD-50 to Mainstream+GDP. This completes the remaining 14 Basic & MS calls not included in SSD-50, along with a brief introduction to 7 or 8 Plus calls. We include Plus calls in Level 2 for two reasons:

- (1) Without them, Level 2 would be much shorter than Level 3 (which then would be longer than Level 1).
- (2) As with SSD vs Basic, including some of the easier Plus calls at this point increases the variety and fun of the dance experience for Level 2 students, with only a slight additional learning load.

We chose the seven Plus calls from the General Dance Program (GDP), a regional variation of the CALLERLAB Condensed Teaching Order, to give our students more dance opportunities. Our local dancer's association (SCVSDA – Santa Clara Valley Square Dance Association) holds a monthly series of GDP dances.

Our primary goal with this level is to get dancers up to the level they need to go to an IAGSDC Convention, where Mainstream is generally the entry-level dance hall.

The result? Several of our Level 2 class members were able to dance Mainstream at the Seattle 2018 IAGSDC convention. This included two former club members who had drifted away from the club ("lost souls") and who wanted to regain their square dancing skills after attending a Fun Night and realizing how much they'd enjoyed dancing.

We have found that former dancers are a great and easy target for the partitioned blast class concept.

"Level 3": From Mainstream+GDP to Plus. Since Plus is the main dance level on club nights for El Camino Reelers, this is going to be a critical final step in dancers' education.⁶ Level 3 completes the remaining 22 calls of Plus.

This is the same number of calls as in Level 2, so should be able to be covered in about the same amount of time. It does include a number of longer, more complicated calls, but on the other hand, students will by this point have somewhat more of a basis for understanding the structure of calls.

⁶ In February of 2019, El Camino Reelers members voted in favor of a bylaws change changing the full membership qualification dance level from Plus to Mainstream.

There's no "magic" to the levels we chose. The original concept was to divide the blast classes up into Basic, Mainstream, and Plus.

While Allan personally still prefer those levels in terms of maximum dancer "portability", the logistics in our local area made SSD-50, Mainstream+GDP, and Plus more practical, as well as making our partitioned blast class lengths more uniform.

Other clubs with different local cultural and logistical situations may choose differently. Chi-Town Squares, for example, recently (March, 2019) advertised a blast class taking new dancers from zero to Mainstream during a single three day sequence with class blocks on Friday evening, Saturday morning/afternoon, and Sunday morning.

Partitioned Blast Class Logistics/Participation

Our first Level 1 class was taught over the Saturday and Sunday of a single weekend. This had the advantage of compressing the time requirement, but also the disadvantage of being a bit hard on the dancers (and angels). Lunch breaks were offered on both days.

Our first Level 2 and Level 3 classes were offered over two successive Sundays, from 10-5 with a lunch break and a mid-afternoon break.

As a key component of this plan, *we followed up each class with six weeks of free workshop club nights specifically targeted to the most recent blast class graduating level, alternating class level and full club level tips.*

Admission to the six weeks of club nights is included as part of the class tuition for the blast class.

Giving partitioned blast class graduates six weeks of club night workshops for free was a deliberate choice. We felt that it would (a) make the new dancers feel welcomed into the club, and (b) provide a financial incentive for them to show up to club nights to practice what they'd learned. ("Well, I already PAID for the six weeks with my tuition, so I don't want to WASTE it...")

These review/workshop club nights are a critical part of the plan. We have observed that even strong students who attend a blast class without *immediately* following up with weekly dancing lose too much to continue dancing at that level.

A partitioned blast class requires the participation of as many members as possible to fill out all squares. It is important that the students dance in every tip, and that we schedule sufficient rest breaks that people can maintain the accelerated pace. Ideally, we tried to provide more angels than students to keep a supply of "fresh" angels on hand for each tip. This also was easier on the angels.

As a prerequisite for the first partitioned blast class, we ask that students should have already attended a Fun Night or other intro, so they have basic familiarity with core calls like *Circle Left, Dosado, Right & Left Grand, Allemande Left*, and the general idea of moving through the square to the caller's instructions. This saves time at the beginning of the class, and also makes sure that we only take people who have some clue as to what they're getting into.

