

Milestone Award - 2002

Vaughn Parrish

Presented By Herb Egender

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Good evening fellow callers, partners and guests. I want to say that I am glad to be here tonight. Having celebrated my 80th birthday in December, I am glad to be anywhere.

It is a special pleasure and privilege for me to talk about our honoree tonight. He was partly responsible for my attending the first CALLERLAB convention in 1974. His efforts on my behalf typify the generosity and concern he has shown for his fellow callers over the years.

I guess the best outline I could follow for this presentation is simply to use the criteria for awarding the Milestone. But I need your help. Whenever I say "he" in my talk, I want you to mentally add "and his wife." Because I know of no more inseparable, dedicated pair, who have worked long and hard for the good of square dancing.

The first criterion is "his contributions must have stood the test of time."

Over a period of more than 50 years he has been an ambassador for square dancing, he began to hit the road in about 1960 and was featured at many camps and festivals. He is accused of finishing a dance in one small town, putting his wife in the back seat of the car, and heading down the road 600 miles to his next gig. It is a wonder they stayed married and alive all those years. He built his own dance hall and brought dancers from all over the United States and some foreign countries. Not only did he show them the joy of square dancing, but he treated them as family, fed them well, took them on tours of the countryside around his hall, and sent them home as happy campers and square dancers. What better advertising could we have? He wrote singing calls, he wrote square dance level round dances (are you mentally adding that phrase?) he wrote line dances. And he wrote articles for the square dance publications. I like this one - "lines and ocean waves.

The most used and abused figures in square dancing today" I especially like the last sentence in the article - "be a thoughtful leader, not a blind follower." There is much more, but we had better move along to the second criterion:

Relates to unselfish contributions - divorced from personal gain and monetary rewards.

This man has always been available to help other callers and encourage dancers. I am not talking about his successful callers' schools or many successful dance programs in which he was involved. I am talking about the many hours he has spent helping newer callers on a one-to-one basis, the way he has contributed to the betterment of square dancing in callers' meetings, panels and seminars, the way he has made his hall available for all sorts of activities without remuneration. His focus has always been on what is good for square dancing, not lining his pockets.

Recipient must maintain and conduct self in professional and leadership capacity.

I am sure most of you have heard this story, but I am going to tell my version anyhow - at one of our very early conventions one of the burning issues was whether to hold hands up (pigeon-wing) or hands down in an ocean wave, you younger callers may not realize what an earthshaking decision that was. Long after the day's meetings were over, four of your fellow male callers were in the hotel lobby debating the issue. Our honoree was one of them. I might mention he was and is big enough to go bear hunting with a switch. There they were, hands up, and balancing back and forth when a couple of traveling salesmen walked in. The salesmen looked at this display of male patty-cake and almost turned around and departed. They were not sure this was their kind of hotel.

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That story was simply to illustrate that my friend was much involved in decisions affecting square dancing, day or night, formal or informal. In meetings of his callers' association, he was always a leader in working for purposeful activities and results that would benefit all members. If a new movement were being discussed, he was on his feet saying, "here, let's try this" or "what do you think of this?" his enthusiasm, good humor, and constructive approach quickly got others thinking and involved, and he never criticized the ideas of others. If you have been to many conventions and have attended panels on teaching, etc., you have seen him and heard him saying, "let's get a square on the floor and see how it works" "why not try that another way?" I have seen him get a lethargic audience stirred up more than once. He certainly has followed his own dictate - "be a thoughtful leader, not a blind follower."

And lastly - "recipient must have exercised broad influence in the square dance activity"

I have briefly outlined a career of more than 50 years of dedicated service to square dancing. I have tried (probably unsuccessfully) to omit words and terms That would allow the recipient to say, "oh Yeah, that's me." I have not mentioned ranch, or the Little Big Thompson River, or Colorado, or building teepees in his backyard so that dancers would have a place to stay. Now it is time to remove all doubt in his mind and your minds these things could not apply to anyone else.

Among other activities, he conducted the square dance program for the mountain recreation department of the University of Colorado. Among many awards was his induction into the Northeast Colorado Square Dance Hall of Fame. I need to mention that his success was achieved in spite of his using the worst homemade, jury-rigged sound system you have ever seen. He was a very dependable and punctual person - so much so that he once appeared to call a dance a year too early. And there was the one time he was late to a caller's school because he was chasing a rattle snake for a belt.

Speaking of rattlesnakes, I said he fed his guests well. The area around his ranch had plenty of rattlesnakes, and he was fond of catching them and preparing them for lunch or dinner. On those days there would be a cookout down

by the creek, there would be a nice fire for roasting weenies or other goodies, and a pot of hot oil into which the rattlesnakes could be plunged. He delighted in urging the folks from back east to "come on. Try it. It tastes like chicken." I'm here to defend the chickens. Rattlesnake meat tastes like rattlesnake meat.

Not only did he drive long distances with his wife in the back seat, but once was a considerable distance down the road from a filling station potty stop, when a highway patrolman stopped him. "What's wrong officer?" Officer - "Are you missing something?" "No, I don't think so." "Well, I have a lady back here who says she belongs with you." The rest of that long trip must have been interesting.

Not to leave his Partner unscathed - during the hands up/hands down discussion in a crowded room this sweet lady was heard to say "I don't really care where a man puts his hands as long as he is gentle" that of course brought the house down and ended the arguments.

Well, there can be little doubt about the individual we are honoring tonight. **Vaughn Parrish** come on up and pick up another MILESTONE in you distinguished calling career.