

# Milestone Award - 2000

## Tony Oxendine

### Presented By Jerry Junck & Jim Mayo

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This is the Milestone... CALLERLAB's highest award--presented to individuals who have met the five-point criteria in the field of square dancing and been selected by representatives of the membership to be honored in this way.

These five points are:

- (1) The recipient must have worked in UNCHARTERED FIELDS.
- (2) The individual's contributions to the activity must have STOOD THE TEST OF TIME.
- (3) These contributions must have been UNSELFISH.
- (4) In the course of making these contributions, the recipient must have displayed true LEADERSHIP and PROFESSIONALISM.
- (5) Finally, the recipient's work must have had a BROAD INFLUENCE on the activity.

The most prestigious award CALLERLAB can bestow on an individual is the Milestone. It is presented to callers that have made significant contributions to the square dance activity. Our recipient this evening certainly meets all of these requirements.

There is a strong perception that the Milestone is a good old boys" award. While it is true that many of the recipients have been senior members of the community when they received the award, there is no age requirement. Our recipient this evening is not an "old boy" – good or otherwise. Quite frankly, he still thinks of himself as a member of the young and energetic set. Even so, his accomplishments and reputation as a performer are known to nearly everyone. However, outstanding performance as a caller is not one of the criteria for the Milestone award. Rather, it is his accomplishments off-stage that make him an appropriate recipient for this recognition

Because of his popularity and recognition, it would be impossible for us to make this presentation without everyone guessing the identity of the recipient. Therefore, I'll end the guesswork and tell you now who it is that will receive this first Milestone of the new millennium. Ladies and gentlemen, the Milestone Award for the year 2000 is awarded to **Tony Oxendine** – after we finish telling you why he deserves it.

In 1972 John Davis taught a group of teenagers to square dance at the Sumpter, South Carolina Teen Center. Eighteen year old Tony Oxendine became a member of the group, which called itself the Jean Squares. He began his square dance life dancing the girl's part, because there was a shortage of girls in the group.

Tony has always been interested in music and, for a while, sang professionally with a band. With his musical background and an analytical mind, he majored in math and computer science at the University of South Carolina. He was quickly attracted to calling. One evening, as John Davis was calling, Tony was standing nearby enjoying the music. John simply handed the microphone to Tony, and a star was born! Tony later became the club caller for the Jean Squares.

Tony's mother, Ruby, recalled his first dance away from home. It was for the Teen Age Americans in Greenville, South Carolina. Mrs. Oxendine related to me how excited and "nervous" Tony was about this date. For support, the entire Oxendine family traveled to Greenville with him. We all start somewhere, don't we?

Tony entered the square dance business when it was well developed. The techniques of club calling were well understood and widely practiced. Also, the methods and presentations of the traveling callers had become reasonably standardized. It was an era just prior to the creation of the CALLERLAB Mainstream Program. Most choreography was based on the Chicken Plucker routine. New calls – sometimes several in a single evening - were taught and then fitted into that Chicken Plucker routine.

The establishment and acceptance of a standard list of calls required a new way of calling. No longer could the caller introduce new terms as a means of "leveling" the ability of the floor. Tony was quick to realize that success with clubs and festivals required him to develop presentation skills that would permit dancers to enjoy this new style of choreography. He combined a unique presentation style, and a mastery of choreography, with an uncanny sense of showmanship to quickly become one of the most popular of the traveling festival callers. One can certainly make the case that Tony's creativity and showmanship has had a tremendous influence on the way callers view their singing call presentations. His is a style that many have tried to copy.

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In addition to his leadership on the stage, Tony also accepted, somewhat reluctantly, a position of organizational leadership. When he was elected to the CALLERLAB Board Of Governors, most of us felt that the future of the organization would be fairly routine. The major squabbles seemed to be behind us. The requirement for music licensing had swollen our membership and we seemed financially secure.

Such was not to be. By the time Tony was persuaded to accept the chairmanship, the myth of our comfortable future had evaporated. A competing caller association was offering the necessary license without the commitment that CALLERLAB expected. Few will ever know how important and valuable it was for CALLERLAB to have Tony as our Chairman at this critical time. His leadership and stature represented CALLERLAB most effectively during some very difficult negotiations. His energy, devotion, leadership, and diplomacy were exemplary.

