

Minutes of the 1st Open Annual General Meeting of NASSPDA

Date: April 26th, 2009
Time: 10:00 AM to 11:45 AM, PST
Location: Allegro Ballroom, Emeryville, CA

An announcement for this meeting was e-mailed to all members of NASSPDA and to all potential members, which are on NASSPDA's and April Follies e-mail list. It was additionally posted about a month prior on NASSPDA's and April Follies website, as well as announced several times on the day of April Follies 2009. In order to encourage broader participation of the community, the Board of NASSPDA decided to invite members as well as non-members.

Aside from the 7 Board members of NASSPDA, 12 registered NASSPDA members attended this meeting in addition to an unidentified number of non-members (estimated to be between 12 to 15). The following agenda was handed to all in attendance:

Agenda for NASSPDA open meeting, April 26, 2009

- 1) *How we came to be.*
 - a) *Original meeting here Oct 2007*
 - i) *Agreed to create a membership organization for same-sex partner dancing covering North America with an elected Board of Directors*
 - ii) *Created a volunteer ad hoc committee chartered with establishing a process for and running the election of the Board of Directors*
 - b) *Held elections Jan 2008 and elected a 7-member Board with 2 Co-Chairs*
- 2) *What your Board has done.*
 - a) *Created a non-profit organization incorporated in the State of California*
 - b) *Applied for tax-exempt status with the State of California and the US Federal Government*
 - c) *Established initial rules and procedures for same-sex dance competitions to obtain NASSPDA sanctioning*
 - d) *Established initial rules and procedures for authorizing local, state, regional, national, and North American titles to granted by NASSPDA in specific graded events (International and American dance styles).*
 - e) *Created membership categories, defined member privileges and responsibilities, and established a membership dues structure.*
 - f) *Created organizational bylaws as required for tax-exempt status*
 - g) *Created organizational policies and procedures under which NASSPDA will operate.*
 - h) *Created a website that includes the following:*
 - i) *Extensive social networking for NASSPDA members*
 - ii) *Public posting of NASSPDA documents (policies and procedures, competition rules, Board minutes, etc.)*
 - iii) *Schedule of NASSPDA-sanctioned upcoming same-sex partner dance competitions.*

- i) *Sanctioned competitions in New York, Philadelphia, Oakland, Vancouver, Sacramento*
- j) *Authorized and awarded 2008 and 2009 North American Championship titles.*
- 3) *What we're planning to do next.*
 - a) *Expand and clarify rules for same-sex partner dance competitions*
 - b) *Create and maintain through time a data base of NASSPDA title holders*
 - c) *Develop ways to support social dance opportunities for partner dancers*
- 4) *Your thoughts, questions, ideas.*

The meeting started approx. at 10:15 AM. Barbara Zoloth, Co-Chair of NASSPDA from California, introduced herself and all other members of NASSPDA's Board (Richard Lamberty, Co-Chair from Florida; Sonja Furiya, Membership Chair from Missouri/Illinois; Pat Hogan, from Vancouver; Citabria Phillips, from California; Benjamin Soencksen, Secretary from New York; Winter Held, from California).

The current Board of NASSPDA had been elected in January of 2008, and one of its first actions was to establish and agree on rules as to how the Board will function, to be committed to transparency and to focus on the goals set by the initial meeting in 2007. This included voting rules and the goal to build at the very least a skeleton for this new founded organization within two years, at which point new elections should be held. This Board envisions those elections once again to be put into motion by an Elections Committee. For that purpose and possible other needed committees and/or individual helpers on certain issues, a sign-up sheet was passed around to solicit volunteering.

The Co-Chairs, Richard Lamberty and Barbara Zoloth, elaborated on points 1) and 2) of the agenda, referring in this regard also to NASSPDA's website, which is functioning similar to "Facebook." Members and non-members can read up on policies established by the Board, announcements posted by members, minutes of all Board meetings, etc. But only members can interact with each other, and post anything on the website. In addition to point 2j), it was explained that the annual NASSPDA Championships will change location and organizer each year, since NASSPDA has not yet the resources to hold those independently, and that 2010 will be held in Philadelphia, and 2011 in Vancouver.

