

THE BEAT GOES ON . . .
An Updated History of the
Friday Nighters Dancing
Club



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www.fridaynightersdancingclub.com

Introduction

The Friday Nighters Dancing Club has been in existence since 1945. Several generations of Friday Nighters have succeeded the charter members. One thing that distinguishes the Club is the strong sense of its own history. There exists a large (and ever growing) body of files which are passed along from one Club president to the next. At several points over the years, relying on such documentation and members' memories, volunteers have put together informative and entertaining retrospectives.

A history of the Club covering the period 1945-62 was compiled by charter members Bob and Corinne Ragains with the assistance of O.B. and Myrtle Allen. At the Executive Board's instigation, the history was updated through 1973 by volunteers Bob and Pat Walsh, who relied on Board meeting minutes and the recollections of longstanding members, themselves included. Since the early 1990s, most Club presidents have penned brief chronicles of the key events on their watch.

As president for the 2009-10 season, I came into possession of the Club's main files. This presented an opportunity to consolidate previous contributions to the Club's history into a single document. This work draws heavily on previous histories—from which I have taken large swaths—as well as Board minutes and other records.

The final product is unavoidably unbalanced. The amount of source material available on key

individuals, issues, events, even entire years, is extensive in some cases, sketchy or missing altogether in others. Within existing constraints, I have sought to provide a reasonably accurate picture of the Club's activities over many decades. (Note: If anyone has or comes to have records or other information that can fill those gaps, please pass them along to whoever is president.)

The Friday Nighters Dancing Club is an all-volunteer entity. For its many years of successful operation, the Club owes a debt of gratitude to all who have served as officers on the Executive Board, whether as president, vice-president, treasurer, membership, property or secretary, as well as those members who have volunteered for special committees (e.g. raffle prizes, dance committees, and more).

Special thanks are due to the members of the 2009-10 Board whose comments have improved this history. This updated version is meant to inform and perhaps inspire current and future members on whom the continued existence of the Friday Nighters Dancing Club rests.

After all, what's life without opportunities for ballroom dancing and good fellowship?

Bob Clark
November 2009

"To watch us dance is to hear our hearts speak."
~Hopi Indian Saying

Small Talk at a Coffee Break

It all began just after the end of World War II . . .

In the fall of 1945, at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, employees of the Farm Administration (now Farmers Home Administration) met for their usual coffee break in the South Agriculture Building. This group had recently moved to Washington, DC from Cincinnati, where they had been relocated during the war.

Not yet fully involved in their respective communities, these employees may have been looking for a social outlet. In any event, someone suggested that the group gather at a nightclub or some other appropriate venue for an evening of dancing.¹ The idea was tossed around during the brief coffee break. Then the coffee drinkers matched to see who would pay and everyone returned to his or her desk.

But a nerve had been struck. A few evenings later, several members of the group met at one member's home to explore the idea further. The names of some of those present were Sue Taylor (later Mrs. Sue Murray), Hugh and Helen McLaughlin, Clark and Minnie Tate, and Steve and Teresa Hughes.

Going to a public place like a nightclub to dance, it was decided, would be too expensive. Instead the plan was to use the home of a member with a large living room, where the rugs could be taken up and the

¹ Regrettably, terms like "someone" or "member" must be resorted to at times in the Club's early history, since the names of key figures are not always recorded.

furniture pushed back. Participants would pool their dance records and use a member's record player. Some in the group were tasked with furnishing popcorn, peanuts and setups, with each couple bringing their own spirits.

Ashton Heights Women's Club

Before the first dance could be held, however, a member (another whose name has been lost) learned that the Ashton Heights Women's Club in Arlington would rent space for \$10 a night, provided that bottles were taken away and the room cleaned up before everyone went home. The first dance was held there in October or November 1945.²

A conglomeration of records on a borrowed record player did not make for the most danceable music. The records were too slow, or too fast, or too soft, or too loud. Nevertheless, the party got going. The participants were largely from rural backgrounds—farms in Colorado, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, North Carolina, and

² The Ashton Heights Woman's Club, which began as a sewing circle in 1923, was located at 413 Irving Street. After many decades of operation, the AHWC was disbanded by its few remaining members in 2005 and the property sold off. Scrapbooks, other records and a sum of money were donated to the Arlington Community Archives. The Ashton Heights area is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/Libraries/history/LibrariesHistoryBackPages100306.aspx

Tennessee as well as ranches in New Mexico and Texas. When the spirit(s) moved them, they added "hollerin", "yodelin" and "hog callin" to the music records.

