

PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

By Jackie Daemion
Rockin' Jokers
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I went to a party and a square dance broke out. That's the way I feel about the club that I am lucky enough to be president of - The Rockin' Jokers.

Rockin' Jokers was formed in May 2005 by the combination of the Jokers and Rafter Rockers, two "rival" couples clubs that had danced about a mile apart on the same night for many years. The club presidents, Allen Glesser and Joe Carboni, got together to engineer the merger because both clubs were losing membership. Allen and Joe did a masterful job.

We start dancing at 7:30 and there are usually 5 or 6 people waiting to dance by 7:15. Our caller, Roger Smith and his partner, Josie Baumgartner, arrive by 6:45 to set up. They are closely followed by the venerable Harold and Lee Fleeman who drive over from Santa Cruz to hassle and support Roger and to enjoy the camaraderie that they find at our club. Our cuer, John Flora, joins us on the first and third Wednesdays.

I think that there are four things that contribute to our success.

First, we decided that these two traditionally "couples only" clubs would become a "couples and singles" club. That change is often frowned upon by couples clubs, but it has worked out just fine in our case. Some of our dancers have lost partners and often members have medical or work-related reasons why they are not able to dance, leaving their partner to dance with whoever is available.

Second, we moved to a fairly small hall, which unexpectedly changed the atmosphere at our club. We dance on Wednesday nights in Wright Hall at Cambrian United Methodist Church in San Jose. We often have 6 - 7 squares at the peak of the evening and there is usually another square or so sitting out socializing. The hall easily holds us but feels snug. It is very comfortable to move around and chat and still feels like a party. I remember when Rafter Rockers danced in a middle school multipurpose room and our 4 - 5 squares really "rattled around". If I were giving advice, which, of course, I'm not, I would recommend that clubs try to dance in facilities that just match their size.

Third, we have enjoyable entertainment. Roger Smith is an "old school" caller who has an extensive collection of classic records. The music, paired with his excellent singing voice, makes dancing a real joy. John Flora is a wonderful cuer with a sharp wit. It's always fun to see what comments he will make next.

The final thing that I attribute our success to is our extracurricular events. Our Social Planners, Lola Michael and Bill Steinberg, arrange a non-dancing event about once a month. We go to plays, play miniature golf, have picnics and potlucks, go to baseball games, attend ballroom dancing events and go on hikes. These activities give us an opportunity to get to know each other in a way that doesn't happen when we are all square dancing.

Our club has steadily gained membership since the initial attrition that occurred with the merger so that The Rockin' Jokers Club now has a roster of about 80 members and we usually have 10-12 guests.

As I said at the beginning, I am fortunate to be president of Rockin' Jokers. If you want to join our party, we'd love to see you across the square! You can find us at www.rockinjokers.com.