

## 2014 Preserving Our Heritage Award: Dick Oakes

Like many students in the 1950's, Dick was exposed to dance in grade school. He has a funny story about this, that you are welcome to ask him about later... Anyway, he liked it enough to do a bit of international folk dancing in his hometown of Richland, WA around 1955.

He got into dancing more seriously in 1958 while in the US Navy stationed in San Diego. After leaving the Navy a few years later, he moved to Los Angeles and began to soak up all that Southern CA had to offer at that time period: learning from a variety of now-revered teachers (we'll hear more about them during his presentation later), and performing a variety of nationalities on stage and screen (dancing with Aman and 10 other professional troupes.) About that time, he, and we, to our benefit, discovered that he was a natural dance teacher. Passionate and hard working, he started to take leadership roles in numerous dance clubs and coffee houses in Southern California at that time, and in several folk dance organizations.

He held just about every office available in the Folk Dance Federation of California South. He was the first co-editor of their publication *Folk Dance Scene* and a staff artist for *Viltis*. Along with Diki Shields, he directed the Holiday Folk Dance Camp. He also founded several "beginner festivals" - an idea still relevant and important to today's international folk dancers.

By the 1970's, the heyday of Recreational International Folk Dance, he was widely respected for his humorous teaching style, that not only accurately conveyed the steps of a dance, but more importantly its style and cultural background. He did two Teaching Tours of the US (75 cities) and then one in Asia. He had a lucid sense of the learning process and wrote several articles on how to teach folk dance, and on the qualities of a

good instructor. He also shared his writings on what makes a good dance program and a welcoming dance group.

Over the past 20 or so years, during his temporary retirement from teaching, Dick has channeled a lot of his dedication and energy into the amazing PhantomRanch.net website with pages and pages of pronunciation and costume guides, along with the articles mentioned earlier. What began as a way for Dick to give back and sort through a lifetime of knowledge, has grown into the go-to site for background information on folk dance **instructions** and **instructors**, past and present. It has expanded to include the contributions of many other master teachers and fellow dance fanatics. But it's not all folk dance! Dick "Colorado" Oakes also enjoys viewing B-Westerns and meeting others who do the same. Look on phantom ranch for his pages on that interest as well as traveling, photography, and artwork.

About the website Kathy Molga says, "Never asking for any financial compensation for his years of labor in compiling this information, Dick shared his gifts of planning, organizing, and writing by creating an invaluable resource with a flair for detail. Not looking for accolades, his "labor of love" has left us with a legacy of research materials for everyone to enjoy for generations to come!"

Dick has also contributed many items to the Society of Folk Dance Historians archives. He really has helped Preserve Our Heritage on many different levels.

After dealing with two knee replacements and more significantly the death of his beloved wife Carol last year, Dick is slowly returning to the folk dance world. We are so happy that he was able to join us here in San Antonio and thrilled to finally give him this award.