After a couple of dances, a nickelodeon was rented, delivered to the hall on the afternoon of the dance and picked up the following day. This did not prove much more successful than the record player. Plus there were differences of opinion on what constituted danceable music. Some favored a waltz, others Alexander's Ragtime Band, still others the Mexican Hat Dance or "Put Your Little Foot". There were extended periods without music until a decision was reached. During one of these lulls, one "spirited" participant provided his own vocal music.

No matter that this was not music to dance by. A tradition had gotten started. During intermission at the dances, singers gathered around the microphone. Baritones bellowed and tenors screeched. The songs included "Let Me Call You Sweetheart", "Down By the Old Mill Stream", "I've Been Workin' On the Railroad", "Show Me the Way to Go Home", "Shine On Harvests Moon", "Carolina Moon" and other familiar ditties. The singing, which improved over time, was aided by the distinguished piano playing of members like Minnie Tate, Jo Scofield, and Virginia Axelson.

Several song leaders emerged: Ed Talbot with his favorite Alma Mater song; Ann Doster with "Bell Bottom Trousers"; Walt McClanahan with "Jolly Sixpence"; Bob Nobel with "Wiffenproof Song"; Sam

Hess with “I’ve Been Workin’ On the Railroad”; and Sam Wright with “Old-Time Religion.”

Bylaws

In January 1946, a committee was appointed to draft a set of bylaws for the Friday Nighters Dancing Club. The goal was to provide its members with a good time through ballroom dancing. Everybody on the committee was interested in forming a congenial club; one with a legal background helped with technical considerations. The committee’s draft bylaws aimed at enabling the club to function smoothly without an elaborate organization that could create operating problems. The proposed set of bylaws was adopted by the rest of the members and, while amended from time to time, has served as the organizational basis for the Club ever since.

The bylaws provided for the election of a president and vice-president by popular vote. The elected president could then appoint additional officers as needed. Initially this meant a secretary-treasurer. The president also appointed a membership committee. The names of those serving on the committee were not divulged so that they could make recommendations on new member applications free from outside pressure. The membership committee chair served on the Executive Board. Additional officers were appointed over the years. Membership categories were either *active* upon full payment of dues or, at a member’s request, *inactive* subject to Board approval and payment of \$1 semi-annually.

For many years a couple was counted as one “member”. The bylaws were amended in 2002 to provide that one person shall be considered one member. The distinction between active and inactive members was eliminated. That needs to be kept in mind when comparing total membership from one time period to another.

As a matter of policy, membership dues were kept as low as possible so that the cost would not be a deterrent. The emphasis was on attracting couples, along with a few singles, who enjoyed dancing and having a good time. Active members would bring friends as guests. Members could meet the guests and guests could see the Club in action. If guests wanted to join the Club, they would be proposed by at least two members. Thanks to this method, little difficulty was experienced with undesirable members.

Initially elections were held twice a year, one for the fall series of dances and one for the spring series. Under this system, problems arose in arranging the full-year schedule of dances, e.g. a meeting place and a band. In 1950 the bylaws were changed to provide for one annual election. In that year the newly elected president was transferred out of town and a special election had to be held. Afterwards the bylaws were changed again to provide that if a president could not serve, the vice-president would automatically assume that office.

The full membership was divided into committees that had responsibility for putting on the monthly dances. Thus each member had a stake in the Club’s ongoing success.

Location, Location, Location

The Ashton Heights Women's Club building, located on Irving Street off Pershing Drive in Arlington, sat in a neighborhood of modest homes. On either side of the entrance were a cloakroom and a rest room. A main hall took up most of the interior. At the back was a kitchen that held glasses, ice, setups and other refreshments. The first couple of dances went well from the members' perspective but there may have been talk among the neighbors who heard loud music and strange noises on the second Friday of the month.

