

PACE—Brings Us Together

by Suzanne McCourt

The history of PACE (Pacific Association of Challenge Enthusiasts) from its beginnings in 1976 is a story of efforts by a dedicated band of upper level dancers to bring to the West Coast challenge callers from the Atlantic side of the United States where, at that time, most of the high level dancing was being developed. During the '70s tape groups (scattered from Seattle to San Diego) strived to master challenge level, and whenever there was an Advanced weekend in California (like 'West Meets East' at Griswold's Inn in Claremont, or an Ernie Kinney dance in Visalia) all challenge dancers on the Pacific coast participated. After the regular dance schedule the challenge people would get together until the wee morning hours to try their hand at tapes procured from Jimmy Davis, Keith Gulley, Dave Hodson, Lee Kopman, Chuck Stinchcomb, Norm Poisson, and Deuce Williams. On those occasions (and also back home at individual tape groups) new calls were sometimes difficult to understand without the benefit of a

teach that would have been provided at the original dance. Two couples, Elliot and Iris Pucker and Carole and Hal Buss, recall some of the frustrations of those times. For

example, during a Norm Poisson tape Elliot stood in the middle of his square, a copy of Burleson in hand, trying to figure out the call "Bring Us Together." Finally he ended up phoning Norm at 9:00 PM California time (midnight at the Poisson house-hold in Massachusetts) to ask "How in the ...#!... do you do

Bring Us Together?"

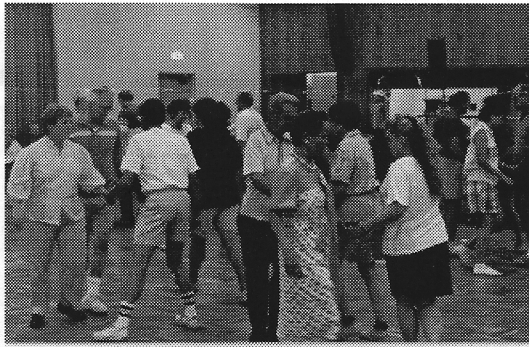
Those words 'Bring Us Together' hit exactly the right theme in the minds of the Puckers and the Busses and the five other couples in their tape group (Lee & Ruby Baird, Chuck & Pat Cole, Bob & Dee Johnson, Jim & Ailsa Sanford, and Hank & Ardie Simons). "Bring us together with challenge callers from the East," they said, "so that we can have a viable challenge movement on the West Coast." That was their goal—but how could it be accomplished?



Elliot Pucker, first president of PACE. He and his wife, Iris, still run a C-3 tape group.

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In June, 1976, at the National Square Dance Convention in Anaheim, Calif., these same seven couples had a chance (again, after hours) to dance challenge to the live calling of Lee Kopman, Deuce Williams, and Johnny Preston. That exhilarating



What's the call? Split Phantom Wave Trade Motivate?

experience convinced the group they had to find a way to bring to the West the new developments in high level dancing. As a start three couples (the Busses, the Puckers, and one additional pair, Bob & Joanie Bozeman) decided to go out on a limb: Each couple would personally hire one challenge caller to come West. Specifically, Dave Smith, Norm Poisson, and Jimmy Davis were to be booked (for Nov. '76, April '77, and Aug. '77 respectively.) Each sponsoring couple agreed to guarantee air fare and expenses for their caller; and the callers understood that any possible remuneration above and beyond that would depend on attendance.

The first dance. (held Thanksgiving weekend, 1976, at the Sets In Order Hall, Beverly Hills) featured Dave Smith and was a big success, with all seven squares of C-level dancers from the Pacific coast in attendance. (The high turnout resulted in a fee for David in addition to airfare and expenses). This event proved that the importing of challenge callers would be supported by the West Coast community. But arranging all the details of that Dave Smith weekend underscored the need for a formal organization—a club of sorts—that could underwrite the financial obligations of paying callers, renting halls, etc.

