

Meri Squares President's Report, 2024-2025

Meri Squares is functioning well, both socially and financially. At a time when a number of Ottawa area square dance clubs are ceasing to operate, our club is increasing its membership and achieving better than break even budgets.

Our introduction of Social Square Dancing (SSD) three years ago has been a definite success; we now have four squares dancing, sometimes five (including angels) on Tuesday evenings, and by the end of this season we will have introduced and graduated 22 new dancers to square dancing in the past year, a total of 60 over the three years! We recently introduced dance step coaching for our SSD students in the half hour before the regular dance, and this has proven very popular. Our Plus dancing on Thursday evenings, however, has reduced to two squares, sometimes three, as some dancers have dropped away from the activity. We are hoping to reverse this trend by offering a Plus teach over the Fall 2025 and Winter 2026 sessions.

Meri Squares is clearly one of the leading and trend setting clubs in the Ottawa area, and one of only three clubs that dance on more than one night per week. In addition to our regular weekly dances, we host and organize special events that are well attended outside of the club, such as the Meri Mingle Plus dance in February, 2025. As well, we hold demonstration squares from time to time when requested by outside organizations, typically retirement homes, which provide fun and square dance awareness to an outside audience. All of these activities receive support not only from the Executive but also from regular dancers, a number of whom regularly volunteer in such tasks as chair and table set up and take down, food preparation, provision of snacks and manning of registration tables. Meri Squares provides major services to the local community – beyond the good times and the mental and physical recreation of our activities, we also contribute substantially to local charities including the Snowsuit Fund, the In From the Cold charity for homeless residents, and the local food bank.

In 2024 we launched a brand new website for our organization. This was a major effort spearheaded by Guy Quesnel and Gerry Lelievre, with assistance from Michelle Gravelle, Jacques Chesnais and myself. We developed the website over the summer of 2024 based on a template provided by Jean-Marc Robichaud of Ottawa Date Squares. The site launched in August in time for our new fall dance season and is a great improvement in the online look and feel for our club. Check it out at www.merisquares.ca/wp

The Meri Squares Executive team deserves recognition for their work behind the scenes managing the club. Team members are both competent and dedicated, and a number deserve special mention for having served for a significant number of years – Gerry Lelievre (treasurer), Colleen McEwan (membership), Michelle Gravelle (secretary) and Pat McLachlan and Jaques Chesnais (publicity, and

vice president). You may recall that at the AGM two years ago we created a special “member at large” Executive position because we had no representation from our SSD dancers, and Lynn Wilson joined the team in this capacity. Well, our new slate of candidates for our Executive team contains no less than five from our SSD group; this excellent participation from our newer dancers has brought balance to our Executive between our two major activities.

Weather was not kind to us this winter; we ended up cancelling four Plus dances and one SSD dance, which is the most of any year in my recollection. Makeup dances have been scheduled which will extend our dance season to the end of April for SSD and into May for Plus. As in the previous two years, we plan to offer monthly dances over the summer with alternating SSD and Plus level tips.

I want to end this report by thanking all of our member dancers, our volunteers, our Executive team and our callers. Together, you have built a happy, successful club that contributes to the health and wellbeing of its members and to the effective functioning of the wider Ottawa community. It has been a privilege to serve as your President over the past two years.

David Shackleton
President, Meri Squares
March, 2025

Meri Squares AGM 2025

Vice Presidents Report

Patricia McLachlan/ Jacques Chesnais

April 2025

We are pleased to note the following activities from April 2024- April 2025:

- Completion of permit contracts with City of Ottawa for Dulude Arena
- Writing of Square Times articles (quarterly)
- Work with Executive Committee on various projects
- Work on special activities and dances (Beach Night; Xmas Party)
- Organization of Square Dance Clothing Sale (Dulude Arena)
- Revision of Meri Squares Code of Conduct to include written items

2025 AGM – April 8th

Secretary – Michelle Gravelle

During the 2024 – 2025 year; The Executive met on the following dates to conduct business. All meetings were held by zoom technology; with the exception of the September meeting.