After either the third or fourth dance, two gentlemen in blue uniforms, with a holster on one hip and nightstick on the other, appeared at the door. Some dancers worried that they were going to be hauled off in paddy wagons but the officers told the president that they were merely checking to see what was going on. They suggested that the group would be more welcome in the neighborhood if the music, hollerin' and hog callin' were toned down. Police officers visited the dances several times afterwards but just to observe the fun.

Because of the noise factor in a residential area, the members decided to seek another location. During the summer of 1947, the president and other officers spent many a weekend looking for a suitable place in the District, Maryland and Virginia. They settled on a recreation room over the Cherrydale Firehouse off Lee Highway in Virginia. This large

"lodge type" room with a stage at one end served as the venue for dance from the fall of 1947 to the spring of 1949.³

From the fall of 1950 through spring of 1956, the dances were held at the Fellowcraft Club, located south of Alexandria, half a mile off U.S. Route 1 and across the highway from the Belle Haven Country Club.⁴ The Fellowcraft building was situated on a low area of Hunting Creek which often was filled with Potomac River backwater. Cars often had to drive through water and sometimes water seeped into the building.

Dance committees were instructed to sweep the hall, scrub the floor and do anything else necessary to make the place presentable. The water table was so high that one never knew what would happen when the toilet tank lever was pulled. If nothing happened, the river had to go down for a few days before everything worked again. Committees were reminded to include plenty of toilet paper and paper towels.

The main advantage of the Fellowcraft Club was that it was located away from residential areas. While there was a furnace, a huge fireplace with stone hearth and wooden mantelpiece was the main source of heat in winter. On either side of the fireplace was a door,

³ The Cherrydale Volunteer Fire Department, which is located at 3900 Lee Highway, was formed in 1898 and is the oldest volunteer fire department in Arlington County. www.cherrydalevfd.org

⁴ Fellowcraft is the second degree of Freemasonry and there are a number of clubs of Fellowcraft members. www.andrewjackson120.org/aj120_join_us.html

variously labeled His and Hers, Stag and Doe, Steers and Heifers, or Pointers and Setters. At the opposite end of the fireplace was an archway that led to the bar with a brass rail and large decorated mirror. Dance committees placed tubs of ice, gallon bottles of water and setups in the barroom.

By spring 1956 a number of members were ready to find another place to meet. During the 1956-57 season, dances were held in the Magnolia Room of the Hunting Towers apartment complex at the south end of Alexandria. From the fall of 1957 to 1962, dances were held in the George Mason Hotel in Alexandria.⁵

In 1949 the Board organized the Club's first New Year's Eve dance. This was a special event outside the regular schedule of dances and the members who attended made a special donation to cover the costs of ballroom, band, setups, noisemakers, hats and other appropriate favors. For seven years the dances were held at the Hamilton and Lee House in Washington and at the George Mason Hotel and the Hunting Towers' Magnolia Room in Alexandria. At the time it took approximately fifty couples each contributing \$10 to finance a dance. Some members were unwilling to commit well ahead of time to assure

⁵ The George Mason Hotel was located on the corner of Washington and Prince Streets in Old Town Alexandria. It operated from 1926 until the 1960s. The site is now an office building with a U.S. Post Office located on the ground floor. www.alexandria.lib.va.us/lhsc_online_exhibits/doc/archived/mar_2005/doc.html

that expenses would be met. This uncertainty was a continuing source of anxiety among the organizers.

Problems? A Few...

Over the period 1946-62, the members and guests of the Friday Nighters Dancing Club enjoyed many evenings of ballroom dancing in congenial company. The main challenge was financial—to keep dues as low as possible while coping with rising costs. The Club's officers constantly sought to keep membership levels up and encouraged members to bring guests.

In a few instances an overly amorous male would need reminding that he was among respectable couples out for a wholesome evening of dancing. That settled the matter. Once two inebriated guests took offense at some joking remarks and tried to settle their differences with their fists before being separated. One of the pugilists was later refused membership. Some current members became disgruntled at this action and reportedly tried to set up a rival to the Friday Nighters Dancing Club, but without success.

