

April 16, 2026

President's Report

Meri Squares has had another very successful year, reporting good membership growth and sound financials. We can all be very proud of the strong organization we have built.

Our introductory level, Social Square Dancing or SSD, continues to attract new dancers. By the end of the 2025-2026 dance season, we will have graduated 19 new dancers. It is thanks to the efforts of current members that our numbers continue to grow: your encouragement of friends and families to “give square dancing a try” is what brings in most of our new recruits. And, no surprise, most people who give it a try, end up enjoying themselves and sticking with it.

This year, for the first time in several years, Meri Squares offered a Plus Teach program on Thursday nights. Many of the participants were graduates from our very first SSD class three years ago. Others joined us from Ottawa Dates Squares and Grenville Gremlins. Everyone was welcome and, I believe, everyone had a good time! There were challenging times as the Plus moves got more complicated but, in the end, there is a whole new group of Plus dancers in Ottawa. Congratulations on your achievement.

Our motto is “Fun, Fitness and Friendship.” The “friendship” part is what makes Meri Squares the warm, welcoming organization it is. “Angels” at both the SSD and Plus level ensure that everyone feels welcome and supported as they learn. And we also care about our members as more than just dancers. Friendships are formed on the dance floor and members support each other outside the club. This genuine connection is part of Meri Squares’ success.

Beyond our weekly dance activities, Meri Squares also contributes to our community. Each year we support the Ottawa Snowsuit Fund at Christmas with donations of clothing and funds. We also held a food drive for the Westboro Food Bank in March. The club responds to requests from retirement homes for entertainment for residents. We are very fortunate that our caller, Wendy VanderMeulen, is so willing to call at these events, and that we have dancers willing to give of their time to put smiles on the faces of the residents. One very successful event this year was a demonstration for the L’Arche community in the fall. Our club dancers had to cede the floor to the enthusiastic dancing of the audience, including two in wheelchairs! I have seldom felt better about giving of my time and I know other members felt the same way.

April 16, 2026

PRESIDENT'S REPORT – continued:

Meri Squares also reached out to other square dance clubs through its annual Plus dance, the Meri Mingle. While the Executive organizes this special dance for Plus dancers from across the Eastern Region, it is successful because of the contributions of time and food and energy from all Meri Squares Plus members. Just another example of how everyone comes together to share the spirit of square dancing.

And we would be remiss in not mentioning the Used Clothing Drive coordinated by Pat McLachlan. This event draws in dancers from several clubs, recycles traditional square dance clothes, provides new (and old) dancers with fresh attire, and raises funds for our continued operations.

I would like to thank the members of the Executive. We are fortunate to have such dedicated persons leading the organization. As many people know, I stepped back in as President for 2025-2026 because Pat McLachlan, who was to assume this role, had to prioritize medical issues. While this was not my planned role for this dance season, I knew I had a strong team behind me and nothing to worry about. And I was right! Thank you to everyone on the Executive team for carrying out your roles with excellence and always, always, stepping up to fill gaps and make things happen.

I would especially like to acknowledge Colleen McEwan who has been Meri Squares Membership Coordinator since the 2019-2020 dance season and is stepping down from this role. Colleen has quietly and efficiently ensured that everyone gets registered with EOSARDA, gets a phone call when dances are cancelled or a card when a cheery message is needed. Colleen has also supported EOSARDA at the registration desk, along with Gerry Lelievre, of several EOSARDA dances. Colleen, your welcoming smile will be missed at Meri Squares registration table every night. Thank you.

Lastly, I would like to thank our callers, John Charman and Wendy VanderMeulen. Once again, they have offered our new and returning dancers an amazing season of dancing. They continue to challenge us at whatever level we dance, and we are better dancers for their support and encouragement.

April 16, 2026

PRESIDENT'S REPORT – continued:

While we celebrate our new dancers each year, we also take a moment to acknowledge former Meri Squares members who have passed. Many of us will remember Beatrice Gaertner who died last fall. Bea was a long time Basic dancer who always had a smile on her face and enthusiasm

for dancing, despite being somewhat challenged to remember the calls! She was a lovely individual, and we were sorry when she was unable to rejoin us after Covid.

In closing, I would like to say that I am proud to be a member of such a vibrant, caring group of people. Meri Squares is held in high esteem across EOSARDA because its members are known to step up when needed and to always support other clubs' events. It was an honour to have once again served as your President.

Lamar Mason

President

April 16, 2026

Past President's Report

The role of the Past President is primarily to support the new President, who is often stepping into a new and challenging executive role. For 2025, our new President was Lamar Mason, who is probably our most experienced President, having served three years in that role before my own term as President. As a result, my responsibilities were considerably reduced from what would be usual in this role.

