

The square dance

In a community room adjacent to the Free Methodist Church in St. Charles, the music and caller's voice are punctuated with the soft shuffle of women's shoes as they perform two switches and triple travelers with their square-dance partners during a dance hosted by the Bachelors 'n' Bachelorettes square-dance club.

Knee-length layered skirts and country shirts with pearly snaps are de rigueur for the women and men, respectively, as they step and twirl for more than two hours to songs such as "San Antonio Stroll," "Bill, Let Your Bulldog Bite" and "Pink Cadillac."

The square dance was adopted as Illinois' official American folk dance in 1990. With more than 20 square-dance clubs throughout the Chicago suburbs, the dance has a devoted following, but the number of members is dropping, according to the September newsletter of the Metropolitan Chicago Association of Square Dancers.

But Oswego residents Gordon Warfield and Linda Persson square dance almost every Friday and Saturday night. The two are members of the Batavia chapter of Bachelors 'n' Bachelorettes, a singles square-dance club.

"I really like the different outfits you can get. They're very feminine and very nice. It's a good, clean-type activity. They don't have drinking there," Linda says.

"You do develop friends over a period of time. If you're pretty, you'll dance them all," Gordon says. "Would you say that's about right?"

"Yeah, that's right," Linda responds.

On any given Friday and Saturday night at any community center throughout the suburbs, patent attorneys, nurses, accountants and computer programmers can be found dancing rounds and squares, moving in time to the music as a caller announces the next dance.