One of the criteria for Milestone eligibility is that the accomplishments must stand the test of time. Some might question Tony's youth. However, time is a relative term. For some, a decade qualifies as meeting the test of time. For others, a half-century is the appropriate scale. For Tony, I would suggest that the life of CALLERLAB is an appropriate period to set as a standard. Tony was an active and successful caller before CALLERLAB was founded. His acceptance and success today, nearly 3 decades later, is legendary. Nearly every caller in the world knows his name and most would love to share a stage, or even a handshake, with him. Time has served only to increase his contributions, his fame, and the respect with which most in the square dance world regard him.

Several callers have been of great service to CALLERLAB, and then faded into the background, letting others take over the work. Thankfully, Tony is not one of those. He served his time as Chairman, and continues today as Vice Chairman because he was needed. He works for CALLERLAB not only in his official role, but more importantly, in the background as a motivator of others, defender of CALLERLAB, and role model for those who would be leaders of equal stature.

Tony has been totally unselfish in his contributions, not only to CALLERLAB, but also to square dancing in general. All of us who have shared in the leadership of CALLERLAB, have given of our own resources. Over the years, the expense of convention attendance adds up. Those who serve on the Executive Committee don't have to pay their own way to the twice-a-year meetings, but no one makes up for the income lost while attending those meetings. Seldom has an Executive Committee member submitted an expense voucher for phone calls or other miscellaneous expenses incurred. Certainly Tony never did.

In addition, Tony was one of a small number of callers who shared in the vision of forming a Foundation from which funds could be used to promote square dancing. He has been tireless in his support of the Foundation and it's projects. He has contributed both his own money and countless hours of service in obtaining funding for the Foundation. The co-production and subsequent sales of the "God Bless The USA" record with Doug Bennett, is but one of these efforts.

Financial contributions, however, seem minor when compared to the personal sacrifices that often come with the job. Callers, even those not calling full-time, have little time to spend with their families. Giving six or more additional days in the service of CALLERLAB is surely a greater contribution than most would give. Tony is like many of us. He has a wife, Susan, with whom he longs to spend more time. She is here tonight to share this evening with him. They have three children, Ricky, Kayla, and T.J. who also miss him when he's on the road. They are an important part of his life. And, like so many of our families, they allow him the freedom to be who he is. Susan, we salute you for sharing Tony with us.

Most of what we have related in support of the previous criteria has included illustration of the considerable leadership skills that Tony has brought to the square dance activity. At first, his leadership was mostly in the outstanding performance skills that he displayed. Since then, we have been privileged to watch the development of one of the most powerful and effective leaders we have ever known.

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While he has continued to maintain his popularity as a festival caller, Tony has also studied and worked hard to become an accredited Caller Coach. It is certainly possible to help new callers effectively without that certification. The fact that Tony chose not to take that route reflects the respect he has for the professional standards represented by that accreditation. His ability to work with both new and experienced callers in a classroom setting is quite remarkable.

Tony was certainly elected to the Board of Governors because he was well known. He could have put in his time, added that to his resume, and continued as a passive member of the Board. He chose not to take that easy route either. Instead, he ran for the Executive Committee and became a full contributing member. He learned how to work effectively in the intensity of meetings where agreement is not always easy to reach. His contributions on the Executive Committee led those who worked with him to encourage him to run for Chairman. He was elected, and did as professional a job of leading CALLERLAB as any could have asked.

The final criteria for the Milestone are that the nominee has a broad influence. How broad an influence can we ask for? Is the fact that most of the world's callers know his name broad enough? His records sell more than most. Tony is a role model for a large share of today's callers. They would like to call the way he does. Few realize the amount of work, practice time, and sheer, raw talent that he brings to calling square dances. His popularity and professionalism is helping to shape the future of our activity. Where he leads, we will follow.

We are lucky to have such a man to "break a trail" for us as we search for the best way to bring the benefits and joy of square dancing to a new generation. It is with the utmost respect for his talent, energy, work ethic, professionalism, and leadership that we present CALLERLAB's highest award, the Milestone, to Tony Oxendine.