

# Johnson Rags Dance Club

## Arden Johnson Starts Group Dance Lessons

In the mid-1970's a couple of movies, "Urban Cowboy" and "Saturday Night Fever," called attention to the latest national dance fads: Country Western and Disco. Here in West Lafayette, the role of "John Travolta" was played by Arden Johnson (1923-1988). While the popular dance music was "Coca-Cola Cowboy", "Cotton-Eyed Joe", "Stayin' Alive" and "Night Fever," Arden decided the time was right for more complete adult dance education in greater Lafayette.

Arden was a member of the faculty of Purdue's Department of Physical Education, Health & Recreation Sciences. In 1976 he started ballroom lessons at Morton School in West Lafayette with a small group of adult students. Arden was both an accomplished dancer and a skilled teacher. He was masterful with groups, getting people moving and building enthusiasm in a comfortable, fun environment. Roz Sutherland was Arden's dance demonstration partner and Ellen Snellenbarger handled class registration and fees.

## JRDC Charter Members

Arthur, Sarah  
 Bartlett, Dick & Mary Ann  
 Butler, Frank  
 Butler, Larry & Mary  
 Casson, Eric & Peggy  
 Cornwell, Frank & Juanita  
 Dilling, Ray & Eileen  
 Ervin, Jerry & Edith  
 Hartman, Jim & Cindy  
 Hinds, Bob & Anne  
 Johnson, Arden & Trula  
 Johnson, Jeff  
 Lerzak, Jules & Grace  
 Lerzak, Tim & Mary  
 Livelyberger, Dallas & Peggy  
 Lundstrom, Bob & Anne  
 MacKellar, Warren  
 Meyer, Robert  
 Snellenbarger, Ellen  
 Speaker, Ben & Charlene  
 Spencer, Rick & Teresa  
 Sutherland, Roz

## Arden Johnson Finds JRDC

Keeping the increasingly popular classes going was not enough for Arden. To keep people learning and dancing and to build momentum and enthusiasm for ballroom dance, he knew that the social aspect of dance had to be addressed. This is how *Johnson Rags Dance Club* was founded. Arden knew that to maintain and build interest, enthusiasm and skills, social dance students must have a comfortable place to practice what they had learned...a place where others shared and encouraged their interest in social ballroom dance. Arden was so committed to ballroom dance that he personally provided much of the necessary financial support for the club for the first three years.

In 1976, *JRDC* had 37 charter members. Two current club members were on that charter list: **Charlene Speaker** (rejoined *JRDC* in 2005) and **Jules Lerzak**. *Jules is our JRDC champion-charter member with 30 years of continuous membership!*

**Celebrating 30 Years!**

## JRDC Meets Educational & Social Needs

The club records show that by 1979-80 the club was really getting organized. Officer roles and duties were being defined. A charter was ratified at the November 3, 1979 dance. The charter states that the purposes of the club are "fun" first, "fellowship" second, and "ballroom dance opportunities" third: opportunities to learn, opportunities to share, opportunities to encourage others, and opportunities to promote ballroom dance.

The 1979-80 season included 5 dances for \$25 a couple. Thanks to Arden's teaching talents and to some timely coverage in the Journal & Courier, enrollment in Morton School classes soared to 400 people by 1978. The popularity of Arden's classes helped grow the club. By 1980, JRDC membership stood at 114. Ten 2006-07 club members appear on the 1979-80 roster: **Jean & Arnie Cooper, Jan & Dan Ketterer, Edwin Layer & Virginia Smith, Jules Lerzak, Elizabeth Davis, and Ruby & George Tsao.**

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