

Mathematicians coming to dance in Akaroa

Akaroa, get ready for a hoedown – mathematics-style!

Mathematical entertainers will be in Akaroa with their dancing shoes on next month and they want the community to join them for a free barn dance with a live band.

The evening will be led by University of Canterbury senior lecturer in Mathematics and Statistics Dr Bill Baritompā, who received a grant from the Royal Society of New Zealand Science and Technology Promotion Fund to create his “Dance of Mathematics” project.

Information on the project can be found at danceofmathematics.com

The Akaroa barn dance is the third of a series of maths dances he is running in rural Canterbury towns in the coming months.

Dr Baritompā will teach and call the dances which are easy to learn and fun for everyone. As a mathematician and a dance caller he can't help but see the connections between maths and dance.

“Barn dancing is extremely mathematical, though most people don't realise it.

“Take for example the patterns of the dance – ‘Join up hands and circle left; take four

steps in and four steps back’ are geometric, symmetric, repetitive cyclic movements. These ideas are the stuff of mathematics!”

The community barn dances are primarily a social event but will carry an educational bonus.

“There the community will meet mathematicians as real people doing interesting things and the following day we will give a mathematical performance with lots of demos and participation.”

Dr Baritompā believes that people are often put off, not by the mathematics itself, but by their experience of learning it having been boring and complex.

“If something comes across as too heavily mathematical it will put people off. We plan to offer these communities something fun and not make a big deal about the mathematics. We will give the message that maths relates to everyday life experience, rather than an isolated activity involving only mathematicians.”

The dance will run from 8pm to 11pm on Friday May 13 in the Gaiety Hall and more information will be provided on the night about Saturday morning's presentations.