



PCDC Footnotes

July-August 2025



In this issue...



For the summer issue, we're giving you the scoop on upcoming summer events and news:

- [The PCDC Annual Summer Picnic is coming up!](#) The picnic will be held on Saturday, July 26. Join us for camaraderie, food, music, an ECD sampler, and a clothing exchange. More details [here](#).
- Kathy Story extends a warm welcome to new and returning PCDC board members (while wishing a departing member farewell) in "[President's Corner: The Changing of the Board](#)."
- You can read all about that departing board member this month, because he's our featured volunteer! See [Spotlight on volunteer extraordinaire Mark Swan](#).
- You may have seen them calling at the Portland open mic, or caught their calling in Eugene—there's a new crop of callers being trained! Read about the [PCDC-sponsored workshops for new callers](#).
- It's not too late—[there's still room for you at Northwest Passage](#), the superb English Country Dance Weekend over Labor Day. Come to Northwest Passage and find out what many dancers from near and far already know: this is a high-quality, well-run event that wins rave reviews!
- Speaking of special ECD events, it's almost time to [register for the Portland English Country Ball](#). Registration opens in mid-July.
- Summer brings the return of [Second Thursday Backyard Jams](#), and not a minute too soon! Enjoy these pleasant jam sessions under the trees, perfect for warm summer nights. And don't forget about the Monday night jams at the Kennedy School!
- It's the sweetest-smelling dance in all of Portland! [The 11th Annual Flash Waltz in the Peninsula Park Rose Garden](#) falls on August 10th this year. Drop in for a dance or a tune and come out smelling like roses! Click [here](#) for details, including the rain date and musician info.



About PCDC Footnotes

PCDC Footnotes is a bimonthly publication of the Portland Country Dance Community. Article submissions are due one month prior to the publication date—the first day of even-numbered months (such as February 1st for the March-April issue). For more information, contact Lori Shaffer at newsletter@portlandcountrydance.org.

Join us for good times at the July 26th PCDC Summer Picnic!

By Becky Griswold



Plans are underway for the Annual PCDC Member Appreciation Picnic at Fulton Park. The picnic will be held on Saturday, July 26th, from 3 to 6 pm. Meet under the trees for good food and company, a community music jam, an English Country dance sampler, and a clothing exchange!

PCDC is once again providing a main course of falafel and drinks. Please bring a side dish or dessert to share. Also bring a chair or blanket to sit on, your musical instrument for a jam session, and dance clothing for the clothing exchange.

Spend an afternoon of fun with friends, followed by dancing at 7 pm at the 4th Saturday PCDC Contra Dance. Music will be provided by Pleasantly Frantic, with calling by Gordy Euler. Hope to see you there!

President's Corner: The Changing of the Board

By Kathy Story, PCDC Board President

Board elections were held last month and we have two new board members to welcome and one departing member to wish farewell.

Welcome to our new board members: Lisa Scott, ECD Committee rep, and Becky Griswold, Contra Committee rep. Lisa Scott is a sought-after musician for ECD dances and weekends and serves on the ECD Music Subcommittee in addition to her regular ECD Committee work. Becky Griswold is a dancer who returned to contra after a 20-year hiatus. Becky jumped straight into Contra Committee work and is already planning the annual PCDC picnic as a new board member.

We are also welcoming back Dave Colpo, member-at-large, and Cynthia Stenger, Northwest Passage rep, both of whom were re-elected, as was I. The three of us join Rick Kimball (treasurer and Raindance rep), Lindsey Grayzel (secretary and member-at-large), Ash Goren (member-at-large), and Vic Fiore (member-at-large) to make up the 2025–26 board. Thanks to these wonderful community volunteers who make PCDC better every day, and thanks to everyone who voted in the election.

