

This is a history of just how Susie's Dance Parties actually started, in Susie's own words.

"Few years ago, well a whole lot of years ago, way back in 1990, I was teaching line dances classes at local recreation center. A mother approached me and told me that her daughter wanted to learn line dancing. At this time, line dancing was very popular. She asked if her daughter could join the class and my answer was, 'Why Not?' She then told me that her daughter had Down syndrome. Well, the young lady in question started the class and through observation and time watching her dance, I gained an understanding of the rhythm and potential of this young lady. I realized that these kids all had a lot of untapped potential.

I very soon feel in love with the kids and I offered to do a special class for Down syndrome young men and woman. This was sometime in 1992. I didn't have enough participants and I wanted to learn more about these young people, so I volunteered at St. Madeleine Sophie, in El Cajon, CA, to really get up close to the youngsters, learn more about them. I wanted to know about the other people who attended the program and the potential of youngsters with different disabilities. I was then introduced to Autism, William Syndrome, as well as other sorts of disabilities.

Sometime just before 1994, I was teaching at a local cowboy boy "bar" for teens and I thought of the idea of forming teams with teens and special needs guys and gals. There were two teams, The Rocket Ranch and the Gipsy Team. The Gipsy was the team for my Down syndrome kids. I merged the two teams and they performed for the public at the Del Mar Fair in 1994. Again, a mother saw the team perform and she asked me to give her son, who is autistic, privately. Unfortunately, this was not a success story. Autistic people are with you, in their bodies, but their minds are somewhere else. It was a defeat but I knew I could still make lemonade from what I had learned.

This young man's mom was the one who suggested we do parties where I would give instructions in the steps. Sounded like a plan, so we started in 1994 at the Kennedy Center in El Cajon. It didn't take soon before we had between 80 and 90 young man and women and giving instruction became impossible. This was the start of the Friday parties in El Cajon. We continued having those parties every Friday night for 16 years. Unfortunately, the Kennedy Center is closed so the parties have been discontinued.

In 1995, I was working under the umbrella of Disabled Services of San Diego. They sponsored events at the War Memorial Building in Balboa Park, San Diego, CA. They suggested that I try out the idea of a dance party in the city of Poway. It was brilliant and was successful from the start with the assistance of Nancy Grinbald and the City of Poway Manager, Greg Sundberg. Poway dances started in 1996 and in that same year my second dance team was born. They adopted the name of the Rhinestone Cowboys. Actually, Jenny Bishop, a very special gal came up with the name. Jenny is a Special Needs young woman.

Today, in 2011 it is with the greatest proud that we still work at the same location in the Poway area. The Recreation center is now known as Carmel Mountain Recreation Center, a modern and full facility. The dances at Carmel Mountain are held on Saturday, date night. We also have started having parties in the North County, at the San Marcos Civic Center.

In addition to the dance parties, we make outings available to our groups. We visit places like Sea World, the San Diego Zoo, even Disneyland and have even done a couple of cruises. Very soon, hopefully January 2012, we will start working thru the Down Syndrome Association. This is a very exciting time and we have enjoyed every minute of our journey.

Our dance team still performs every year at the Del Mar/San Diego County Fair and we plan to continue to doing the same projects for years to come. We love our job and are proud of what we have been able to accomplish and the young men and women we have been blessed to work with and, hopefully, assist in some way.

With Love,

Susie and Carlos D'Agostino"