

# The Pueblo Chieftain

Your print and online news source for Southern Colorado

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## 'Move your feet'

*Couple aims to introduce locals to contra dancing*

By AMY MATTHEW  
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

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You might call Kate and Pat McCracken a couple of contrarians.

It's not that they're curmudgeons. In fact, their enthusiasm could fill a large room, and they're hoping that happy attitude is infectious as they prepare to introduce Pueblo to a new activity: contra dancing.

The dance evolved from English country dancing, which became popular in 17th-century England. The first published descriptions of the dance appeared in 1651 in "The English Country Dancing Master" by John Playford, according to a history written by Alan Winston.

American settlers modified it and set dances to the new music that was being created in the colonies. Though couple dancing overtook contra dance as the popular activity in the mid-1800s, the dance form endured and Pat McCracken said organized contra dances can be found in cities from coast to coast.

"We did it in Washington, D.C., and there's a huge subculture," he said. "You can find a dance just about every night of the week."

Pueblo's first contra dance will take place at 7 p.m. Saturday at the City Park Pavilion. A walk-through for beginners will be held at 6:30 p.m.

Pat is a Pueblo native; Kate is from Littleton. They met back east, where Pat worked for NASA and Kate worked for a contractor. In 2005, they retired and returned to Colorado.

Kate was an accomplished viola player when she met Pat, a banjo player.

"When we got married, I converted her to fiddle," Pat said.

"And I love every minute of it," said Kate.

Pat is a longtime fan of contra dances and the music that accompanies them - a blend of traditional American, Southern, Celtic, French Canadian and probably several other types. He played in numerous East Coast contra bands and organized dances.

"It's loud, fast music you don't hear anywhere except at these dances," Pat said. "You get so energized."

After their move to Pueblo, the McCrackens played as a duo but eventually built a band, Nimble Fingers, featuring

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Kate McCracken



Pat McCracken

Randy Muniz on guitar and Stevy Whited on bass. Nimble Fingers will provide the music for the first three contra dances, playing songs such as "Crockett's Honeymoon" and "Shove the Pig's Foot a Little Further Into the Fire."

During a contra dance, dancers form parallel lines, standing opposite their partner. As in square dancing, a caller gives instructions. Participants move up and down the line, repeating each move until the music ends. One dance includes three songs and lasts about 10 minutes.

Pat describes the movement as "rhythmic walking." No intricate footwork is involved.

Two things are vital, they said: a water bottle (there's a drinking fountain in the pavilion) and comfortable shoes.

"You don't need a partner or experience. You basically need to move your feet and that's it," said Kate. "We don't want to frustrate anyone. The callers will be geared toward teaching newcomers."

Though family dances may be planned eventually, right now the McCrackens recommend the dances for people high-school age and older.

As an indication of their commitment to the dance, the McCrackens have booked

the pavilion for two years. They plan to bring in callers, dancers and musicians from other contra dance groups around Colorado.

"This is a real community," said Kate. "To get together around this event is really important to us."

Dances will be held on the second Saturday of each month. Cost is \$7 per person, but two-for-one coupons are available for the first three months. For details, visit

[www.fiddletoons.com](http://www.fiddletoons.com).

- *Additional sources: [www.fiddletoons.com](http://www.fiddletoons.com),*

*[www.conradance.org](http://www.conradance.org),*

*[www.sbcds.org](http://www.sbcds.org) and*

*[www-ssrf.slac.stanford.edu](http://www-ssrf.slac.stanford.edu).*

*[amym@chieftain.com](mailto:amym@chieftain.com)*

## **IF YOU GO**

**WHAT:** Pueblo Contra Dance

**WHEN:** Saturday - 6:30 p.m. lesson, 7-10 p.m. dance

**WHERE:** City Park Pavilion

**COST:** \$7; visit [www.fiddletoons.com](http://www.fiddletoons.com) for 2-for-1 coupon

**NECESSITIES:** Water bottle and comfortable shoes