We must wish a fond farewell and much gratitude to Mark Swan as he steps off both the Contra Committee and the PCDC Board after six years of dedicated and selfless service. You can read more about Mark in this newsletter issue: see "[Spotlight on volunteer extraordinaire Mark Swan](#)." And although Mark will no longer have an official title, you can bet you'll find him helping at every contra dance and at our annual picnic on July 26 (3–6 pm, Fulton Park).

PCDC members are more than welcome at our board meetings, held on the third Tuesday of even-numbered months. We gather at 6 pm for a potluck, and the meeting begins at 7 pm. Please contact me or any other board member with ideas, concerns, or suggestions—or just to express your appreciation!



Calendar listings, plus PCDC Board and committee info

For a calendar of upcoming dances and events, go to the [PCDC calendar](#), plug in the month you want to see, and click Go. You can customize your view by choosing the category of events you want to display.

For info on the PCDC board and committees: For a peek into the goings-on of the PCDC Board, see the [PCDC board meeting summaries](#). For a list of board and committee members, see portlandcountrydance.org/board-members/.

Spotlight on volunteer extraordinaire Mark Swan

By Kathy Story



This may be the first time that volunteer extraordinaire Mark Swan has had the spotlight shining solely on him. Mark is the sort of dedicated volunteer who doesn't seek attention or want to be singled out. He's the type who does whatever needs to get done, whether it's hauling his own fans to Fulton on the hottest nights, setting up and bringing supplies for all the summer picnics, counting the money when he's not responsible for the dance, arranging housing for traveling talent, or coming to lessons to help new dancers. He does all of it early, thoroughly, and with a big smile. As Mark rotates off the Contra Committee and the PCDC Board after six years of service, I sat down with our very own contra dance "popsicle man" to learn how he came to contra dancing, what it means to him, and how he got involved in PCDC.

Kathy Story: How did you start contra dancing?

After my wife died, I had time on my hands. In November 2014, I drove to Seattle to a concert honoring the 100th anniversary of WWI, featuring "Christmas in the Trenches" with John McCutcheon. I was sitting alone beside a couple and I got to talking with them. They told me they had contra danced and he had called contras in Portland before moving to Seattle. They said it was a good place to go to be social and to learn to dance. I didn't even get their names. I couldn't get to a dance right away, but I saw that there was a special contra dance in February 2015 on a Thursday night at Polish Hall with Mavish playing, and I went. So my first dance was one with a nationally touring band. Then I started dancing everywhere locally: Saturday dances at Fulton, Contra in the Couve, the Newberg Contra Dance, Joyride, and the Hillsboro dance. Before that, I had only tried West Coast swing and had only gotten to lesson 3 before I dropped out.

I always make it to Raindance, George Marshall's dances, and special dances—even a Norse Hall techno dance with Noah VanNorstrand in 2016. I also have attended Sherry Nevin's Lake City dances, the Vancouver BC monthly dances and Chehalis camp, the Eugene weekend, and the Corvallis weekend. I burned up much of my vacation time taking Sundays off for dance weekends! [KS: Mark works Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday every week, and Wednesday every other week. And he gets up to go to work at 4:30 am!]

KS: What's special about contra for you?

To be seen, and to be touched and to touch, and to be connected. It's spinning into a vacant spot that someone else is spinning into, and relying on that stranger to be there for you after spinning in free space. It's just magic when the line has learned the dance and is cooking well.

KS: How did you get involved in the contra committee and what drew you to it?

That's where all the fun is! Libby Wentz asked me to join the committee. I really enjoyed those pre-COVID potlucks and meetings at the Appleberrys' house, followed by great discussions late into the evening. Kim and Christine were so generous with their time, hospitality, and commitment. Soon after I joined the committee, Marianne O'Doherty timed out as board rep, and she nominated me to replace her. So now I've been on the board for 6 years and am term-limited as well. [Ed: Mark's term ended in June.]

KS: You're usually dancing so much, how did you get through the two years during COVID when we weren't dancing?