During this seventeen year period, the Club put on approximately 170 monthly dances plus eight New Year's Eve dances. That the enjoyment level was high and the difficulties relatively few and minor is testimony to the caliber of the Club's officers and members.

The Golden Years

In the fall of 1962, the Club found that the George Mason Hotel could no longer serve as its dance site. The price of the room had gone up and the practice of permitting setups or bringing food of any kind into the hotel was now prohibited. The new site, announced with much fanfare, was the Fairhaven Community Center in the Penn Daw area south of Alexandria off Route 1. The facility featured a raised fireplace, large dance floor, excellent restrooms and parking. It served as the Club's dance site for *over forty years*.

One problem soon emerged though. Lively dancing generated a lot of heat that taxed the facility's cooling system, so the back door was opened. The noise disturbed the neighbors, so the door had to be closed to the discomfort of the dancers. Occasionally drinking glasses—actual glass with name tapes on them—were broken. The custodian received five dollars for washing them after each dance.

Membership at this time stood at fifty to fifty-five couples, with dues of \$9.50 per season. In February 1963 the Club engaged a new band called the Traveliers, led by Bob Southee, which continued playing at the dances for a number of years.

1964 through 1968 were the golden years. Membership never fell below fifty couples and reached a peak of sixty-eight in January 1967. To prevent overcrowding, membership was capped at seventy couples, a waiting list was created, and members were discouraged from bringing more than

one guest to a dance. The dances regularly featured several mixers (e.g. Paul Jones or Ladies Choice). Most dance committees sponsored semi-formal evenings.⁶ But occasionally a themed dance was scheduled, such as Hawaiian Night and Gamblers Night. These grew in popularity.

The dance hours were 10:00 pm to 1:00 am. Although there was a push to extend the length of the dance night beyond three hours, the additional expense was an obstacle. One persistent problem was the late payment of dues by many members, which made it harder for the treasurer to meet the expenses at each dance. Overall, however, the Club was in good shape financially.

The coffers were such that the Club provided the women with engraved disc charms in 1964 and a couple won a \$50 door prize in 1965. A new sound system was purchased in 1966 after the existing one was damaged from a burst water pipe at the community center. The band regularly received bonuses for contributing to the good times.

Name badges were first brought up in 1964. A motion was made that anyone who had been a member for twenty years would be granted lifetime membership; the motion was defeated. Throwaway cups replaced glasses in the fall of 1968. Singing at the intermission was continued by certain male members.

⁶A 1967 survey asked members if they would object to allowing gentlemen to remove their coats on warm nights when there was no air conditioning.

In 1968, rising costs led to an increase in member dues from \$9.50 to \$12.50 semi-annually. Members were encouraged to bring guests to the dances. Despite these initiatives, membership began to decline in 1969 and the Club's financial stability became an issue. Although the cap permitted seventy members, in August 1969 the actual number was fifty-three. By March 1970 the number had dropped to forty-one active members.⁷ To cover expenses dues were raised again in February 1971 to \$15 semi-annually.

There was a feeling that the late start time put off prospective members. With virtually unanimous membership support, the start time for dances was changed from 10:00 pm to 9:00 pm beginning with the November 1971 dance. Complaints about the Traveliers band were voiced, such as late starting times, overextended breaks, music tempo that was too fast or too slow. It was felt that this was contributing to the decline in membership.

In a letter the Board chair urged the band to bring back its earlier melodies and tempos and help the Club regain its lost momentum and enthusiasm.⁸ While the band's performance seemed to improve, the Club decided to engage Bob Navarra for the April

⁷Interestingly, the idea of having a Club historian was advocated at this time by Board member Bob Sheldon and discussed at the January and February Board meetings.

⁸ Letter from Arnold Hall, FNDC President, to Bob Southee, January 25, 1972.

dance. Bob Southee, who was tied up with his regular job at the time, accepted the change graciously.