It should be noted that each club we know of using blast classes has structured them differently, according to what works best for the targeted audience in their local area:

- Chi-Town Squares original zero-to-Mainstream blasts were held over a single weekend, consisting of a Friday night, Saturday all day, and Sunday all day. Given Chicago's dense population and easy public transit to the dance location, this made logistics for a three-day course of instruction very easy for the dancers.
- Temple Squares does a zero-to-Mainstream blast over two weekends (Friday evening 7-10 PM and Saturday evening 3-10 PM). In the Salt Lake City area, Sundays are usually dedicated to church activities, but Friday and Saturday nights are often open.
- El Camino Reelers chose to break up our blast classes into three smaller levels, each of which could be taught over a two day period (approximately 12-14 hours total). This was necessary due to the Silicon Valley demographic's work ethics, where people have very limited weekend time. Friday nights also tend to be busy for Silicon Valley locals, with terrible traffic.⁷ This meant that a Friday-Saturday-Sunday block wouldn't work well in our area, and neither would four days of instructions held over two separate weekends.
- Oaktown 8's uses the same three-part approach as ECR. For 2019, they're experimenting with a partitioned blast format of three Sundays of four hours each (2:00 PM to 6:00 PM), each session two weeks apart, for each of the three parts. This cleanly divides the six-week review period into two weeks for each blast day. The timing of the Sunday sessions was dictated by hall availability.

Blast Class Follow-Up

After each partitioned blast class, the students immediately start dancing their "Blast Level" during our Wednesday club nights, which offers blast-level workshop tips alternating with full level Plus (and an Advanced star tip).

During the club nights, we exercise all the calls the blasters have just learned, gradually upping the speed and difficulty over a number of weeks. This includes a concerted effort to coordinate the club night callers to emphasize specific calls on each night, to spread out the entire list over six weeks.

Six weeks of prepaid club night admissions are included in the price of the blast class, and after that blasters can pay the regular club night fee.

Between blast classes, after the 6-week review period, Wednesday club nights continue to have alternating tips at the most recent blast level. After the Level 3 Blast class review period, club nights revert to the default Plus w/Advanced star tips format.

Note that this assumes that all of the Level 1 dancers move on to Level 2, etc. We currently have no way to accommodate dancers who don't move on to MS+GDP and then Plus with the rest of the group. So far, this hasn't been a problem.

This strategy appears to have worked well for us.

⁷ Which is why our Fun Nights are advertising as starting at 7:15 PM, with dancing starting at 7:30 PM, because we had a lot of people walking in halfway through the first tip.

Cost

We originally set a price of \$88 for students and \$25 for angels, which was later amended to \$99 for students and \$25 for angels. This price was designed to allow us to pay for the caller and for lunch, refreshments, and snacks during the weekend. We do not expect to make a profit on the blast class; we're happy to break even or even run at a slight loss in the short term, because our attention is focused on the long-term success of the club.

Partitioned Blast Class Cycles

We originally anticipated running two (overlapping 9-12 month) cycles of partitioned blast classes each calendar year. While we had calendar space to start a second blast cycle in 4Q18, the board opted not to do so for a number of reasons.

Mostly, after a year of getting into the rhythm of a dance/board year that had to incorporate new activities (Fun Nights, Partitioned Blast Classes) into an existing framework of twice-weekly club nights, monthly potluck dances, and quarterly club dances, we were becoming exhausted.

In late 2018, we opted to start the next blast class cycle in February, which would give us time to recruit from the December and January Fun Nights.

Oaktown 8's is experimenting with a modified two-cycle approach where a Level 1A is offered in the Fall, followed by a January modified Level 1 ("1B") with a similar call list to bring in more brand new dancers, followed by *combined* Level 2 and Level 3 blasts. This provides two opportunities a year to start new students, but only one track to manage. In order to keep the 1A students interested in attending 1B (at a reduced price), the curriculum is varied to swap out some of the calls between what was in 1A and would have been taught in Level 2. Specifically, 1A targets SSD-50 and 1B targets GDP; level 2 is still the union of Mainstream and GDP (MS+GDP), and level 3 is full Plus.

Location

Our first Level 1 blast class was held in the conference room of a member's offices in Fremont, California. There was just enough room for two squares. The room setup was a bit cramped, but the space was free.

For our first Level 2 blast class, we utilized a club house in a mobile home park that had graciously been made available by a friend of the club.

For our first Level 3 blast class, which was held on Sundays, we faced a challenge: no suitable space was available. We needed space for 3 squares because we had accumulated students from other clubs who wanted to strengthen their Plus or move on from MS+GDP.

