

Fred Strang Calls 4-H Dancers To Swing Partners All The Way To Farm Show

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SOMERSET (Somerset Co.)— Fred Strang arrives at the Somerset Area High School just in time to set up the expensive equipment he brought along from home. Minutes before, the gym was teeming with Somerset County 4-H'ers learning to "swing their partners" with fine-tuned movements.

Some 12 square dance teams will be headed to the state Farm Show. Strang, a square dance caller from Johnstown, is training them. With caller Dan Prosser of Harrisburg, Strang will call at the Farm Show Folk Dance Competition.

Strang's wearing camel-colored western boots with requisite pointed toes and a medium blue, cotton shirt tucked into blue jeans. From the shirt back, the glittering face of a Husky dog seems to stare at you from a wintry scene.

The job before him, at the outset of sessions, is sometimes frustrating. But, year after year he returns. In the end, the performances he sees do justice to the training he gave. This is the 12th time.

"It is interesting," he said. "You pull your hair out trying to teach them and by the time the Farm Show rolls around, they are so refined. I could pin a blue ribbon on all of them."

That isn't surprising when there are young newcomers every year and older, experienced kids have sashayed out of the picture because their 4-H days are over.

Four sessions are held with Strang, the final being dress rehearsal Sunday before the competition. What happens between trainings is up to the various club leaders.

Strang praises the leaders for being dedicated. They take what he has taught the entire contingent of square dancers and work with the individual teams, usually on weekends.

A native of Monroeville, Strang graduated as a dancer in 1974 and went on to graduate as a caller in late 1975.

He said prior to that time, although he enjoyed country music,

he preferred attending boxing matches.

"I was interested in country music, but not in the capacity of a dancer," he said.

But somebody issued a challenge which Strang accepted and he hasn't stopped dancing since. He came to realize square dancing has numerous side effects that are totally positive for health and happiness.

"Square dancing is a multilevel, generational activity and that makes it unique," he said.

Besides its appeal to all ages, people of all professions meet as equals.

"It's one of those things you can have doctors and ditch-diggers on the same floor," Strang said. "It's cheap entertainment, plus you have fellowship and refreshments. It's a very therapeutic activity."

About that time, Strang's wife, Eva, a sixth-grade science teacher in the North Star School District, said, "It keeps kids out of trouble."

Strang manages her husband's schedule of appearances, besides being a round dance cuer.

So Strang may be out of town three nights a week, say, at Staunton, Va., Wooster, Ohio, or Sayre, N.Y. On Memorial Day he goes to Clearfield and to Cook's Forest in Clarion County on Labor Day.

Still, he calls for the Franklin Squares in Murrysville and the Canoe Club in Verona, where sentimentality is attached. The first club he ever called for was the Canoe Club.

He calls for the Wheelers and Dealers in Somerset County and that is what ultimately led to training the county 4-H kids for the Farm Show event.

Harry and Virginia Rhoads of Berlin, besides regularly including their four children at the Wheeler-Dealer dances, trusted that their friendship with Strang was comfortable enough to enlist his help training their own kids for the Farm Show.

Rhoads' daughter, Jodell, now married to David Antram of Somerset, said her parents thought square dancing with a club was a very good way to socialize, exercise, and have fun with a bunch of people.



Evan Strang, wife of square dance caller Fred Strang, coaches a team that is having some trouble on the dance floor.

David Antram points out how well square dancing coincides with 4-H because, as a co-ed activity, it fosters interaction between boys and girls, as well as the clubs themselves, from all over the county.

Even after young adults graduate from high school and continue on to college, Strang observes, sooner or later they will be seen back at the same square dance club they were introduced to by their parents.

It seems once "Do Sa Do-ing"

gets in your system, it tends to stick. The only way to deal with it is simply to find a partner and put on your dancin' shoes.

Between calling square dances, Strang is a Pennsylvania notary public, works for Laurel Motors, and cooks for Eat-n-Park restaurant.

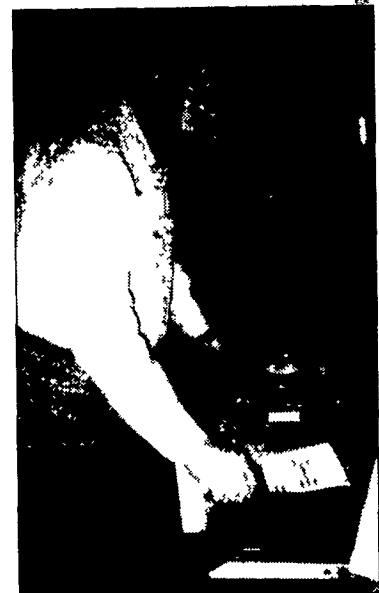
No wonder he said, grinning, the childless couple is too busy to raise a family.

As "Honeycomb" spins on the turntable of the phonograph, some of the dancers are awkward.

Strang adjusts the variable speed recorder to either slow down or speed up the pace.

"Were you trying to anticipate?" he calls to a nearby team. They deny. "I told you not to anticipate the calls," he gently reiterates what he told them earlier.

Strang then takes the microphone and yodels a tune.



Square dance caller Fred Strang of Johnstown trains Somerset County 4-H square dance teams for competition at the Farm Show. They start with the song "Honeycomb" on the phonograph.



Fred and Eva Strang work together helping the 4-H dance teams from Somerset County who will compete in folk dancing at the Farm Show.



Fred Strang talks with Teresa Landis, a leader in the Valley 4-H Club, at a square dance training held at Somerset High School.



Here square dance caller, Fred Strang, observes the progress of a 4-H dance team preparing for the Farm Show Folk Dance competition.