After reading out point 3) of the agenda and followed by an open discussion, it became quickly clear that point 3)a) should have priority. But other concerns and issues were raised as well, listed in the following summary:

- A. Clarification of Pro/Am status in a competition
- B. NASSPDA's relationship to Federation of Gay Games
- C. Competition level dancing vs. social in an event
- D. Competition categories in regards to gender, age and proficiency
- E. NASSPDA Formation Team Championship title
- F. Process for contesting organizer's or judges' decisions during a competition
- G. Establish judging guidelines for NASSPDA sanctioned competitions
- H. Develop a unified registration system for NASSPDA sanctioned competitions

And the following discussions with resulting suggestions took place on these various issues:

to A.:

This problem of having or not having to identify Pro/Am status of a couple is uniquely a North American problem, which is why NASSPDA can't ignore it nor look to its European counterpart for answers. The Board had proposed in its meeting on June 15th, 2008, to adopt the following policy, which was reiterated at this meeting, but which needs to be further clarified, posted and reinforced:

- 1) NASSPDA sanctioned events: If a NASSPDA sanctioned competition includes a Pro/Am category, the event organizers are required to do all of the following:
 - a. Announce in advance the definition of Pro/Am to be used for the competition;
 - b. Announce in advance what Pro/Am participation is allowed;
 - c. Announce in advance how Pro/Am participation will be handled (including whether it will be judged separately);
 - d. Abide by their announced policies and procedures.
- 2) NASSPDA authorized titles: The following couples are not eligible to compete in a NASSPDA authorized title event as part of a particular NASSPDA sanctioned competition:
 - a. A couple in which one dancer is paying the other to dance with them in any part of that competition.
 - b. A couple that has entered any other dance event in this competition as Pro/Am couple.

In essence, NASSPDA doesn't want to define competitors as Pro or Am unless there is a Pro/Am category offered in a NASSPDA sanctioned competition, and a couple identifies itself as a Pro/Am couple.

to B.:

The process of becoming a member of the Federation of Gay Games is apparently quite involved and complicated. At this point, NASSPDA still needs to focus on continuing to form itself into a stronger organization before considering this step. But NASSPDA supports the goals of and encourages its members to participate in the Gay Games. If the Gay Games will be held at some point in a city of North America, which seems likely to be in 2014, NASSPDA would then want to have a closer relationship with the FGG.

to C.:

It was agreed by all in attendance, that fostering social dancing within the same-sex partner dance community is a very important issue, but that there is a problem to make the social dance scene mesh with the competitive. Roke Noir has initiated in the Bay Area a monthly event that has shown potential to address this issue. It's a dance event in two parts, a supervised and mock-judged competition practice followed by a beginner class leading into a social dance. It was well received, but it was suggested to reverse the order, so that beginner dancers are not discouraged by initially watching the more advanced competitive dancers. It was suggested that the word "competition" should initially be avoided in a social setting, since it seems for beginner dancer not connected to instant "fun." Additionally, the choice of music and setting has to foster the social aspect during a dance event in order to attract beginners (along with this sentiment: Demystify International Style by not equating American Style with the only form of social dancing).

The only way for the same-sex partner dance community to grow socially and competitively is through having an encouraging environment for beginners. Therefore, other possible ways suggested during an event are to have advanced dancers commit to dance with beginners (Angel System or Mentoring), which could be achieved by offering advanced dancers free or discounted admission in exchange for committing to dance with a certain number of identified beginner dancers, hold a “Beginners’ Showcase,” have a competition between advanced dancers judged by beginner dancers, and/or hold an “Imperfect Dance Award Contest,” in which couples are encouraged to display their “worst.”

to D.:

The organizer of April Follies 2009 had gotten many request since the previous event to add different age and proficiency competition categories. On one level, this was highly appreciated, but on the other hand it was also recognized that it diluted/weakened the competition, since there were fewer competitors competing against each other in the different categories (at times couples were uncontested). It was concluded, after some lengthy discussion and input from many, that NASSPDA needs to make it a priority to establish competition rules, which all NASSPDA sanctioned competitions will have to adhere to, and which other events could use as a guideline. These rules would have to address two different sections of the competition: Graded Categories, which is a system used in Europe, well established and universally liked, and Singles Dance Categories, which allows an organizer to offer more different dances and levels. The latter has triggered much discussion on how to classify levels for age, gender and proficiency. To recognize different age groups, but not to break the field of competitors into many small groups, it was suggested simply to have a level named “Senior,” for which the age restriction will have to be determined, and for which it has to be made clear, that all “Senior” eligible couples are also eligible for “any” lower age category. The issue of gender was brought up, but not further discussed, though it was recognized as an important ongoing point of discussion within the same-sex partner dance community. In order to have couples enter an appropriate level of achievement (not below their level; i.e: advanced couple dances in an intermediate level) two methods were compared to each other, syllabi restricted categories vs. proficiency levels (as used in April Follies 2009). Another system that was brought into this discussion to achieve better leveling is a point system, similar to what is used in the Country Western circuit and/or by amateur dance organizations in some European countries. Many agreed that this system might work for the single dance categories, but that for the graded events the classification rounds is the preferred method, since each competition typically has different numbers of participants, and therefore also different number of grades. The point system would certainly help to resolve the issue between the perceptions vs. reality of a couple’s level of achievement. Along with this issue, it was suggested to always offer at any competition an entry level for rank beginners (i.e.: as it is defined by “Newcomers” in the straight partner dance world). The Board of NASSPDA acknowledged all of the aforementioned suggestions and comments as very important and helpful, and promised to work on these issues with great care and urgency.

to E.:

Some time ago, NASSPDA had been officially asked to grant the authorization of an annual Formation Team Championship title, which had been denied. One of the reasons

given at the time was that the numbers of same-sex partner dancers are still small, and therefore the numbers of teams as well, except in the Bay Area. But, as was pointed out, the same really applies currently to the American Style, Showdance and 10-Dance Championships, and yet NASSPDA authorized those titles to be given. However, rules as to what constitutes a formation team, are there restrictions or demands for the choreography, how long can the piece be, what are the judging guidelines, etc., will have to be established, if this request will be granted. For the already authorized titles, universally accepted rules had been in place, although not yet formalized by NASSPDA. The Board agreed to give this proposal again serious consideration.

to F.:

Another ongoing discussion in the competitive same-sex partner dance community worldwide is about whether and how a competitor can contest organizers' and/or judges' decisions made during the course of the competition (especially the result of grading/classification rounds). Once again, this points towards the urgency to establish unified competition rules, which is one of the reasons why NASSPDA was formed in the first place. Only a governing body that functions as an umbrella like NASSPDA will be able to establish and reinforce universal rules for all to follow. This is an issue the Board had already started to discuss, and will try to resolve in the near future along with competition rules (see "to D.").

to G.:

The desire for judging rules and guidelines for same-sex partner dance competitions has been consistent, and has been reiterated at this meeting. The Board of NASSPDA understands the importance of this issue as much as having or creating a pool of judges to choose from. This issue is also clearly intertwined with establishing competition rules. The Board agreed to add this issue to its "plate."

to H.:

Along with the call for rules, which govern competitions, it was suggested to possibly work on unifying the registration process that NASSPDA sanctioned competition organizers would have to adhere to (i.e.: unified, clearly readable and understandable forms). And though the Board acknowledges the validity of this suggestion, and will take it under consideration, this suggestion might not take priority over some of the other issues brought up in this meeting, which all in attendance agreed to.

The Board of Directors of NASSPDA thanked all in attendance for their participation and their input, after which a group photo was taken to commemorate this very first annual general member and non-member meeting of NASSPDA. The meeting adjourned at approx. 11:50 AM PST.