The free space at our member's office was deemed too small for 3 squares, so the first day of the class was held at Foothills Congregational Church in Los Altos, and the second day was held at the Billy DeFrank LGBTQ Community Center in San Jose. The community center location had a beautiful ballroom with a sprung wood floor, designed specifically for dancing, and our students loved the space. Unfortunately, it was much more expensive than any of our other dance spaces. We were fortunate that a club member donated funds towards the space rental.

It should be noted that due to the weekend format, a traditional square dance club space such as a church or a school probably isn't suitable. In our area, schools charge an hourly fee outside of school hours to have a janitor on-site for insurance purposes. Community space in churches is usually taken up by congregational activities on weekends.

Future blast classes will be held on Saturdays, to make it easier to find space, and our member's office will be utilized if the class will be 8 or fewer students. If we have more than 8 students, we'll seek out other space at the Foothills Congregational Church or Billy DeFrank Center.

Partitioned Blast Class Teachers

The list of callers we initially assembled was based on personal knowledge of their calling histories and interests, as well as taking into account local availability vs. long-distance travel costs.

For our first partitioned blast class, we brought in Arlene Kaspik from Chi-Town Squares after one of our club members donated sufficient miles to fly her out. The board felt that we wanted someone with extensive blast experience to teach our first blast class. Arlene did a wonderful job for us!

Our successive Level 2 and Level 3 blast classes were taught by Kurt Gollhardt.

External resources for information on blast classes

Chi-Town Squares (<https://www.chitownsquares.org/>) has been doing blast classes for a couple of years, with great success. Their board and their callers were happy to answer any questions we had on topics such as scheduling breaks, food, price, etc.

Temple Squares (<http://www.templestones.org/>) has also recently begun teaching blast classes, though we haven't exchanged information with them yet.

Advantages of partitioned blast classes

- Students don't have to commit to a weekly class for months at a time.
- No time taken away from club night dancing in order to teach. There will need to be more reviewing and workshopping at club night, but many of our club members would benefit from that.
- No worries about people missing weeks here and there, or starting a class several weeks late. We can get RSVPs and plan exactly who's going to be there, including angels (with small allowances for last-minute cancellations).
- To a certain extent, people may be willing to travel farther for a Blast class than a weekly one, so we may be able to draw in additional students.
- In particular, we will continue to attempt to coordinate with other clubs who may be willing to send their students and/or angels to our Blasts. Ultimately, we may be able to work together with 2 or 3 other clubs to jointly sponsor/promote/fund blast classes. We hope in the future to bring in students from Oaktown 8's SSD-50 graduating classes.
- Lower cost vs total for a weekly class.

Disadvantages of partitioned blast classes

- Students must commit to attend both days, and dance all tips.
- Callers must plan their lessons more precisely, and be highly time-aware during calling.
- Scheduling a dance space on weekend days can be challenging.
- Students must be able to attend on at least two different days of the week: occasionally for the blast days, and regularly for the club nights.

The Hidden Demographic

We were (pleasantly) surprised in our first blast class to discover a “hidden” demographic we hadn’t intentionally targeted: former dancers.

We had 11 students in our first blast class; 5 of them were “retreads” (former dancers who had dropped out and wanted an easy/fast way to relearn square dancing without spending a year on weekly classes).

The retread dancers were ecstatic at what they perceived as a “second chance” to get back into square dancing. This elation has translated into high amounts of enthusiasm and energy.

For our next Level 1 blast class, we will be looking at ways to reach out to former square dancers as well as brand new dancers.

The Results

We graduated 11 students at Plus from our first full partitioned blast class sequence. Since we’d graduated only 1 student the previous year, we deemed this to be a great success.

Keep in mind that ECR’s membership has been slowly declining for several years, largely due to the “aging out” of members who retired and/or moved away, or who stopped dancing due to medical issues.

The overall impact on our bottom line was surprisingly positive. See the section “Financial Impact” for more details.

Track 3: Club Nights

El Camino Reelers currently dances on Tuesday and Wednesday nights.

Tuesday nights are dedicated to Advanced level dancing.

With the advent of blast classes, Wednesday nights have been modified from Plus/Advanced to:

- Current blast class level alternating with Plus
- Advanced star tip

These club nights continue to be called by our regular club callers.

