

MIKE STOKES, SR.
MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

In 1961 Mike and Lorene started square dancing by taking lessons from Bennie Clark. Twenty one years later Lorene claimed she could still feel the sheer terror she felt upon graduation when the president of Old Country Cousins asked her to dance and Mike was practically a basket case. But they soon overcame their initial fear and it was the beginning of their love affair with square dancing and their devotion furthering its cause. Instrumental in forming two square dance clubs, The Cotton Towner and Bumble Bee Squares, they served as square dance leaders for many years: President of Cotton Towners; Banner Napper for Salty Stompers; Treasurer, Memphis Hillbillies; President, Bumble Bee Squares and Honorary Members of the Bootleggers. They round danced with Jack's Queens and Kings and served in various capacities with the Greater Memphis Square and Round Dance Association.

Mike and Lorene were instrumental in helping form the Tennessee State Association of Square and Round Dance Clubs, Inc. and served two terms as President and one term as Vice President. During Mike's presidency the ground work was laid that enabled Tennessee to bid for the 29th National Square Dance Convention in 1976 in Anaheim. The bid "won" and Memphis hosted the National in 1980 with an attendance record that was second only to Anaheim for many years. It is impossible to calculate the hundreds of hours of work that went into bringing off a successful National Convention, but it is obvious that Mike and Lorene dedicated just about that much time in helping bring it off.

Like so many of his generation, Mike quit school at an early age to join the Army in 1941. A native Memphian he saw service in North Africa, Europe and Germany before he saw Memphis again. Before he went into service, his family lived next door to the Crawford family whose daughter had been staying with her grandparent in Arkansas for a couple of years. At 16 Lorene Crawford returned to Memphis and met the Stokes family . . . all 13 of them and 16 year old Mike in particular. After he returned from the service in 1946 they were married. Mike worked at several jobs before going to work for Southern Painting Company where he stayed until he started his own business, Stokes Painting Company, in 1968.

In the last couple of years his health precluded much physical square dancing but he was always there in spirit and devotion, giving his time and expertise to those who could when he could not. He never lost his interest or his love of the dance.

On January 26, 1982, Mike Stokes, Sr. lost his long battle with several debilitating illnesses and succumbed at the relatively young age of 58.

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