During lockdown, Kit and I attended lots of Zoom dances, including the London Barn Dance, East Coast contra dances, and West Coast contra and Saturday night waltzes. Sometimes we went to more than one dance in a day. I even put down a dance floor in one of my rooms so Kit and I could dance. And I've tried to collect CDs from every musician I've come into contact with, including those I've danced to on Zoom.

For me, the Sea-to-Sea New Year's Eve party was a great culmination of that first year of online dancing. I saw the familiar faces of committed organizers whose dances we had attended all year. I was so happy Seth Tepfer called the Joyride dance this year before Supersonic and I got to meet him and thank him for all his work in those shutdown times.

Kit and I just came back from CHIME (Contra Holiday in Medieval England) in Ely, UK. It was a week-long camp of dancing and touring. When it ended, we visited London and timed it to join the London Barn Dance contra group for their Saturday night dance at the Cecil Sharp House. Other Portland dancers were there, too! It was special.

KS: You've hosted many contra and board potlucks and meetings in your home, and even a training.

The space in my house was created for hosting and that's something I want to continue to do. I've attended a lot of things, but not sourced them. I don't do the training, but I can host it. Any musicians who need a small performing space, let's talk.

KS: And the big question on everyone's mind, will you still bring popsicles to dances on the hottest nights?

I promise I'll still bring popsicles.

PCDC sponsors free workshops for new callers

By Kathy Story



Advanced beginning calling workshop. From left, Kelly Tabor (helper), Maya McCool, Megan Tucker, Sam Dana, Yosef Trachtenburg, and Laurel Thomas (teacher)

What makes for a successful contra dance? Great music, good sound, and of course, proficient calling! The PCDC Board is supporting the development of all three through monthly Second Thursday tune teaching sessions, weekly Kennedy School jams, dance music workshops, the sound apprenticeship program, and now...organized caller workshops.

On March 15, Laurel Thomas hosted and taught the first PCDC-sponsored beginner caller workshop. William Watson helped teach and handled logistics. Eight aspiring callers participated: Anne Peterson, Dawn Mott, Jeremy Eilers, Mason Atkins, and Ash Goren from Portland; Megan Tucker and Emma Hardin from Eugene; and Maya McCool from Independence. Robin Hale, an organizer from Olympia, came to observe. Laurel used her "Contra Calling Basics" guide to structure the workshop.

Along with basic skills, participants got a chance to check out Laurel's and William's collections of dance cards; learn organizing strategies for cards; listen to examples of potatoes (4-beat music intros that callers use to time the start of their calling); call an easy dance together to music; choose a dance; perform a walk-through of their chosen dance; get feedback on their walk-through; call the dance to recorded music;

and get additional feedback on their calling. They also got a chance to try using a portable microphone, after a short demonstration.

On May 31, Laurel hosted an advanced beginner workshop, with help from Kelly Tabor. Maya, Megan, Sam Dana, and Ash participated, with Yosef Trachtenberg, contra committee member, also in attendance. Topics included how to set yourself up for success as a caller by choosing accessible dances and how to teach the newcomers' lesson before the dance. The latter topic included lesson length and content, teaching in a circle vs. long lines, and what can be skipped and taught later during the dance. One participant presented a newcomers' lesson and received comments and feedback. All participants performed walk-throughs of their chosen dances and then called them to recorded music with the other attendees as dancers. The topic of programming was also discussed, including the idea that the last dance before the break and the dance at the end of the evening should not be difficult.

In addition to these workshops, Laurel, William, Kelly, Rich Goss, and Noah Grunzweig have generously mentored up-and-coming callers individually.

Tangible results are already apparent: Megan, Maya, Emma Hardin, and Sam Dana called at the PCDC open mic dance on March 29 (with William Watson as lead caller). Ash, Megan, Sam, and Maya called at the May 31 open mic dance (with Kelly as lead caller). Megan, Emma, and Anne then called the June 14 dance in Eugene. According to Megan, Eugene does not have any local callers and these workshops are very important for that dance community. "I'm so thankful Portland has these opportunities," Megan says. "Eugene wouldn't have been able to be so successful in curating three new callers so quickly."