Bob Johnson chose the name for the organization: Pacific Association of Challenge Enthusiasts. He liked the connotation of its acronym PACE, which suggested 'They'll have to keep pace with us.' Memberships were solicited at upper level workshops and tape groups. The message was: "Please join, and urge your friends and fellow dancers to join in with PACE to secure higher



*PACE Weekend
Caller Mike Jacobs says "Over there."*

level dancing for the West Coast." In March, 1977, their newsletter (*THE PACESETTER*) listed a roster of 80 members. A year and a half later that number had grown to 200!

On August 2, 1977, the organization was officially incorporated and became PACE, Inc., a Member Benefit (nonprofit) Corporation of the State of California. A Board of Directors was elected that fall, and Elliot Pucker became the first President of PACE. The original seven founding couples had shared ideals that became guiding principles for PACE and remain so to this day. These are:

1) PACE is a social organization whose primary purpose is to promote Advanced and Challenge level dances for all members and

their guests.

2) All events that are sponsored by PACE will be advertised by dance level. It will be the individual responsibility of all dancers to attend PACE sponsored sessions suitable to their expected level of performance.

3) A balanced program of dance levels representative of the membership will be presented throughout the year. It is expected that these programs will be self-supporting.

4) Groups desiring to hire [incoming] callers on a "time available" basis may do so by arrangement with the President [of PACE]. All participants in any group arranging private invitational sessions will be expected to attend

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YOU CAN'T DO THAT FROM HERE!

(OR CAN YOU?)

These are the definitions we have developed for lessons - explained from the *dancers'* side of the microphone. Scattered throughout are pretty pictures (diagrams) which can be extremely beneficial to minds that respond best to curves and other "visual" literature. A Bonus: my opinions & editorials (which I simply could not bring myself to delete). In addition: **THEY WILL ALWAYS WORK IF YOU DO!**

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and support the PACE-sponsored events in the local area in which such sessions are held.

In addition to these principles, the PACE Board instituted two practices to ensure a spirit of unity among all levels of challenge dancers. The first one was a package pricing policy for all PACE weekends. Participants



"Good Old Fashion \$1.00 Hamburger Lunch...with all the trimmings"

had to buy the whole weekend—or nothing. (C-3 and C-4 sessions were held on Sundays and came with the package as a "thank you" to these top dancers for attending the entire weekend.) This package policy encouraged full membership participation in all PACE weekends and was necessary in order to underwrite the heavy costs of bringing callers across the country.

The second practice established from the beginning was that there would be no dancing "by the numbers" (now known as computer squares). It was believed that squaring up "by the numbers"

would encourage some people to attend dances above the level of their ability.

The newly-formed PACE club assumed sponsorship of the Norm Poisson weekend that had been earmarked for April '77 and also the Jimmy Davis C-2 weekend slated for Aug. '77—both highly successful—and also arranged several other Advanced and Challenge dances and workshops. (When Jimmy was initially booked in 1976 there were fewer than a dozen C-2 couples on the West Coast, but by the time of his Aug. '77 weekend 38 couples participated!)

After one year, PACE held a gala First Anniversary Party at the Burbank YMCA, with Dave Smith again at the podium. That event celebrated what everyone by then realized—that PACE and the Advanced/Challenge movement in the West was becoming a huge success. By the end of 1978 PACE had sponsored six A-2 dances, eight



Even Santa (Joe Sirks) attends the Extravaganza

C-1, C-2, and C-3 dances, three C-1 weekends, and four C-3 weekends. The events took place in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Santa Marie, and Sacramento; and they featured Jimmy Davis, Ed Foote, Ross Howell, Lee Kopman, Dave Lightly, Ron Libby, Norm Poisson, Johnny Preston, Jerry Schatzer, and Deuce Williams. This blitz of challenge callers from the East continued in 1979 as the numbers of dancers and dances increased rapidly.

At the end of 1979, the Board decided to divide PACE into two regional chapters—Northern (San Francisco/Sacramento) and Southern (Los Angeles/San Diego). Each chapter elects its own officers and is responsible for dances and finances in its area. The PACE Corporation Board retained responsibility for setting general guidelines—and reporting to the Internal Revenue Service.