Kurt Gollhardt has kindly taken on the role of coordinating with each caller what calls should be workshopped each night for our blast level dancers.

Extra Credit: APD/DBD Workshop

Because we didn't have time during the blast classes to dig *deeply* into APD/DBD dancing, and also because we had an Advanced class coming up, on November 10th, 2018, we offered a one-day APD/DBD workshop taught by Rob French. 33 dancers paid \$30 each to spend the day learning the ins and outs of how to be a better dancer. Response to this workshop was completely positive, from both the dancers' and the caller's perspectives.

We are already fielding requests for follow-up APD/DBD workshops, and held another such workshop in place of an Advanced class night early in 2019.

Here's the summary slide we presented to our members at the last membership meeting.



DBD-APD workshop

- **New this year:** a one-day workshop in All Position Dancing & Dancing by Definition
- **Goal:** to improve skills and understanding of current Plus dancers
- **33 participants** from as far away as Sacramento
- Lead-in to the Advanced Class



Fun Night Marketing & Advertising

Fun Nights are currently advertised via Facebook, Meetup.com, Twitter, and our website, at www.reelers.org.

Recently, to make posting to social media easier, and to avoid distracting potential new dancers from our core marketing message, we established a landing page on our website just for Fun Nights.

<http://www.reelers.org/Dances/FunNights.html>

This landing page is inserted into every social media post and email we send out regarding Fun Nights.

We have discussed, but not yet followed through, on direct emails to local LGBTQ+ employee groups (Apple Lambda, Gayglers, etc.).

We have still not yet attempted press releases to local papers such as the Bay Area News Group (San Jose Mercury News) and local TV stations.

Managing Social Media

We have needed to become adept at managing social media and presenting a consistent message across all of those platforms, including but not limited to:

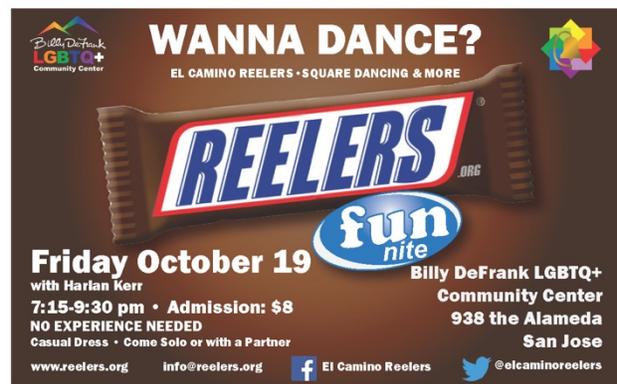
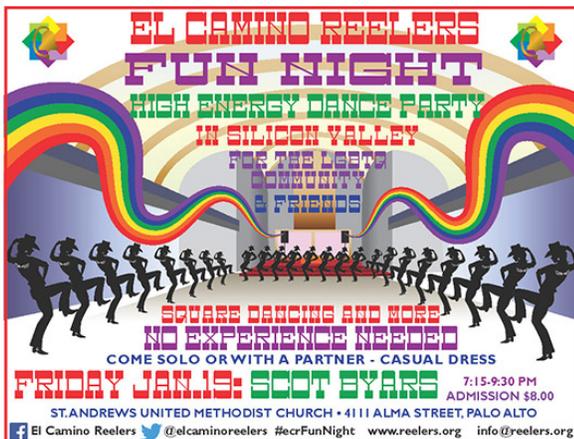
- Frequent website updates
- Twitter
- Facebook
- MeetUp
- Instagram

Originally, we considered using an advanced mailing list system such as MailChimp which would let us track how many people open each email, click on links, etcetera. However, this has been put on hold for the moment, as we don't yet perceive a need for this type of detailed data.

It has been difficult to “keep up” with all of the social media posting. Website updates have been fairly easy, and we have a procedure in place for Facebook/Meetup, but there are some months that we simply forget to cross-post Fun Nights to Twitter. There are a number of social media cross-posting utilities available (most paid, some free), but all seem to involve a fair amount of money and time to get started.

Social Media Cycle, Step 1: Create the Event Flyer

We start by creating the flyer and posting it to the Fun Nights landing page on our website. We are highly fortunate to have a board member (Ed Wilson) who is exceptionally talented at creating striking graphic flyers. He created a bold, modern flyer which required only changing of date, caller name, and color palette to produce a “new” flyer each month. He changes the design frequently. Here are some samples of his work.