Changing Times, Changing Tastes

Through all these developments the dance committees continued to come up with ingenious themes like Halloween costume parties, Easter bonnet competitions, maypole dances, old-timer nights and the like.

Around 1970 it was evident that tastes were shifting. For example, in the past tables sufficient for holding drinks, chips and purses but not large enough for members to sit around were the norm. Chairs were scattered here and there for the foot-weary. Along the back wall, the Fairhaven Community Center had stacked longer, larger tables for use at other functions. Some members coming in big groups took it upon themselves to set these up so they could all sit together.

Other members objected. The smaller tables, they felt, fostered greater congeniality for the group as a whole, whereas large tables would promote cliques. The Executive Board decided to leave the issue of large versus small tables up to each dance committee. Eventually the large tables side prevailed. Some of the small table contingent actually resigned from the Club but most took the change in stride and danced on.

Another shift came as a result of dancing lessons that many members were taking. At the Club's dances members could practice what they had learned. Along with traditional foxtrots, waltzes and swings, and the

“Alley Cat”, new dances were incorporated into the evening’s program like cha-cha, tango, rumba and samba. Dance course classmates of these members became interested in the Club and some joined.

The Club continued to struggle with low membership and inadequate financing. Membership was down to thirty-one active members in February 1973. At that time dues were raised to \$20 a term and guest fees from \$3 to \$5.

New Members, Bands and Sites

In June 1973, in recognition of their devotion to the Club over eighteen years, charter members (and original history authors) O.B. and Myrtle Allen and Bob and Corinne Ragains received prolonged applause and, more usefully, a bottle of spirits.

By June 1974, the Club’s membership stood at a still low thirty-three couples. Dues were \$20 per couple for a season or term of five dances. Guests paid \$5 a dance. The Club often used records or tapes at the dances but in September 1974 a band, the Tritones, was engaged. In December 1974 a volunteer seventeen piece band played for free because they wanted a chance to practice and play together.

In September 1975 the thirtieth anniversary of the Club was celebrated with a “Forties” theme dance. There was finger food and a tiered cake with a large “30” on it. An aggressive membership campaign increased the number of members and guests. Flyers were circulated, personal contact was made with non-

member classmates at county dance courses and members were encouraged to bring guests.

Reversing the earlier downward trend, membership levels began going up. By December 1977, membership had grown to forty-two couples. A membership limit of forty couples was set at the February 1978 Board meeting. Compared to a bank account balance of \$186 for the year ending in June 1974, the dance year that ended in June 1978 showed a balance of \$545.

Band leader Al Bruffey’s group first played for the Club at the thirtieth anniversary celebration. Mr. Bruffey died in 1979 but his drummer, Stan Sheltra, continued to head a three-piece band that played at the dances for several years afterwards.

A poll taken at the January 1980 dance resulted in an 18 to four vote in favor of reinstating the New Year’s Eve dance. After a search that covered some twenty-four locations, space was found at Queen of Apostles Catholic Church in Annandale. The problems that had arisen before reappeared. The 1980 dance had a profit of \$3.83 but the following two years had a combined loss of \$366. After the Board reviewed all the facts, the members voted 21 to one not to have a New Year’s Eve dance in 1983.

In the 1982-83 year, the members unanimously decided to forego the exchange of Christmas gifts, which had become a tradition, and opted instead to make a donation to a worthy cause. The Hartwood

House received a gift of \$235 from donations collected at the December dance.⁹

In 1982-83 the Board took note of a change in the Club's membership. In a letter to Stan Sheltra, band leader, the president stated that newer members were more serious dancers, intent on practicing newly learned steps, in contrast to the traditional purely social dancers. The letter put the dances into two groups. Foxtrot, single swing, triple swing, rumba, bolero, and cha-cha would make up the primary group. The secondary group would include waltz, disco, samba, tango, meringue and polka. To keep both social dancers and more serious dance students happy, the band was asked to play two dances from the primary group for every one in the secondary group. The letter suggested medium tempo (about 30 measures per minute) for fox trot and waltz, a faster tempo (36-48 measures per minute) for single swing and a smoother tempo (30-32 measures per minute) for triple swing.¹⁰

Recent Bands

For the most part over the years dances were held as scheduled. The exceptions from the 1970s into the early 1980s were February 1974, January 1977, January 1978 and January 1983 when ice and snow

⁹ The Hartwood House was a short-term training residence for persons with physical and/or mental disabilities.