May 29, 2024

June 26, 2024

July 29, 2024

September 28, 2024 (in person)

October 26, 2024

November 30, 2024

January 28, 2025

March 1, 2025

April 5, 2025

Your secretary provided services for Publicity:

- Provided services of Club Photographer to capture “Club events” and maintain inventory of events on the photo album page on the website

I encourage all members to go to our website to see the photos. The website is very user friendly. All the graduations are posted as individual albums along with separate albums for each themed event. You can easily download any desired photo from the website. Do note, that at a certain point, some themed albums will be “taken down” as we replace with the most current theme. (ie: 2024 Halloween will be replaced with 2025 Halloween. Do feel free to link here: <https://merisquares.ca/wp/photo-albums/>

- Work with the webmaster Gerry Lelievre and Guy Quesnel to maintain current information and photos on the upcoming events page
- Participated in Rogers TV interview (August) to Promote Social Square Dancing (SSD)
- Currently working on project of business cards for the club

Special and themed events:

- Participated on the committee for the 55th Anniversary
- Chaired the planning committee for the Christmas Party

I will be completing my term of secretary, held since spring 2019 and have put my name forward for the Publicity role.

2025 AGM Membership Report

Meri Squares is a large active square dancing Club in Ottawa consisting of two groups of enthusiastic individuals – SSD and Plus.

Our membership indicates that there are 38 SSD dancers and 32 Plus members but not all dancers participate on a weekly basis.

Every Tuesday SSD meet at Dulude Arena, 941 Clyde Avenue, while the Plus dancers attend at Westminster Presbyterian Church, 470 Roosevelt Avenue on Thursdays.

Membership fees are paid either by the session or nightly with the following results

SSD: Session 25	Nightly 9
PLUS: Session 21	Nightly 8

These totals are based on weekly attendance from the winter session. There are usually four complete squares on Tuesday while Thursday has two complete squares and a few extras.

On Tuesday there is a faithful group of “Angels” (plus dancers) who enjoy participating and assisting new dancers to perfect the newly acquired skills. This explains the larger number of squares in comparison to Thursday's group.

In December ‘24 there were 11 SSD graduates with some who continued to participate in the winter session. There are 11 new dancers expected to graduate and receive their Meri Square badge at the end of April.

SSD membership has continued to increase this year because of individual participation ability and enjoyment in physical activity. However enrollment of plus dancers has decreased somewhat due to illness and personal physical injury.

Our callers, Wendy VanderMeulen for SSD and John Charman for the Plus group, continue to encourage and challenge us during our weekly program. Meri Squares continues to welcome new dancers and visiting dancers from area clubs at all our weekly programs plus any special planned events

Colleen McEwan

Social Committee Report – Plus Night

April 8, 2025

We tried something new, this year, to reduce the amount of coffee wasted and the amount of time required for setup and clean up, which was expressed at the 2024 AGM.

Upon discussion at the Executive, the Club purchased 2 Keurig Machines, from Value Village. These have been working very satisfactory. The only challenge has been the fuse blowing out a couple of times, but extension cords have been the work around.

We have strived to add gluten free and/or sugar free snacks to the assortment of cookies and do purchase individually wrapped items. We have kept to the budget.

As per other years, a Kitchen Duty List was made up for volunteers to help out each week for which we had a relatively good response.

In terms of décor, we separated out all the themed décor and grouped together in “clear bags” to make it easier to coordinate what was needed for transport to Dulude. The system has been working! Décor is currently stored in our garage.

We had a successful picnic which was held at Ron Kolbus on August 13.

We had a 2nd successful Potluck Dinner for Christmas with about 45 people in attendance.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Susan and Joyce for their expertise and fun in coordinating joint events.

A thank you to everyone who helped throughout the year for kitchen duty. As well, a thank you to Robert for bringing in his themed décor for Halloween, and Beach Party and for organizing the book nook.

Sandy Rosen

SSD Tuesday – Social Committee

We appreciate the organization and sharing of special theme materials. Many willing “hands” participated in the transfer and decorating. Thanks to Michelle and Sandy for spearheading this initiative.

We have worked within allotted budgets for each of the social events.

The August picnic dance was well attended. The exact dancing location and parking information were a bit confusing so we will prepare a map and more explicit directions for this summer’s event.

Sue in the snack bar has been most accommodating with our coffee/drink requests.

It’s a pleasure to work as a team and create special events and activities for our very appreciative and enthusiastic fellow dancers.

Joyce Fleury and Susan Vail

Member at Large for SSD

May - April 2025

For this past year I was happy to step into the role of “Member at Large for SSD” in order to provide an SSD perspective to the Executive’s discussions and decisions. During this time I provided input into discussions around the implementation of the club’s updated website, and improving access to resources useful to new dancers.