Given that we did not have a Vice President in place in the past year, I took on some of the duties of that role: covering for the President in her absence, making occasional announcements to the club, and administrative functions like cosigning checks. I provided the MC function for the February Meri Mingle dance, a role which involved some unexpected excitement when our caller left his laptop behind and so could not play music, and we had to scramble to find a replacement caller while he returned home to collect it. We are very grateful to Geoff Clarke for filling in at that time. In addition to these formal duties, like most members I was happy to help out with ongoing club tasks, including providing the power system so that we could dance at outside club events like our summer picnic and a demonstration dance at Westboro Market.

As I retire from the club executive after four years' service in various roles, I want to acknowledge what an excellent team it is – dedicated, competent and friendly. It has been a privilege to be part of such a well-functioning group of volunteers. I urge all club members to consider serving for a time as part of the executive, it is a rewarding experience, not onerous, and essential to the effective running of the club we enjoy so much.

David Shackleton

Past President

April 16, 2026

Publicity Report

Promotion for the September Open houses

Fair Squares Project: in Conjunction with EOARDA

Meri Squares held 3 community events. This was a “first” for Meri Squares and we can build on the successes we did achieve. Thanks to all who participated their time for the booths and the demo.

Community Booth - Parkdale Farmer’s market - Sat. July 26 (9 am to 3 pm)

Community Booth – Westboro Farmer’s market – Sat. August 23 (9 am to 3 pm)

Demo – Westboro – Farmer’s market – Sat. August 30 – 11 am to 1 pm

Overall, the exposure was good! The Parkdale Market was less foot traffic and less booths than what we had expected. However, we did attract folks who seemed interested. In discussion with organizers, it appears that the night market, held Wednesday evenings, attracts more vendors and people. Additionally, the organizer spoke to me about potential for a demo for next year in the Byward Market. The Byward District Market Authority (BDMA) runs both the Parkdale and Byward Markets.

The Westboro Market is a thriving market with lots of booths!! We saw lots of foot traffic.

In terms of fridge magnets and backpack giveaway – these did not seem to “pull” people in! We did also supplement the EOSARD backpack with \$50 of items for each pack. The recipients of the backpacks were thrilled. We collected 13 ballots from the Parkdale Market – which was decent considering the lower amount of traffic. The Westboro Market attracted 12 ballots which was low considering the amount of people at this market. However, we did hand out many door hangers at this market.

Our biggest success came from the Demo on the Saturday of the Long weekend. Lots of people participated from the crowd while Meri Squares members “worked the crowd”. We handed out lots of door hangers advertising our open houses. There was lots of fun energy happening! Wendy VanderMeulen did a fantastic job! The Demo was the main reason that people did attend our September open houses. Yet, that number of open house attendees was lower than what we wanted. (5 – 6 people).

April 16, 2026

Publicity Report – continued

For Next year:

- try the night market at Parkdale and continue with the Westboro Market. There is no cost for the community booths at either market.
- follow up with the BMDA for a potential demo in the Byward market. The BMDA organizers were very enthusiastic.
- I would see if we could again do a demo at the Westboro market (late August / Labour Day)
- Investigate the Carp Farmers Market
- Consider any Community Outreach Program (example: Church event.....)

Promotion for the January 2026 Program

We had the existing door hangers repurposed with new dates, and flyers prepared to help promote the January open houses. While some were distributed, there were not as much uptake as the Executive had hoped. However, it is clear that the number one reason why people attend our open houses is through word of mouth. We had a successful open house which attracted 12 new dancers. We will strive for increased distribution of materials for the 2026/2027 year.

Announcement in City Councillor newsletters:

Some members contact their City Councillors to have our open houses mentioned in their newsletters. This is free of charge and every little bit helps. Do feel free to reach out to me for any assistance.

Business Cards

We had business cards prepared and encourage all members to have a few in their possession to help promote the club.

Publicity Report – continued

Thank you to members:

- To Annette Farrow who was co-chair of the publicity until such time as she had to step away for personal reasons.
- To John Emond and Patricia McLachlan who wrote articles for the EOSARDA Square time editions.
- To Wendy VanderMeulen and Lamar Mason for preparing the flyers and door hangers
- To members who took photos at club events and sent them to me for inclusion on our website
- To Guy Quesnel for maintaining the photos on our website.

Submitted by Michelle Gravelle

Publicity Coordinator

Executive Reports for 2025 - 2026 Annual General Meeting

April 16, 2026

Secretary's Report

Being new to the Executive, it was an interesting look behind the scenes of the Meri Squares. Executive Meetings were held via Zoom on the following dates:

April 5, 2025

May 3, 2025

July 9, 2025

August 21, 2025

October 25, 2025

November 22, 2025

January 31, 2026

March 21, 2026

Apart from the minute taking, the Secretary has also been exploring white logoed, maroon club T-shirts with online retailer, Vista Print, and store-front retailer, Evolution Corporate Wear, in Carleton Place. Short sleeve cotton, long sleeve cotton, moisture-wicking, with men's, women's, unisex sizing being explored. Samples will be obtained for members to be able to see the shirt options before the printing.

