

HBC Monthly Newsletter

June 2022

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Hi Everyone,

It would be easy to focus on all the challenges our club and clubs around the country are facing. We'll leave a discussion of those for another day. This month we thought we would focus on the club's renewed attempt to tell its stories to the surrounding community. It has lots of good stories to tell to help attract members and new bridge players, our primary mission going forward. We solicited from our membership someone who would be willing to fulfill a public relations role. For the past several years, Linda Starr had functioned superbly as a communicator-in-chief of all our internal doings, creating and making most attractive the almost daily newsletter made necessary by the pandemic. In April Lori Leopold took over the function of communicating to our membership about internal matters, scheduling, special events, programs and initiatives, etc. As is evident, Lori is doing an excellent job.

Debbie Bogatz, a relatively new member, answered the call to become the club's communicator-in-chief to the external world. Debbie is a Connecticut native who spent her career in Medical Sales, and then after an early retirement, became a Realtor in her encore career. She retired about 2 and ½ years ago at which time she found both bridge and the Hartford Bridge Club. She finds them a great way to stay mentally stimulated in a social environment. She looks forward to becoming an integral part of this community. We are pleased to have her aboard in her new capacity and look forward to working with her. If you have any suggestions of stories for Debbie or just suggestions, do not hesitate to contact her at dlbogatz@gmail.com.

At Debbie's urging, we drafted a potential press release that tells, in part, one of the club's current stories. As we said, as the oldest bridge club in North America, there are many others. We hope you will start seeing more of them in area's various media outlets.

Draft Press Release

The Hartford Bridge Club- A Survivor's Story

In March of 2020 the world changed drastically for many people and many organizations. It certainly changed dramatically for the Hartford Bridge Club

The Hartford Bridge Club (HBC) is the oldest bridge club in North America and the 2nd largest in New England. It was founded in 1931 as a member owned club and it recently celebrated its 90th anniversary. In 2019 it was an amazing success story. It had built its membership to nearly 550 members and it had nearly 7500 tables (groups of four) playing bridge for that calendar year to rank as the 25th busiest club among over 3000 in North America.

Then the pandemic hit and the club closed its doors at 19A Andover Driver, West Hartford for 15 months from March 15, 2020 until June 15, 2021. Prior to the pandemic, the bridge club ran 14 live games weekly. It had never run an online game. It suspended operations in March of 2020 and reopened for online activity for the first time in its history in April of 2020 with 12 online games a week. It then reopened for live games in June of 2021 and now has a mix of live and online games. The club charges a modest fee for its games of \$7 live and \$5 online. Some games have only \$3 fees. The club is an all volunteer endeavor with a club manager and assistant club manager.

The pandemic has had a devastating impact on virtually all bridge clubs in North America. It is estimated that more than half of the 3,000 have left the scene never to return and most of the others are operating on a much pared down basis. This is due to the pandemic but also very much due to online bridge. Online bridge, not associated with bridge clubs, is cheaper and more convenient, requiring no travel and no make-up or shaving. It has proven a lethal competitor to face-to-face bridge.

The Hartford Bridge Club has survived not only through the efforts of its dedicated members but through two initiatives it made with foresight during the pandemic. The club revised its Certificate of Incorporation and By-Laws to make clear that a primary mission was education in order to qualify as a tax exempt 501(c)(3) charitable organization under Internal Revenue Service rules and guidelines. Then to make sure that its educational mission was paramount, it enhanced and initiated a wide range of educational endeavors, including regular beginner and follow-up lessons, online and live weekly tutorials, mentorship programs, partnership programs where more experienced persons sign up to play with and tutor less experienced players, and regular sessions where expert players (the club has nearly a dozen players who have won or placed high in national championships) go over the finer points of play.

The club's emphasis on education and lessons and the charitable donations received have allowed the club to offset the operating losses it is encountering in this most challenging environment for bridge clubs. The club remains a thriving enterprise—in the last calendar year, 2021, it had more than 460 members and it had 6881 tables in play to rank 33rd in the nation. The club still runs eight face-to-face games a week where members very much enjoy the socialization that only live bridge provides. The hope is that pandemic abates sufficiently to allow the club to plan many of the events it has postponed for more than two years, including a belated celebration of its own 90th anniversary.

We wanted also to thank those who have contributed to honoring Victor King's memory at the Providence Nationals in July. The generosity was overwhelming. The club was able to

raise \$3,000 and so we will be able to have a day—Friday, July 22—at the Nationals dedicated to the memory of one of the club’s finest members.

This month we again recognize those who have done well at the club’s bridge tables. We list those who have achieved 70% games or where “C” strat players have placed first overall or first in their section in games with six or more tables. Kudos to all of them. The list of honorees appears below.

So that’s it for this month. We hope to see at the bridge table supporting our venerable institution.

Be safe and healthy and play often at your club with a heart,

Donna and Felix

Strat “C” Winners in Limited Masterpoint Games-Section Tops

5/2- Jane Freeman-Stephen Swigert

5/4 -Marianne Tapp-Cheryl Phillips

5/7- Margaret Muscanell-Kurt Muscanell

70% Games

5/10-Barbara Fletcher-Bill Wininger-70.68%

5/24-Peter Katz-Tom Joyce-70.24%

5/25-John Lloyd-Donna Simpson-71.67%