It has been a valuable learning experience for me, and an opportunity to work with a great group of people in support of the Meri Squares Dance Club.

Lynn Wilson

Callers' Report to Meri Squares Annual Meeting – April 8, 2025

Submitted by Wendy

John reports that he is very pleased with the progress of the Plus dancers – in spite of the number of cancellations this winter! He is looking forward to teaching Plus to new dancers in the fall and hopes for a good number of dancers to participate.

Wendy reports that she's happy we only had to cancel ONE dance night due to bad weather. The SSD program needs all the scheduled dance nights to make the learning process for the dancers as efficient as possible. Missing nights means "crunching" more calls into less dance nights. We are fortunate to have an extra week in the schedule to fall back on! All the calls on the list will be taught by the end of the dance season.

I (Wendy) also want to say how much I enjoy the dancers we have on Tuesday nights. It's great to meet and get to know (a little bit!) new dancers every session. It's the people that make each night so much fun for me to teach. I hope they all also have fun learning.

I'd like to remind the SSD dancers that there will be dancing all summer. Flyers have been available on Tuesday nights. These nights will be "just dancing" what we've learned. No plans to expand on what was taught – just reinforcement of the calls.

I hope everyone will come back in the Fall to dance SSD with us again.

Anyone who dances SSD again – whether it's the second or third (or fourth!) time through the lessons – is an Angel to the people who join us for the first time. Each time you dance the SSD program, it gets easier, so you are a help to those who are doing it for the first time.

And if you come back to dance the Extended SSD*, where I will expand – a bit – on the calls learned, you are still an Angel for the new and newer dancers. Your dancing with us is vital to the success of the program – we can't do without our Angels!!!

I particularly want to thank the Plus dancers who come out to dance as Angels with SSD dancers. We couldn't do it without you!!!

* Please note that there is NO requirement to EVER do the Extended SSD. Dance where you are comfortable and are having fun. We always want dancing to be FUN and nothing else.

John and I thank the Meri Squares for continuing to let us call for them, year after year.

Meri Squares

Book Sales Final Report – 2024-25 Dance Year – Final Update Includes Post-Season to 2025 May 22

Report by Robert Milburn

This is the final report for the 2024-25 Dance Year; up to the reporting date; that is the period – 2024 Sep 19 through 2025 May 22. Sales are conducted at most Thursday dance sessions (some special dances such as Halloween are excluded). Therefore, this report covers 27 evening sessions, including 3 evenings post the scheduled year. This activity of receiving and selling donated books was first initiated on Thursday 2024 Mar 07, with reports issued periodically each year (including prior to the year-end meeting, and after final dance of the dance year).

As at this year's reporting date (shown above), the cumulative period profits (as turned over to the Treasurer) were \$124.30; and the remaining inventory of 33 books (24 Paper Backs, 9 Hard Cover), along with the Payment Jar containing the \$10 Float, and the instruction sign were placed in the storage box in the club locker.

During Thursday dances, the books and instruction/price sign are placed on a table in the dance hall, along with the "payment collection jar", which contains a float that can be used for making change as well as receiving payments. The process is then conducted as a "self-serve" process; with donors adding books to the display, and buyers making payments into the collection jar; and if necessary, making their own change from the float in the jar. The float is \$10 (in \$1 and \$2 coins). This is a trust system with no monitoring, nor recording of the number of books donated or sold. The only records are of the number of books remaining at the end of the evening, and the amount of profit received. The nightly profit is turned over to the Treasurer at the end of each evening. Also, at the end of each evening the books and payment jar (with the \$10 float), and instruction sign are placed in a folding storage box, which is stored in the storage room, in the Club's locked lower right cabinet. Books that go unsold for an extended period are removed and donated to a charity that takes used books.

If needed the person in charge brings \$1 coins to the next week's session to exchange for any larger coins or bills that were left to make up the \$10 float of \$1/\$2 coins. I donated the payment jar, float change, folding case, and sign. The sign, which is also kept with the books, explains the process to potential donors and buyers. This sign also gives the book prices; which currently is Paper Back Books - \$1 each or \$2 for three, and Hard Cover Books \$2 each or \$5 for three.

Robert Milburn
Person in charge

Further distribution: Treasurer to re-distribute to the President, Secretary, and other Executive as appropriate.