

As Robin said, I'm Sharon Vaughn and this is my 3<sup>rd</sup> year as president of Mountain Empire Shag Society. We are located in Johnson City, TN which is in the northeast corner of the state and is referred to as being in the Tri-Cities or the Mountain Empire region, which explains our club name. We are referred to, most times, as MESS.

The beginning of MESS came about by way of shag lessons being taught at an Adult Education class at a Kingsport high school. The instructors of these classes were members of Shaggers of Bristol, this couple would go to Asheville to learn new dance steps and borrow DVDs in order to teach shag to others. The Bristol shag club dissolved so the 8 to 10 people involved in the classes started meeting to dance and became Mountain Empire Shag Society in 1992. They would dance weekly at the Holiday Inn in Johnson City and kept giving classes in Kingsport. One of the people in the classes was Larry Calhoun who soon began playing the music and, after some time began working to get MESS in the ACSC in 1996 with a total of 60 members.

It's now 2014, the membership is currently 128 with Larry "Bigfish" Calhoun... now a shag icon... known by so many in the shag world and 4 of the original group have achieved Lifetime Memberships in our club.

MESS is not just a shag club, it is a family that is known to so many as being a friendly group with hospitality that is considered 2<sup>nd</sup> to none. Our yearly 2 day Fall Bash, held in October, has been a sellout for the last 6 years. For a small club, 7 hours away from the beach, we have a lot to celebrate.

One of our lifetime members loves to tell the story of how MESS members would charter a bus to attend parties at the Boone Shag club in Boone, NC. He talks of how the bus full of shaggers were drinking alcoholic punch, Bigfish had in the back of the bus, while on the 2 hour drive. I can only imagine... the partying they did at Boone and wonder what they were like when they got back home. That is a small measure, of the club we have and a wonderful way to travel to a party.

There is a festival in Kingsport each July that attracts people from all across the country...one of the kickoff events is the Fun Fest parade. MESS has had a float, made by members, with a DJ playing music and shaggers dancing on the float or walking the street alongside trying to introduce the Shag. In our area of Tennessee, the shag is thought of the same way the British think of it and have no idea it's a dance or they think the shag is like the stroll.

Some of our members open their homes to the entire club for parties so that we can dance and socialize with one another. We've had one couple host redneck parties and each year one couple hosts a new member party. If you can, imagine a classy lady dressed as a redneck biker complete with chin whiskers, arm pit hairs, underwear showing and a long cucumber in the leg of her/his jeans at the redneck party. These are just examples of how we do things outside the normal shag times and allow us to have the relationships we share. With the strong bonds most of our members share, we are able to make visitors, to our club, feel like they are welcome in the family.

Fun isn't the only thing we do. We have been involved with helping our local food bank for the past 4 years. In 2013, we ask our members and members of other clubs to be a part of a cookbook we were

making with the proceeds being donated to Second Harvest Food Bank. Several shag clubs responded and contributed recipes and quotes. This work of love was called Dining and Dancing and was sold out within 90 days of publication. The local tv stations provided us with tv time and we received a lot of publicity from area newspapers. With the support we received, our club was able to provide 26,000 meals to the needy. What started out as a little old cookbook ....soon became a source of much pride for everyone involved.... even the ones that said cookbooks NEVER sell

For the last few years, we have made donations to the Ellen Taylor Foundation. Some of our members have no idea about the great young dancers the money helps. We don't have Junior Shaggers in Tennessee but, again our group will take our word for it and vote to support the young keeping the shag alive.

We support our local Ronald McDonald house each year and this past year we decided to support Family Choice which is a charity that helps people who have lost their jobs due to layoffs or business closings.

We have held coat drives and canned food drives. So we aren't a club that's just for fun, we also, support our neighbors (in need) living in the Mountain Empire.

4 years ago we changed our club logo. The main reason being that we wanted our logo to represent our area which doesn't have palm trees, beaches or the ocean waves. Our logo has the mountains and they're blue to represent the Blue Ridge Mountains, the state is orange because most anyone thinking of the state of TN thinks of the University of TN and the star in the upper corner represents the area where we meet and of course the dancers and shoes signify the dancing. I just wanted to share how our group worked together to think of the symbol of our club.

When I was asked to present our club, the invitation was to present the good and the bad about our club. I went to several of our members asking their thoughts. I have given you some of the good but, I honestly couldn't get anyone to give me anything bad. I'm not saying our club only has good points but, it's hard to think of any issues we have. Any problems that arise usually are resolved quickly and as you all know, if you have 20 people in a room you're going to have 20 different personalities and you work to make those 20 different people one big group.

The one issue that I came up with is....how do you get more visitors to your club to want to continue coming and become members? We have a lot of people come dance with us and some become a part of the club but, I don't feel like we have a good percentage of people returning. We welcome them, introduce them to others, give them free beginner basic lessons and encourage them to return. We're told how much fun they had and how friendly everyone is but, not enough returns. That is my main concern of how to grow our club. Our membership is up and down usually we will have around 140 to 150 at years' end but, will drop at the beginning of the year. I would really be interested in any ideas you can send our way.

On a personal note, I would like to say that this world of shag we stepped into 7 years ago has been one of the biggest joys of my life. We have met so many wonderful people and a few not so wonderful but, in closing thank you for your attention and I would like to add... I love this life!