

Johnsonville Scottish Country Dance Club



Rod Downey: Commendation for Honorary Life Membership

Rod started Scottish Country Dancing on Easter Monday 1991, at a joint Johnsonville/Linden dance night at Linden Club. He and Kristin had previously done ballroom dancing when they were younger, so dance was not completely new to him. Within a couple of years, Rod started training as a tutor. He was invited to Ian Simmonds' advanced group in his second year of dancing, and also joined Ian's demonstration group dancing at retirement homes.

Rod's first beginners' class was with Ian Simmonds and first intermediate class the next year was with Damon Collin. On seeing a potential tutor replacement at Johnsonville Club, incumbent tutor Marjorie Crawford mentored Rod through the process of becoming a qualified RSCDS tutor.

The Wellington Region, Noelene O'Connor and Kristin with their children who were young at the time were very supportive during this training process and Rod got his full certificate in 1996. Very soon after that, Rod took over from Marjorie as full-time Club tutor at Johnsonville.

For 23 years now, Rod has dedicated considerable time and energy to develop dancers at Johnsonville and contribute to Scottish Country Dancing in the Wellington Region, New Zealand and internationally.

In a piece Rod wrote in 2016 about what he most enjoys about Scottish Country Dancing, he said:

- The wonderful music, the rare instances where you are completely in sync with the music as a dancer, and the flow of formations of a really well constructed dance, together with the technical challenge of making less well constructed dances work
- Teaching and seeing people happy and improving in their dancing
- Seeing the club develop into a supportive and caring environment with the necessary sense of humour.

Throughout his time as tutor, Rod has shared his love of music with dancers—from demonstrating the differences between reels, jigs and strathspeys, to choosing appropriate music and sets of tunes for each dance, to introducing dancers to the music of great musicians such as Jimmy Shand, Jim Macleod, Stan Hamilton, and Ron Gonella.

This year, in his paper [Mathematics, Computer Science and Scottish Country Dancing](#), Rod said, "To me the music is the core of Scottish Country Dancing... As a dancer I love a great set of tunes... As a teacher, I consider the musical structure of my programmes for social dances as a key element."

To Rod, the single most important part of the dance is the interpretation of the music. Where should we be and when? How should we try to modify our phrasing to enable the dance for ourselves and others?

As tutor, Rod endeavours to help members understand and master phrasing to enable the flow of the dance from one figure to the next (and thereby increase their happiness and improve their dancing).

With his love of music, Rod has developed strong relationships with local Scottish Country Dance musicians, in particular Peter Elmes who we recognised and applauded exactly a year ago at our final night for 2018 for the very special role he played in the musical history of Johnsonville Club.

Rod has also worked with musicians John Smith, Merren Simmonds, and more recently Lynne Scott, then Don McKay, Aileen Logie and Hilary Ferral on using sets of tunes that appeal to our members and enable us to dance with joy to live music. Tonight, we welcome Sharlene, Richard and Ann.

Over the years, Rod has invited young or visiting musicians to play on our social evenings including Tartan Nights so they get the experience needed to understand the music and develop their playing skills. This includes Rod and Kristin's son Carlton who was encouraged to play with the band.

Right from the start, devising dances appealed to Rod—perhaps as Scottish Country Dancing does seem to appeal to mathematicians/computer scientists/scientists. As an example, we have danced *The Auld Grey Cat* by Wellingtonian Iain Boyd tonight.

The wide range of dances devised by Rod include:

- Simple dances for teaching specific formations with straightforward transitions such as *Jeanette's Hornpipe* for set to and turn corners
- *Violynne* as a teaching dance for poussette and mirror reels for the beginners class Rod taught at New Zealand Summer School—written for Lynne Scott who is playing tonight
- Ceilidh style dances such as *The Maypole Dance* for Club social events
- For special occasions such as the dance *Désirée Patterson* for her 70th birthday
- *My Golden Bear* for Kristin, his bear, for her 60th birthday, especially in appreciation of her work in Johnsonville's Golden Year in 2016
- *The Johnsonville Diamond* danced at our 50 Golden Years Celebration in 2016, showcasing Rod's progression *La Spirale*.

Rod's significant achievements at Club include:

- Encouraging beginners through teaching classes specifically for them before the start of the Club season
- Encouraging existing Club members to attend beginners' classes to support new dancers
- For those beginners who decide to join the Club, running an early session from 7-7.45pm before Club night proper for a few months
- Focusing on teaching dancing, rather than dances, in a slow structured programme for new dancers
- For the more experienced, including dances on Club night that are more complicated but not too hard—with a focus on flow and teamwork. As Rod says, "It's a team sport."
- In each weekly Club newsletter, setting out the dances planned for the following week along with appropriate videos—allowing members to study and review the upcoming dances if desired
- Building the skill of dancing from a briefing only, by notifying a briefing dance or dances in the week prior
- Spending considerable time on developing well-structured and balanced programmes for both Club nights and special events
- Preparing special programmes for celebratory evenings such as Samhain/Halloween
- Making the decision together with Capital City to walk most dances at the Johnsonville/Capital City Joint Annual Dance this year—with the result of a happy and laughter-filled evening.

Rod works hard to give us all a good time, no matter our level of dancing experience. He brings energy, enthusiasm, experience and great music to beginners' classes, Club nights, and social events. As a bonus, we are also privileged to dance the 'world premieres' of his new dances and progressions. Thank you Rod, for all you bring to the Club.