Regards,

Colleen Barnes

Secretary

April 16, 2026

Membership Report

Meri Squares, one of several active square dance clubs in Ottawa has continued to increase in membership. In September at our Fall session there were seven new dancers enrolled and then fourteen enthusiastic individuals joined this group at our January Winter session at Dulude arena, 941 Clyde Avenue on Tuesday evening. Meri Squares offered a Plus-Teach program in conjunction with Plus dancing on Thursday at Westminster Presbyterian Church, 470 Roosevelt Avenue. There were 14 individuals who accepted this challenge. Eight of these dancers were from Meri Squares SSD, while six were from other local clubs that had not offered this program at this time. Unfortunately, one of our SSD individuals had to withdraw from the program because of personal injuries. After the January registration was completed, the grand total is 87 members composed of 37 SSD and 50 Plus (includes Plus-Teach).

After registration of each new session the Meri Squares database is updated and maintained. The names of new dancers are compiled and sent to EOSARDA. The appropriate fee is transferred to EOSARDA by the treasurer. The information gained from the registration forms aids in creating an electronic directory which is posted to all members for their personal use. All EOSARDA bulletins are forwarded to Club members when they are received from the central posting. Many of our dancing members have experienced personal loss, injury or physical health issues. Cards have been posted on behalf of the club (some with personal comments) addressing their appropriate situations. Meri Squares continues to welcome visiting dancers from other local clubs during the weekly programs but especially for special planned events. Meri Squares is a club that definitely supports the 3 F's motto: FITNESS FUN and FRIENDS.

Colleen McEwan

Membership Coordinator

April 16, 2026

Social Committee Report – Plus/Thursday Nights

The use of the Keurig coffee machines has worked well on Thursday plus nights and offering tea for those who prefer that option.

We have some caffeinated coffee pods to go along with the decaf pods that Meri Squares provide.

The dance group has also adjusted smoothly to the elimination of cookies on regular dance nights. This makes it even more special when on themed nights members bring food items.

It has been a total team effort with many dancers always willing to help out both setting up and cleaning up. It has been very much appreciated.

A big thank you goes out to Robert for bringing his creative themed décor for the Halloween and beach parties and for organizing the ongoing book nook.

I have enjoyed my past two years on the Executive but am stepping away at this time. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Susan and Joyce for their expertise and fun in coordinating joint events. Their fresh ideas have been well received and are instrumental in maintaining the fun atmosphere of Meri Squares.

Sandy Rosen

Plus Social Coordinator

Social Committee Report – SSD/Tuesday Nights

Coffee at Dulude

Sue is very cooperative preparing a pot of coffee and an additional pot of coffee on request or individual coffees. The plan of having half the group (A-M and N- Z) provide food for special events seems to result in less waste of food and has been successful. The group is enthusiastic and seems to enter into the spirit of all events planned.

Halloween Party

Executive Reports for 2025 - 2026 Annual General Meeting

April 16, 2026

Great atmosphere and decorations thanks to the creativity of Colleen B., Robert, and Sandy & Michelle. Lots of volunteer assistance in decorating the hall.

Social Committee Report – SSD/Tuesday Nights - continued

Christmas and Graduation

It was a large turnout of 60-65 people from Tuesday and Thursday groups. A wonderful buffet provided by all attendees. The sign-up sheets indicated the amount of food people should prepare for - 6 to 8 people. Again, much less food prep and wastage. We welcomed members of other clubs to further enjoy our dancing with our 2 fun callers, Wendy and John.

The poinsettia door prizes were much appreciated.

Valentine event and Beach party

2026 started on a successful note. Food and decorations ensured a festive spirit.

Looking forward to Spring Fling in early April and the Grad at the end and closing of our season

Suggestions:

1. Maintain our food plan - A to M And N to Z provide food at events
2. For Christmas maintain sign-up sheets with food prepared for 6-8
3. Sign-up sheets for events like Meri Mingle should include sandwiches, savory, as well as sweets.
4. Present Sue with a gift certificate to thank her for her continued cheerful work with coffee at Delude

Susan Vail and Joyce Fleury

SSD Social Coordinators

Appendix A

Executive Reports for 2025 - 2026 Annual General Meeting

April 16, 2026

Executive Reports for 2025 - 2026 Annual General Meeting

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Callers' Report

Not really much to say.... Dancers did well in both programs....

For the Plus dancers, it was great to see some of them start attending the Ottawa Date Squares Plus night on Mondays for some extra dance practice. They tell me the extra dancing has been very helpful.

The SSD dancers had to be pushed a little harder this session due to 2 unscheduled weeks off from dancing: February 10 because of a snowstorm and May 17 because Dulude decided to pre-empt us for a spring break event. They did well in spite of that and I am very proud of them! Here's hoping they will all take advantage of the summer dancing that will be offered.

Now we just look forward to an exciting fall session where we would like to see everyone bring a new friend!

Written by Wendy