

**GEPPAC Gala • May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015**  
**Organizational Achievement Award for the Friday Night Dancers**

**Introduction**

delivered by Maryland State Senator Susan D Lee

*(written by Katey Boerner and GEPPAC staff, revised by FND President Rick DuPuy)*

The Friday Night Dance at Glen Echo Park, a popular weekly contra dance, came to the Park 30 years ago with the help of the National Park Service and many volunteers. The participants on any given Friday range from teens to seniors and come from all over the region. Contra dance is a truly democratic genre. All are welcome, regardless of age, background, or experience. Fit dancers are welcome, as are total novices with two left feet. Whole families can have a great night out, and retirees can get some exercise and make new friends. You may wear what makes you comfortable, as long as your feet are in floor-friendly shoes.

Contra dancing is a traditional folk dance form of the American east coast, with centuries of history under its belt and lively innovation continuing today. There are many shapes and forms taken on by the arrangements the caller directs and it can be dazzlingly beautiful to watch, particularly with the large crowds we get at Glen Echo on a balmy night.

The dance is fairly easy to learn at first but then has great complexity as you master it. Experienced dancers try to make newcomers feel comfortable by partnering with them to guide them through the learning stage. You are guaranteed a warm environment where you will make new friends and new muscles, and learn new dance moves. We encourage you to try it later tonight in the bumper car pavilion.

The Friday Night Dance at Glen Echo is one of the largest contra dances held regularly in the United States and features live music and callers. A different band performs each week, playing folk music with roots in Ireland, England, Scotland, France, Canada, New England, and Appalachia. Once a month, the stage is thrown open to the fabulous Glen Echo Open Band, enabling dozens of amateur musicians to participate in the performance.

Over the years at Glen Echo the cumulative attendance has exceeded 375,000 dancers, including numerous visitors from smaller contra dances around the country who often express a sense of awe at the Spanish Ballroom and the top-notch artists it attracts.

The Friday Night Dancers have shown their love of Glen Echo Park by providing tremendous volunteer labor to the efforts, led by ranger Stan Fowler, to renovate the bumper car pavilion in the 1990s and shore up the ballroom floor before the major renovation took place in 2003. The dancers were advocates for the park's renovation and helped make the case to legislators, calling their offices and writing them to express the need for renovation funds.

The organization is entirely volunteer-run, relying on everybody to pitch in to get things done. When the dancers organize carpools to get folks home after a dance, their motto is "no dancer left behind" — a suitable motto for the whole world of contra dance.

We are recognizing the Friday Night Dancers for their welcoming community, their volunteerism, their artistry and talent, as well as their longevity and solid partnership with Glen Echo Park.

## Acceptance speech

by Jackie Hoglund, immediate past president of the Friday Night Dancers

Thank you, Senator Lee.

Hello Everyone. I am very happy to be here. Thank you all for coming. This is Rick DuPuy, current president of the FND Board, and most of the members of the current board.

It is a great honor for us to accept this award on behalf of the current and former Friday Night Dancers board members.

You know, a lot of people ask me “What is Contra Dancing?” and I think the Senator gave an excellent description, and I’d like to add one more thing, if I may, that I believe distinguishes contra from other styles of dance.

I saw a youtube video once that describes what it feels like to be a contra dancer. This video showed a bunch of those old fashioned metronomes, you know, the kind with the needle that swings back and forth. They were set in a grid pattern, on a table, and one by one they started them all going. And they were in complete disarray, with the needles swinging everywhere. But, because of the shared vibrations via the table, and in our case the music and the caller, the metronomes started syncing up. Two here, four there, they started to move together. Within a minute and a half, even the last straggler had found the rhythm of the group. And that’s what it’s like to contra dance. Maybe not the first minute of the dance, or not even the first whole dance, but by the middle of the evening you’ve got 50 – 75 complete beginners, who have never danced before, and 200 experienced dancers all dancing together as one. And it is just so powerful. For many people it is just a fun night out, for others it becomes a lifetime addiction.

And tonight, the Partnership has arranged a treat for all of us – the chance to contra dance together in the Bumper Car Pavilion, with the caller Tom Hinds and the band Cabaret Sauvignon. I hope you all come out to try it, or at least watch, and see for yourselves what I’m talking about.

Now, that’s just what it feels like to contra dance. The thing that makes the Friday Night Dance so special, and has helped it become one of the largest weekly contra dances in the country, is the fact that we hold it here, in the Spanish Ballroom. We are so fortunate. It has become a destination dance not only for dancers around the country, but for musicians and callers as well.

We wouldn’t be here — we wouldn’t have been able to hold this dance for the last 30 years — without the efforts of the many people and organizations who have helped make dancing in the park for the last 30 years possible.

First, I’d like to give a deep, heartfelt, thank you to all of you associated with the Glen Echo Partnership for the Arts and Culture, who work so hard to keep the day-to-day, and night-to-night, operations running smoothly. A special thank you to Donna Barker, her passion for dance was clear to everyone, I very much enjoyed working with her to make sure our dances ran smoothly. Thank you to Katey Boerner, the director, it has been an honor and a pleasure working with you.

Thank you to the National Park Service, for keeping Glen Echo Park part of the National Park Service, working in partnership with the other organizations to save this hall. For allowing visitors to experience a piece of American heritage by attending a contra dance here.

Thank you to all of you here representing Montgomery County. Montgomery County helped spearhead the funding efforts to renovate this beautiful ballroom. You led the effort, and contra dancers from around the country supported you by contacting their own representatives in Congress. We are forever grateful.

Thirty years ago, Stan Fowler and Diane Behrens had a vision of what contra dancing in this ballroom could be, with nationally known musicians and callers coming here. Those two are here tonight. Thank you, Stan and Diane. You started this. This award is for you.

A special thank you to Stan, who led hundreds of volunteers, many if not most of them contra dancers, to turn the Bumper Car Pavilion into a dance hall, so there would be a place to dance while the ballroom renovations kept this hall closed. Thank you, Stan. Without you we would not have been able to contra dance here for two years while the ballroom was closed.

Since then, many, many volunteers have served on the Friday Night Dance board or in other ways, working to put on the dance every Friday. Many of you are here tonight. Please realize that we are accepting this award on your behalf as well. Thank you for your service.

And for the current board, and future boards, a wish: may you work in partnership, in sync, with the National Park Service, with Montgomery County, and with the Glen Echo Partnership to continue the legacy of the last 30 years for many years to come.

Thank you.