As for the workshop participants, Dawn says, "Calling contra dances can be as nerve-wracking as it is fun. Working with Laurel and other beginner callers provided a low-stakes place to practice and grow our skills and confidence. And now I know 'end-effects' are real and [I know] how to let dancers know about them!" Ash reports, "The caller workshop was a comfortable space for learning and practicing and getting up the courage to try calling at the open mic dance. The workshops are super-important for furthering our mission of developing community skills." Megan adds, "Laurel's caller workshop has been incredibly helpful for me to go from never calling to having called five dances in just three months. Valuing and mentoring emerging talent is so important for keeping this amazing dance community thriving for centuries to come."

RIP community member, dancer, and caller Elinor Preston



Long-time community member, dancer, and caller Elinor Preston passed away on June 16th. Elinor was active in both contra and English dance communities, at one point running her own contra dance series in North Portland. She was an excellent cook—hosting a supper club in her home for a while and at times hosting Soup & Games nights. Elinor played both piano and cello and ran the Portland Marathon fast enough to qualify for the Boston Marathon (which she also completed). She held a doctorate in recreational therapy.

Northwest Passage ECD Weekend: Space is still available!

By Cynthia Stenger

Join us for 3 nights and 4 days of great dance, music, food, and scenery!

What: Northwest Passage English Country Dance Weekend, a 4-day English Country Dance weekend that includes music and singing workshops

When: Labor Day weekend, August 29–September 1, 2025

Where: Mt. Hood Kiwanis Camp, near Sandy, OR

Featuring:

Callers: Brooke Friendly and Jenny Beer

Musicians: Roguery (Anita Anderson, Dave Bartley, Shira Kammen, and Jim Oakden) and Idlewild (Clara Byom, Jacob Chen, and Mirinisa Stewart-Tengco)

Sound: John Oorthuys

More info: See the [Northwest Passage website](#) for registration and details.



Registration opens for the 2025 Portland English Ball

By David Macemon



Mark your calendars for the start of registration for the Portland English Country Ball! Registration opens mid-July at portlandecdball.info.

What: Portland English Country Ball

When: November 7, 8, and 9, 2025

Where: Oaks Park Dance Pavilion

Caller: Laura Hatch

Music: Fine Companions (Betsy Branch, Bill Tomczak, Erik Weberg, and Lisa Scott)

Sound: John Oorthuys

Friday night dance: Caller and band TBD

Summer brings the return of Second Thursday Backyard Jams!

By Sharon Allen

PCDC's 2nd Thursday Tune Sessions continue through the summer with two backyard jams (by ear; no written music necessary). All instruments, all levels welcome!

What: Backyard contra tune jams, sponsored by PCDC

When: Thursday, July 10, 7–9 pm, led by Betsy Branch; Thursday, August 14, 7–9 pm, led by George Penk

Where: Private backyard in SW Portland (email Sharon Allen for the address)

Who can attend: YOU! All levels of musicianship and all acoustic instruments are welcome.

Tunes: See the [Jams](#) and [Tunes by Session](#) tabs on [our website](#) for info on the common repertoire.

RSVP: sharonjeanallen@yahoo.com

Come to 11th Annual Flash Waltz in the Peninsula Park Rose Garden



What: This 90-minute community event is free and open to anyone who wants to dance, play, or listen to lovely waltzes in the shady lanes between the fragrant roses of Peninsula Park.

When: Sunday, August 10, at 5 pm for dancers, 4:15 for musicians (*Rain date: Sunday, August 17*)

Where: Northwest corner of the Peninsula Park Rose Garden

What to bring: Instruments, music stands, music (setlist available [here](#)). *NO alcohol or amplifiers.*

For more info: Click [here](#) or email Will Simpson at wcsimpson@mac.com