Social Media Cycle, Step 2: Create the Form Letter

A “form letter” announcement is then created and posted to Facebook and Meetup. Here is an example:

It's hip to be Square!

Join us for our monthly no-experience-required evening of high energy modern square (and other) dancing to **Rich Reel!** Come for the dancing, stay for the fun, friends, food, and opportunity to socialize!

El Camino Reelers is an LGBTQ Modern Western Square Dance club which is open to everyone! Singles and couples are both welcome.

WHAT: El Camino Reelers "No Experience Required" Fun Night!

WHEN: **Friday, March 16, 2018**, from 7:15 PM to 9:30 PM

WHERE: St. Andrew's United Methodist Church, 4111 Alma St, Palo Alto, California 94306

COST: \$8 at the door, or pay what you can. (No one turned away for lack of funds.)

[#elcaminoeulers](#), [#ecrfunnight](#), [#ecrdanceparty](#), [#squaredanceparty](#), [#squaredance](#)

<http://reelers.org/Dances/FunNights.html>

TO RSVP (or share!) on Meetup:

<https://www.meetup.com/No-Experience-Required-Square-Contra-Dance-Night/events/248811001/>

TO RSVP (or share!) on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/966828260136331/>

Note: The actual emails and posts contain all text in black. The colors shown above are for discussion points below.

The announcement above contains slight variations (marked in red) from month to month, such as the caller name and event date.

The highlighted portions (URLs for Meetup and Facebook) later ended up being removed from the actual ad boost text (but *not* the original event text) because Facebook deemed unrelated URLs to be inappropriate when we attempted to boost the ad.

In fairness to their policies, a Facebook ad boost is supposed to contain just enough information to get people to click on the ad, which will link through to the original ad being boosted.

The tags highlighted in green were customized for our club. You may find better tags. We found examples of both [#squaredanceparty](#) and [#squaredance](#) on social media.

Social Media Cycle, Step 3: Post on Facebook, Meetup, and Twitter

The posted announcement is then edited on Facebook and Meetup to include that month's event URL at the bottom of the message.

Note the cross-selling information ([marked in blue](#)); this gives people clickable links no matter which social media they use as an entry point.

The announcement also contains our website's Fun Night landing page.

This "cross-selling" ensures that no matter where a potential dancer finds the announcement, they can RSVP right away via the platform of their choice...or go to the dedicated Fun Night page to get more information.

Finally, two tweets are sent out via ECR's twitter account. One announces the availability of the event's posting to Meetup (with the Meetup URL), the other announces the same thing for the Facebook version of the event (with the Facebook URL). We tried posting both URLs in the same tweet, but it looked confusing.

We also encourage our members to make their own social media posts about Fun Night on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, to improve our visibility.

Boosting Facebook Posts

There is an entire document waiting to be written about the intricacies of paid advertising on social media. Here are our experiences with Facebook.

Facebook provides "boosting" of posts, meaning turning an event from your club's page into a paid advertisement. You can target the posts by age, location, and other demographic indicators. We chose to spend an arbitrary amount of \$25 on each month's Facebook boost.

We have found it difficult to tell who's actually reading the boosted posts, even with Facebook's highly detailed advertising "dashboard". Informally, we believe that a significant enough number of people are finding our Fun Nights through boosted posts. Our door surveys (we ask people where they heard about us when they sign in at each Fun Night) have been inconclusive.

Here are a couple of things we've learned about boosting Facebook events:

- *Keep the boost message short and simple.* It doesn't have to have all of the information from the event description. It just has to have enough information to get people to click on the ad...at which point they'll be redirected to your full event posting.
- *Don't mention politics or politicians in your event.* One month, we advertised that a former county supervisor (mentioning him by name) would be signing free copies of his recent books, and this led Facebook to tag Allan's Facebook account as a "political activist"; i.e., a potential foreign operative, given recent news developments.

As a result, Allan was required to submit copies of the front and back of his driver's license, *and* to wait for Facebook to send a secret code via U.S. Mail to his home address to prove that he was a U.S. resident. Allan's Facebook account was blocked from posting or boosting events until he had entered the secret code into a special Facebook URL. Now, every time Allan posts an event, he must check or uncheck a box to indicate whether this is a politically-related post.

