



Dancers from across the country fill the gymnasium at Timber Ridge last Friday night. They were there to gather and dance as a part of the annual Scottish weekend that takes place each year at the camp.

Scottish Dancers Retreat to Timber Ridge

Ed DeWitt, Hampshire Review Staff

HIGH VIEW – Amid the typical mid-September noises emanating from the forest in High View last weekend, some different sounds mixed with the crickets and katydids as Timber Ridge played host to its annual Scottish weekend.

As the 130 or so attendees gathered for their opening dance last Friday, violins, bagpipes and accordions harmonized as they performed traditional dances such as the Jubilee Jig, Shiftin' Bobbins, Campbell's Frolic and Miss Ogilvie's Fancy.

The gathering of members of 3 different regional groups of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society has been a tradition in and around Hampshire County since the 1st one was held at Buffalo Gap campground in 1989.

This year, musicians and teachers from as far away as Scotland and France joined dancers from all up and down the East Coast and even Canada to spend the weekend dancing, laughing and learning.

A good way to describe Scottish country dancing is that it is a cross between square dancing and ballet. About a dozen basic figures are used in many dances, but each dance has its own quirky qualities that separate it. One of the reasons that it is so popular is that you can arrive solo and don't need a partner to join in.

The RSCD formed in Edinburgh to preserve the heritage of this style of dancing. It was brought over with immigrants in the late 19th century.

One more local connection exists to the group beyond the fact that they hold the retreat at Timber Ridge.

Rick and Becky Corbett are 2 of the attendees, and they live in Levels now after relocating to Hampshire County about 4 years ago to help take care of a family member.

Originally from Rhode Island, the couple started their dancing about 15 years ago with the Boston division of the RSCD.

Once in Hampshire County, the couple found a semi-local connection in Cresaptown, Md., after going to the Scottish games up in McHenry near Deep Creek Lake.

“We discovered that there was a little group in Cresaptown,” Becky said. “We went to the Scottish games in McHenry and there was a group there doing the dancing.

“We started dancing with them and when the leader of the group could no longer do it we took over because of our experience in New England.”

While their teaching keeps them active in their new home here in Hampshire County, attending a large event like the one held at Timber Ridge is the icing on the cake for the Corbetts and others who are so passionate about the hobby.

“We basically try to do anything like this in the area. The D.C. branch organizes events and we try to go,” Becky said.

“We have made phenomenal friendships with this hobby,” she said. “It’s amazing meeting the people involved. The ones who do this love it. You go from event to event to event as much as time and money will allow.”

With all of the active people, getting a large crowd together is not as difficult as one initially would think. But, why Timber Ridge out in the middle of nowhere in High View, instead of a more localized venue close to the city?

That is sort of the point, according to John McCloud, one of the dancers in the D.C. chapter.

“The camp is why we come,” he said. “It has a good dance floor. It has places to sleep, a place to eat. It gets us away from the city. Everyone comes and doesn’t have to worry about a thing in the world except dancing. That’s what makes it so great.”

Becky agreed, saying, “The crucial thing is you need a good wood floor for dancing. You actually need a couple of them. You need a large space like the gym and then some smaller spaces for the workshops held during the day.”

The education received during the daily workshops improves the technique of the dancers and allows them to strut their stuff during the large dances held during the course of the weekend.

Dancers young and old alike took advantage of the Timber Ridge retreat last weekend, and passing on the heritage to the newest dancers is a large part of the point of the event.

“We all love this and we don’t want it to die out so bringing in younger people is important,” Becky said.

“Obviously the majority of the people who do this are older. It’s like everything else these days. There’s a lot of competition with kids. This isn’t the first thing they will gravitate to. You want to get younger people involved.”

McCloud agreed that passing on the torch is paramount.

“I started because my parents danced,” he said. “If you can break the code of how do you get the next generation in, everybody will be deeply in your debt. It’s great to see.”

Once the time and energy is devoted to learning, they are universal.

“The benefit is that it’s worldwide,” McCloud said. “If you see it in Scotland or you see it in Tokyo it’s the same dance. It might be in a different language but it’s the same dance.”

For those local individuals who think Scottish dancing sounds fun and would like to give it a try, Becky says you are in luck.

Her classes are taught weekly on Wednesday night in Cresaptown in the Appalachian Ballet Theater on Route 220 across from Sheetz, and they are always looking for new additions.

“You don’t need a partner or experience,” she said. “If you are brand new you can start from scratch. It’s a lot of fun and for people who are looking for some exercise.”

In addition to the physical exercise, it’s also good for the brain. “It’s mental exercise, too,” Becky said. “You have to memorize how the dance goes.”

For more information on how to join the Potomac Highlands Scottish Country Dancers, give Becky a call at 304-492-5128.

Who knows? If it catches on here a bit more than it has, perhaps a few more Hampshire County natives will join for next year’s Scottish Weekend at Timber Ridge.

The tradition will be in it’s 27th year next fall, and Becky thinks there is a reason the number of attendees stays so strong.

“Doing a hobby you love in a gorgeous setting like this is about as good as it gets,” she said.