Southern California (SoCal) PACE sponsored Advanced dances until 1980, at which time it was clear that several new Advanced

clubs in that region were providing ample outlets for that level. Accordingly, after 1980 PACE events in Southern California focused on challenge with an occasional Advanced special.



*Extravaganza '95
Hodson, Howell, Sybalsky, &
L. Kopman calling.*

In contrast, Northern California (NorCal) PACE continued to sponsor Advanced events in keeping with the needs of dancers in that region. Presently, the two regional chapters remain connected by their membership in PACE Inc., but in 1996 a process was initiated to make each a totally independent entity.

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ATTENTION CALLERS!

**Advanced dancers are looking for you !
Are you heading south on I-75 ?
Are you looking for a calling "gig" for the night ?
We are interested.**

**Contact: Margie Allendorf
239 Heath Drive N
Macon, GA 31220
912-477-7442**

In 1979 SoCal PACE sponsored its First West Coast Challenge Extravaganza, which was scheduled for April to take advantage of the fact that many callers from the East were to be in California at that time for their first CALLERLAB meeting.



*Spectacular '94
SoCal PACE dancers travel upstate to
square up with NorCal PACE*

Jimmy Davis, Dave Hodson, and Norm Poisson were appointed as the three staff callers for that first Extravaganza, which was held at the Community Center in Oxnard, and which drew 30 squares for C-1 through C-4. Those annual Extravaganzas remained at Oxnard for 14 years and since 1980 (a peak year with 53 squares!) have been scheduled for Thanksgiving weekends. In 1982 A-2 sessions were added to the program to facilitate the progression of A-2 dancers into challenge, to provide a staff position for local A-2 callers, and to offer a fall-back level for new C-1 couples who might need some

respite from the intense C-1 sessions. The A-2 staff position was rotated among local callers until 1994 when that level was dropped from the Extravaganza program. However, the 4th staff position was retained, and the ratio of three out-of-town callers to one local one remains in force to this day. In 1993 the Extravaganza moved to the Radisson Suites Hotel in Oxnard to give PACE members and their guests the benefit of lodging and dancing on the same site.

NorCal PACE held its first Spectacular (C-1 through C-4) in 1982 and has sponsored them annually since then. These weekends along with SoCal's yearly Extravaganzas provide excellent opportunities for South and North to square up together.

Over the years, changing circumstances have required adjustments in the PACE way of doing things. In the beginning when there were no challenge callers in the Pacific corridor, Pace's policy was to engage only out-of-town personnel, and *THE PACESETTER* constantly exhorted members to support Advanced /Challenge dances, classes, and workshops. As more and more dancers progressed to C-2, C-3, and C-4, PACE was hard pressed to justify its weekend "all or nothing" pricing policy, which gave some dancers more available floor time than others, at the same

cost. Accordingly, in 1985 a new multilevel pricing system was introduced, along with various combination packages and a special rate for those who register for every session.

Since its inception PACE has held to its commitment to the highest quality of challenge dancing. Everyone coming to a PACE event expects it to be tough, and this expectation may dissuade some from attending—but only until they feel confident enough to step up to a higher standard.

One aspect of PACE's original policy that has remained unchanged is the determination not to dance "by the numbers." There are some good reasons for using computer-generated squares, and perhaps some day PACE will do so. But for now the majority vote remains in favor of a voluntary mixing of dancers.

The seven couples who originally founded PACE two decades ago

have reason to be proud of their foresight. Two of those couples, Hal & Carole Buss and Elliot & Iris Pucker, still dance with PACE and maintain their commitment to providing the highest standards of calling and challenge dancing for the West—and they are still having fun along with the rest of the Pacific Association of Challenge Enthusiasts.

[Author's Note: This history of PACE was compiled with the help of Hal & Carole Buss (Carole wrote a "History of the First three Years," and an update at the end of five years) and Elliot & Iris Pucker (respectively first President of PACE and first Editor of the THE PACESETTER). And many thanks to Valerie Bellini, who has saved every issue of THE PACESETTER and made them available for this write-up.]

[Editor's Note: We wish to thank Suzanne for digging through archives to locate the originals of the photos included with this article.]



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