Blast Class and Fun Night Marketing

To date, our only marketing of blast classes has been via announcements during our Fun Nights (accompanied by a handy signup sheet!) and direct emails to the list of folks who have attended Fun Nights, as well as to club members for referral.

We are continuing to explore new ways to actively market our blast class, including working with other local clubs such as Oaktown 8's and creating/distributing printed flyers to other clubs and at local dances.

Some of our members have also posted on community bulletin boards or left small stacks of flyers at grocery stores and coffee shops and bars. We have been pleasantly surprised that a small number of Fun Night attendees have found us via such distributed flyers. Even in small numbers, every new person at a Fun Night is a win for the club.

Fun Night Email Followup

After each Fun Night, we send out a thank-you note similar to the following, including a copy of the flyer for the next Fun Night:

Greetings, fellow dancer!

Thanks for coming to El Camino Reelers' Fun Night this past Friday with the Rob French! Your presence helped make the evening enjoyable and fun for everybody. Hopefully you learned a new move or two and found as much entertainment as we did!

You can see pictures that were taken posted on our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/ElCaminoReelers/>.

If you took any pictures that you want to share, feel free to send them to me and I'll make sure that we get them posted on our website and other outlets.

Our next Fun Night is on January 18th at the Billy DeFrank LGBTQ+ Community Center at 938 The Alameda in San Jose from 7:15-9:30pm with Kurt Gollhardt. Please come and join us and bring your friends as well to share the evening.

Sincerely,

Eric Hudson

El Camino Reelers, Co-President



What about Advanced classes?

We considered doing a partitioned blast class for Advanced, but the logistics were deemed to be too daunting in the context of running Fun Nights and Partitioned Blast Classes for lower levels, and we finally opted for 2018-2019 to do a traditional format weekly A1/A2 class on Tuesday nights.

In a partitioned blast class approach, we projected using either two x three-day blasts (one for A1, one for A2) or three x two-day blasts.

Three-day blasts would have been a Friday evening, Saturday, and Sunday. (However, finding Sunday dance space has been a challenge for us.)

Two-day blasts would have been a Saturday and Sunday (or perhaps a Friday evening and Saturday, given the logistics of finding dance space in our area on Sundays).

In either case, we would have provided six to ten weeks of Tuesday club night review and practice between each one (and after the last one). Our usual Advanced club nights would alternate tips between class-level Advanced and full A2 during that period.

Our current (2018-2019) Advanced class is being taught in a traditional weekly format by a rotation of three callers (Kurt Gollhardt, Michael Levy, Dave Decot) with a half-hour review session before each class taught by Allan Hurst.

This exposes students to four different calling voices, styles and teaching methods. Based on the club's prior experience with this format, we continue to believe this will yield a stronger graduating class than if we had used only one caller. One of the Challenge clubs in our area (Interlocked Squares) takes a similar approach, rotating through three or four callers weekly to give students the most varied dance experience to build skill.

Potential Objections

There were a number of objections from some club members to this restructuring. Some of them were quite serious, others were a bit more farfetched.

Over time, we have addressed all of the concerns raised both in our club meetings and one-on-one between club members and board members.

The two most common objections we received, along with our responses, were:

- *“But this is a PLUS AND ADVANCED club!”*

When Allan joined ECR in 1996, he was told that we were chartered as a Plus and Advanced level club. It was not surprising to find that some club members were strongly attached to the idea of Plus being our minimum club dance level.

There is nothing in this proposal that removes Plus or Advanced dancing from our program.

After examining our by-laws, our board reached what we believe is a good compromise: all dancers are considered *Associate* (non-voting) members of ECR once they graduate their first SSD-50 blast class. They will become *Full* (voting) members of ECR once they graduate from their first Mainstream blast class. They will also receive permanent plastic club badges once they graduate at Mainstream.⁸

Update: As of 12/16/18, there was a proposed bylaws change to make Mainstream the entry level for full club membership. This was voted on and passed in February of 2019.

- *“But this is how we’ve always run classes!”*

What worked before has now been shown to no longer work now. Other clubs have had to change their recruitment model. By changing their model, Chi-Town has retained well over 100 members with an extremely aggressive and healthy dance program and is continuing to grow their membership.

Temple Squares has managed to grow and maintain their membership in what is probably the most politically hostile social climate for a LGBTQ+ square dance club in North America...by using ABC dances, blast classes, and Mainstream to appeal to a wider potential audience.

