

Knee-slapping Hee Haw fun



2nd from right is actually Bill Vernon of MVFD.

SHILOH CRAWFORD III/DAYTON DAILY NEWS

SQUARE DANCE CALLER John Chevalier (second from right) made his 12th visit to Monticello Elementary School to teach fourth- and fifth-graders how to square dance. Huber Heights students (from left) Robert Thrusty, Ashley Thurston and Sabrina Redwine also learned dances from the visiting Miami Valley Folk Dancers.

Heights students learn square dancing

Miami Valley Folk Dancers teach Greek, Irish dances, finishing with the Levi Jackson Rag

BY DEBRA GASKILL
For the Dayton Daily News

**'Just like sports, you need to be able to think
on your feet and work as a team.'**

NAN SILVER

Monticello Elementary physical education teacher

HUBER HEIGHTS — There was a lot of foot stompin' and hand clappin' going on at Monticello Elementary School last week as students completed a unit on folk and square dancing.

Physical education teacher Nan Silver and music teacher Lisa Gale combined their classes for the unit, which culminated in performances by members of the Miami Valley Folk Dancers and square dancers from around the Dayton area.

Students are encouraged to dress up as cowboys and cowgirls for Hee Haw Days, a two-day event.

This is a 12-year tradition at Monticello, according to Silver. Students not only learn how to dance, they also learn how to get along with a partner and work with other dancers within their group.

"This is not something that takes away from academic time," Monticello Principal James Johnson said. "We've combined music time and physical education time to do this."

"Twelve years ago when we started this unit, the students moaned and groaned about square dancing," Silver said.

"Now they actually look forward to it. This year, the students learned several dances from other

countries, such as Russia, Israel, Mexico and Canada."

"I love it because it's fun to learn a new dance," said fifth-grader Anthony Windsor, 11. "Each year it gets better and better."

Fourth-grader Robert Wilson, 10, likes the dancing unit "because you get to twist and turn."

Olivia Duvall, 10, likes the square dancing, "but the folk dancing is more exciting."

"The hardest part is getting the kids to move and to relax with the music — to get them over the fear of dancing," Silver said. As a gym teacher, she tried to apply some of the principals used in dancing to the athletic field as well.

"Just like sports, you need to be able to think on your feet and work as a team."

Gale believes using a lot of humor gets the kids into the worst part of dancing — having to hold hands with a partner.

"To start out, we do hand checks

— has anybody got any scales? Has anybody got anything gross growing on their hands? The worst part — has anybody fallen in love? Those are some of the questions I ask," Gale said.

Before long, students are laughing and having a good time.

"They put up their little whines, but they really have a good time."

John Chevalier is a square dance caller who has been coming to Monticello for 12 years to teach the students how to square dance.

"Square dancing became really popular in the '40s and '50s and it's that same generation that is doing it today," he said. "The younger generation doesn't seem to have the time to do it."

But it's something that he'd like to see the younger generation continue.

"It's fun to see them pick up on the dances — they seem to pick them up real quick," Chevalier said. "It's kind of hard picking a dance that the kids are interested

in. They want something that is fast, but not real complicated so they don't embarrass themselves."

For the first time, the Miami Valley Folk Dancers brought an international flavor to Hee Haw Days, with the women wearing costumes from Austria, Germany, India, Mexico and Thailand.

"As you can see, the men are wearing pretty generic folk dancing costumes," dance group spokesman John Pappas joked, noting the white shirts, black pants and red sashes worn by the men. "That means we're from the country of Generia."

The dancers have performed at the World A'Fair in Dayton, promoting international folk dancing.

"We dance for fun," said Pappas as he introduced the group.

They started with a Greek dance, then demonstrated dances from Scotland and Israel, finishing with an American Square dance, the Levi Jackson Rag.

Following each performance, several "honorary couples" — Monticello students — performed with the folk dancers and the square dancers. There was also time for parents to come and see what their children had learned.

"My favorite dance is from Israel," student Anthony Windsor said. "By the end of it, your legs should be tired."