¹⁰ Letter from President John Reshofs to San Sheltra, March 21, 1983.

forced postponements of a week or longer. In December 1992 the Board adopted a policy of canceling a dance if the Fairfax County schools were closed that day and the weather still presented a danger at 4:00 pm. A telephone tree was set up to notify members. The policy was timely since the March 12, 1993 dance had to be rescheduled because of a late season snowstorm.

In 1992, former president Bob Kandt contributed to the Club's history and suggested that each president write a summary of his and/or her tenure. The Board should find the history of missing years.

On May 12, 1995, the Club held a 50th anniversary dinner dance at the Lorton American Legion. It was attended by 103 people who enjoyed cake and champagne.

Although the rent increased at times over the years, monthly dances continued at the Fairhaven Community Center. Membership waxed and waned. At the start of the 1993-94 season, the Club had 70 members, 33 couples and four singles. As of June 1995 the Club had twenty-four active members. Building the membership and attracting guests again became a priority.

From the late 1980s until 1995 the Suzanne Lee Trio featured Suzanne Lee on the keyboard with durable Bob Southee at drums and vocals.¹¹ For several years the Suzanne Lee Trio alternated monthly with another band but in the 1991-92 dance year it

¹¹ Yes, this was the same Bob Southee who led the band from 1973 to 1983. He retired from the band business in 1995.

was decided after a poll of the membership to have the Suzanne Lee Trio play at all the dances. That continued until 1996 when Suzanne Lee had to leave the area to care for seriously ill parents.

The Suzanne Lee Trio was succeeded in September 1996 by The Family, a four piece band led by Jasper Napoli on the keyboard with others handling the drums, bass and clarinet/vocals. The Family has continued to play for the Club from that time to the present and is currently under the leadership of Frank Cocuzzi who joined the band as drummer in 2001. In a 2002 newspaper article, bass player Larry Bohnert was quoted as saying, "We do a large variety of styles We have fun playing for them, they're very appreciative and they enjoy dancing I'm amazed at the quality of the dancing."¹²

The 9/11 terrorist attacks occurred shortly before the start of the 2001-02 dance year. The first dance scheduled for September 14 was cancelled. The number of members which had been rising again fell, this time to 48; only 37 guests attended dances from October through January. Bills could be paid only by drawing on the Club's reserves. An outreach effort was launched. Promotional leaflets and calling cards were distributed to members. Feature articles appeared in the *Alexandria Gazette Packet* and the *Mount Vernon Gazette*. By June 2002 the number of members stood at 72, a 50 percent increase. From

¹² Curcio, Gail, "Friday Nighters Dancing Club", *Alexandria Gazette Packet*, March 27, 2002.

February through June 116 guests attended the dances.

Good-bye Fairhaven, Hello Mount Vernon Unitarian Church

After more than four decades at the Fairhaven Community Center, the Club was notified that the space was no longer available because the Center had gone bankrupt and was forced to close.

Fortunately a new facility was discovered over the summer by incoming presidents Dave and Pat Noon and in 2004 the Club moved to the Mount Vernon Unitarian Church in the Mount Vernon area of Fairfax County south of Alexandria. The day of the September 2004 dance at the new location was stormy and that initial dance at the Church had to be cancelled.¹³

Despite the inauspicious start, the new facility has worked extremely well for the Friday Nighters Dancing Club. The dance floor is spacious, the Church staff welcoming and the entire facility well-maintained. The Club's sixtieth anniversary, attended by 110 people, was celebrated in 2005 at its new, larger location.

The number of members grew and, to prevent overcrowding the dance floor, the Board set a cap of one hundred members, which led to 24 applicants being placed on the waiting list. Despite increased

¹³ Email communication to the writer from Dave and Pat Noon, 7/31/2009.

expenses for postage, raffle prizes, website domain name, band bonuses and Church donations, the Club's reserves increased from \$5,731 to \$8,275.