Clearly, other clubs could do worse than follow either or both of these club’s models.

⁸ We felt that since our Level 2 blast students wanted to attend IAGSDC convention, it would be more appropriate to give them their permanent club badges once they graduated at Mainstream level

Financial Impact

At the end of the first blast sequence, we were quite surprised. Our club went from *losing* money to *making* money. Part of this was the blast classes, part of it were changes in door fees and dues. Here are the slides from our December 2018 membership report:



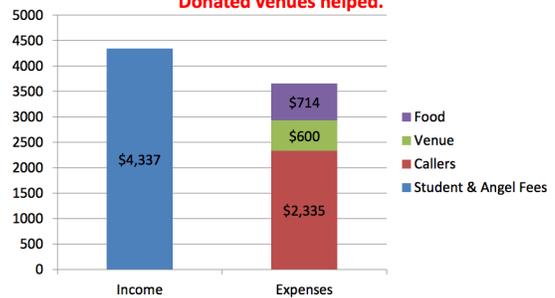
Door Fees & Dues

- In an effort to reverse the club's losses, we:
 - Increased door fees from \$5 to \$8 for all club nights
 - Increased door fees for quarterly dances from \$8 to \$10 for ECR members, \$10 to \$12 for guests
 - Increased the yearly membership fee from \$45 to \$50
- Net result: we made **\$752** for the fiscal year
 - (Previous year: we lost \$1136)
 - Generous donations helped a lot
- As always, no one turned away for lack of funds



3 Blast Classes + 2 reviews

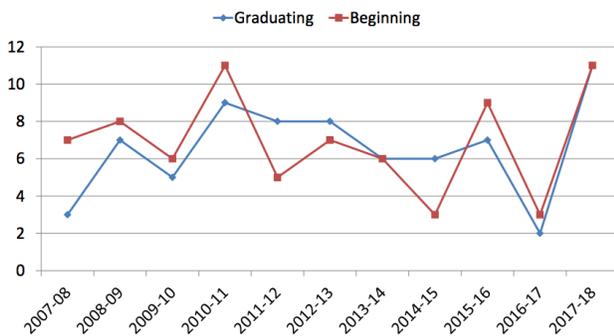
Class revenue helped offset Fun Night losses.
Donated venues helped.



Net gain: \$688



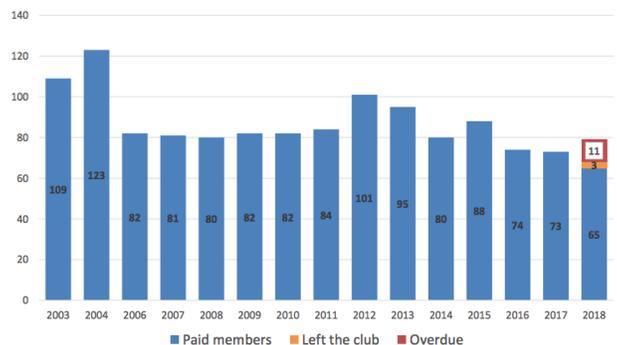
Beginner Class Sizes



Our best Beginner class in years!



Club Membership

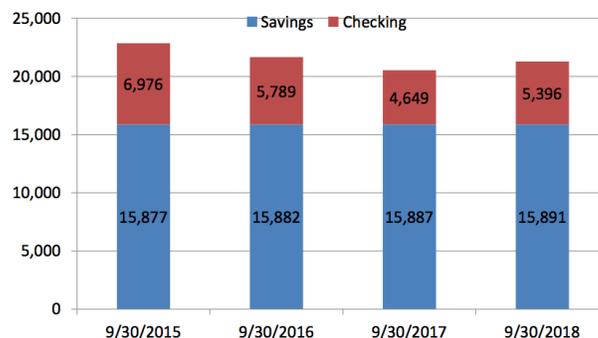


11 members still need to pay their dues



Balance Sheet

Turning things around...



Contact Information

There are undoubtedly a number of questions which we haven't addressed in this version of the document. We'll be happy to answer any questions you have.

El Camino Reelers
P.O. Box 391373
Mountain View, CA 94039-1373
Email: info@reelers.org
Website: <http://www.reelers.org>

Allan Hurst
Phone: 650-207-0215
Email: allanhurst@gmail.com
Website: <http://www.squareinfo.org>

[end document]