In 2006, the Board adopted a policy of keeping the reserve fund at \$6,000—enough to cope with large unexpected costs but not excessive for a volunteer non-profit club. A website was created and reconfigured a year later by a professional website designer who expanded its functionality. The Board was persuaded that a website would help keep members informed and facilitate the recruitment of new members.

Over the next two years the Board streamlined several administrative procedures. These included a Dance Committee Guidelines document, a simplified process for updating the membership roster and generating mailing labels, and a template for the monthly dance announcements. Dance committees came up with creative themes for the dances that set the Club apart from other dance clubs. The themes also gave the band opportunities for delving deeper into their playbook and keeping the music fresh.

The 2008-09 dance year began with a slightly lower membership roster as some members did not renew due to illness or other personal circumstances and others had moved out of the area. Although the waiting list was cleared, the number of members was still ten below the cap and the Board undertook a membership drive. A professionally-designed flyer was posted at various locations (e.g. Lee District Park and Recreation Center). Calendar announcements were put into local newspapers. The number of guests

averaged around fifteen for each dance. A Guest Packet was handed out to guests inviting them to join as members. In its April 9, 2009 edition, the Alexandria Gazette Packet published a short article about the Club with several photos.¹⁴

Several cost-cutting measures were adopted, such as eliminating the subsidy for the two annual buffets and cutting back the number of band members from five to the original four. Dues were raised slightly from \$50 to \$55 per term. As of this writing, The Family has been performing monthly at the Club's dances for the past twelve years.

Taking Stock, Looking Ahead

What accounts for the long and successful existence of the Friday Nighters Dancing Club? From this historical retrospective, several factors can be gleaned.

First, the Club provides its members with a pleasurable evening of ballroom dancing in congenial company. That has never lost its attraction. As an activity, ballroom dancing goes in and out of fashion but there has always been a core group of devotees. The Club strives to promote a spirit of camaraderie among the members and guests in a party-like atmosphere. Dances begin at 8:30 pm and end at 11:30 pm.

¹⁴ www.connectionnewspapers.com. Use the Advanced Search function.

Second, the Club's founders with great foresight developed bylaws that set forth the Club's purpose, minimized organizational complexity and maximized cost-consciousness. The bylaws have been amended from time to time (1965, 1974, 1977, 1980, 1986, 1994, 1998, 2002) but only to bring them up to date and clarify some points, never to change their basic purpose or meaning. They have served the Club well.

Third, in accordance with the bylaws, applicants must be sponsored by an existing member and their membership approved by the Board. That system has helped maintain the congeniality of the members in a wholesome environment. When members join, they agree to assist in the running of the Club. Members have always stepped forward to serve on the Board and on dance committees. That level of commitment is needed in an all-volunteer organization.

Fourth, the monthly dance themes have proven to be an attraction and distinguish the Club from other dance groups. To forestall tendencies toward one-upmanship among dance committees, the Board has discouraged elaborate and expensive decorations. The dance committees have consistently shown creativity while staying within their budget limits.

Fifth, in recent years the Club has been fortunate in two important respects. The Mount Vernon Unitarian Church has provided an ideal setting for the dances. The dance floor is large, the staff at the Church very cooperative and supportive and the rent reasonable. On the music front, the Family Band has remained popular with the members for the

excellence of its playing and ability to adapt to dance themes.

Several issues remain hardy perennials. The "rightsizing" of the Club involves a balancing act. Too many members can lead to an overcrowded dance floor and a sense of impersonality. Too few members make it hard to meet expenses without raising dues or lowering the quality of the dance experience.

New members are always needed to replace those who do not renew for whatever reason—moving out of the area, serious illness or physical problems, work and family demands, personal preference. Most of the recruitment comes from inviting guests to the monthly dances, personal contact with friends, and spreading the word at dance classes or other dance events. Newer younger members will always be needed to bring fresh energy and new ideas.

Periodically the Club has had to undertake more organized membership drives through means like local news articles, posting of flyers at various locations, and more public distribution of dance announcements (e.g. community calendars). The Club's website makes it easier for anyone interested to obtain information about the Club and its schedule of dances.

The Friday Nighters Dancing Club has provided its members and their guests with hundreds of pleasurable evenings for more than six decades. As of this writing the Club has close to one hundred members, is in good shape financially, meets at an ideal setting for ballroom dancing, and enjoys a

variety of well-played danceable music. If this history is any guide, any of these conditions can change and new challenges will emerge. Will the Club be around for its 100th anniversary? To quote Yogi Berra: “It’s tough to make predictions, especially about the future.” One thing is certain. The future lies squarely in the hands and hearts of the Club’s members.

Appendix 1. List of Friday Nighters Dancing Club Presidents

<u>President</u>	<u>Term</u>
Hugh (Mac) & Helen McLaughlin	Spring 1946
Virgil & Martha Couch	Fall 1946
Steve & Teresa Hughes	Spring 1947
Bob & Corinne Ragains	Fall 1947
John & Peggy Armstrong	Spring 1948
Jerry & Ann Doster	Fall 1948
Barney & Marian Draheim	Spring 1949
Henry & Betty Nichol	Fall 1949
Bob & Corinne Ragains	Spring 1950
Sam & Reba McClung ¹⁵	--
Frank & Molly Pollard ¹⁶	--
Lou & Florence Malotky	1951-52
Cliff & Mary Lou Moorman	1952-53
Cylar (Van) & Kay VanNatta	1953-54
George & Vivian Walter	1954-55
John & Mickey Forrey	1955-56
Bill & Polly Robinson	1956-57
Ralph & Frances Pickett	1957-58
Lee & Mary Ehringer ¹⁷	--
John & Margie Champney	1958-59

¹⁵Elected but transferred out of town.

¹⁶ Special election; full year.

¹⁷ Elected but transferred out of town.

Sam & Marge Wright	1959-60
Walter & Cathy McClanahan	1960-61
Al & Marge Rice	1961-62
Don & Lois Davis	1962-63
O.B. & Myrtle Allen	1963-64
Willard & Helen Smith	1964-65
Bob & Delores Sheldon	1965-66
Ross & Marie Coffey	1966-67
Richard & Peggy Johnson	1967-68
Bob & Nora Cooper	1968-69
Larry & Donna Richards	1969-70
Dick & Joyce Hilleary	1970-71
Arnold & Doris Hall	1971-72
Louis & Bonnie Walter	1972-73
Bob & Pat Walsh	1973-74
Harry & Fran Estes	1974-75
Bruce & Shirley Bolstad	1975-76
Joe & Jane Heard	1976-77
Jim & Jenny Pickwick	1977-78
Bob & Elstie Johnston	1978-79
Jerry & Irene Broyhill	1979-80
Jim & Phyllis Robinson	1980-81
Bill & Wilma Holland	1981-82
John & Julia Reshoft	1982-83
Jim & Bea Foster	1983-84
Rex & Marie Stores	1984-85

Miles & Gloria Brown	1985-86
Robert & Kay Johnson	1986-87
Bruce & Barbara Reyle	1987-88
Len & Florence Fish	1988-89
Bruce & Shirley Bolstad	1989-90
Miles & Gloria Brown	1990-91
Robert & Ginny Kandt	1991-92
Eligius (Al) & Wilma Wolicki	1992-93
Karl & Nina Bergsvik	1993-94
Robert & Joyce Haring	1994-95
Dave & Pat Noon	1995-96
Dave & Pat Noon	1996-97
Shirley (Oscar) Sherman	1997-98
John & Dolores Wilson	1998-99
Lewis & Maribeth Wetzel	1999-2000
Vicki & Stew Godwin	2000-01
Allen Davis	2001-02
Ken & Carol Hoggard	2002-03
Ken & Carol Hoggard	2003-04
Dave & Pat Noon	2004-05
Allen Davis & Barbara Robinson	2005-06
Deborah Anderson	2006-07
Peter Zeranski	2007-08
Peter Zeranski	2008-09
Robert Clark	2009-10