



Hartford Bridge Club

The with a

December 2021 Newsletter

Hi Everyone,

This month, we are going to highlight one theme: the Hartford Bridge Club as a member-owned bridge club. So we'll talk about, as usual, some of the things that members are doing for the club, some of the Board of Trustees' plans for the club and perhaps, most importantly, some suggestions about what you can do as a member of the club in the coming months to keep it a vital and thriving operation.

First, a few numbers: We are currently at 370 members. Our budget is 400 and we will likely reach that—or come close—during the fiscal year. In these times, that's not bad, but it is way down from the 463 members we had last year and the 528 who joined in 2019. Similarly, we will have had 476 tables in play during the month of November just ended. This compares to 636 tables in play last November when the club was entirely online. These numbers alone indicate a real need to try to boost our membership and participation in our games—enduring challenges since we reopened for live play.

Membership and Participation—and Initiatives to Enhance Both

To boost our membership, the club is planning several initiatives and we are very excited about them and about the prospect that they may increase our club's membership and participation at games. But that excitement has to be tempered by the reality that, with this pandemic, planning and hopes, particularly planning and hopes for live events, is at best an iffy proposition. The new, highly mutated version of the virus, Omicron, makes us all too well aware that all plans may need to be shelved and rescheduled. Nonetheless, we are plowing ahead at the moment.

We are hosting free beginner bridge lessons at the club on two Saturday mornings—December 4 and December 11. Thirty-two people have indicated a desire to

attend those lessons. We are encouraged by that number and hope to run such free beginner lessons every six months. A special shout out should go to those who have agreed to volunteer at these sessions as table buddies (members who will act to ensure that participants understand and keep up with what is happening). They are Carole Amaio, Peggy Arseneaux, John Calderbank, Judy Cavagnaro, Lori Leopold, Tom Lorch, Mary Sullivan, and John Willoughby. We also intend to follow up with these "newbies" with additional lessons to try to make sure their interest in bridge and the club is sustained.

On December 7, Bill Watson will be restarting live supervised play, this time on Tuesday afternoons so as not to interfere with the very vibrant 0-200 online Thursday afternoon game. We are very hopeful that this game will quickly regain the large and enthusiastic following enjoyed by Thursday afternoon supervised play before the pandemic. It will be a wonderful place for both newbies and others with more experience to achieve more comfort at the bridge table and be a feeder for our other games. Look for information about these sessions in our regular newsletters.

Starting in January, Laurie Robbins will be giving online lessons to advanced beginners and intermediates. We expect these to be very popular and you'll start seeing information about them later in December.

We should also note that John Willoughby and Mike Wavada are spearheading an initiative to locate and reach out to all the ACBL members in our area in an effort to make sure all non-members are familiar with all the club has to offer. To be sure, we also intend to reach out to everyone who was a member in the past two years but has not renewed their membership as of December 1 (the end of the period to renew before game prices go up for non-members). We hope to learn why they haven't joined and see if we can get them to reconsider.

As all of the preceding initiatives indicate, we are trying very hard to come up with ways to attract people to the club and then retain them. Ways you can help will be noted later in this email.

A Few Noteworthy Income and Expense Items

We wanted to note that we recently received a \$1,000 anonymous donation. That donation along with others, including the \$10,000 anonymous donation at the start of the fiscal year, allow the club more freedom to explore initiatives and more time to see if certain ideas will work. We are also pleased to announce that we recently received \$51 in a second AmazonSmile program payment. That \$51 represents more than \$10,000 in purchases by members who have made the Hartford Bridge Club their charity of choice. We fully expect monies received from AmazonSmile to continue and grow. To find out more about donating and AmazonSmile go to our website at hartfordbridgeclub.org.

In addition to trying to maximize revenues in these challenging times, we want to assure everyone that the board and the staff are working very hard to keep expenses down. For instance, Susan Seckinger and Linda Starr are committed to having a Tuesday evening open game so working members and others who want a live evening opportunity to play can have a venue to do that. The game is only \$3 because Susan and Linda don't charge directors' fees while nonetheless serving as directors. The last Tuesday night game reached five full tables. This a delightful, friendly game welcomes newcomers and starts at 6:45 so it can end close to 10.

Special kudos to Sally Kirtley, who is also not charging a directors fee, but is monitoring the Monday morning online game so it can proceed for a \$3 directorless charge. Please try to take advantage of—and encourage your friends to take advantage of—this bargain.

Speaking of expenses, we wanted to note Trevor Reeves' dogged efforts with the Town of West Hartford to save the club approximately \$500 in annual property taxes. As a 501 (c)(3) charitable organization, there should be no question under state and federal law that the club is entitled to relief from municipal property taxes. Nonetheless, West Hartford's Office of Tax Assessment had initially denied our application for tax relief. Trevor has made numerous phone calls and personally visited the office to seek the relief we are due. We anticipate a successful outcome.

Lastly, we note that Roger Pikor is spearheading the board's review of all vendor costs and services to ensure that we are getting appropriate bang for the club's buck.

Recent Survey and Game Schedule

In an effort to find out more from our members about their appetite for live and online games, we sent out a brief survey. Seventy-three members responded. The key takeaway from this limited survey and limited response was that, while there is an appetite for more play (not quite 20% of the respondents said they either had no more capacity or appetite for additional play), responses were predominantly from those wanting online limited games (only 18 of the 73 respondents were those who play exclusively or mostly in open games). Perhaps most noteworthy was that many took the survey as an opportunity to make comments, all of which were read with great interest and several of which will be followed up with the board of trustees. A number said that they much appreciated the Swiss team event on Sunday and wanted it continued, which is consistent with the 16 tables—a record post pandemic crowd—that showed up for the Swiss team event in November. Others mentioned a desire for special events that would draw people to the club. The board will certainly be exploring what's possible in that regard during this pandemic. Several emails also mentioned the desire for continuity of schedule so planning can occur.

The directors certainly took into account the survey and what they have been hearing in planning the next monthly schedule. That schedule appears at the end of this newsletter. Please note a few particulars. We will try to keep the schedule for the entire month of December and hopefully beyond. We are committed to one Swiss team game a month—please reserve December 19th on your schedule for our next one. We are excited by the attendance at our Monday open game and very much hope it continues to thrive as it provides the only open online game for our out-of-area and out-of-state members.

What You Can Do as Members

We want you to remember that this is your club. It is one of only a few really successful member-owned clubs in the country. We very much appreciate the

efforts of many of you. We think everyone can do a little more. Here is a menu of suggestions.

- Be a pen pal or phone pal. Email or call someone at the club you haven't spoken to or heard from in a while. Both of us constantly call and write people and we can't tell you how often they are delighted to hear from us. Do yourself the favor of reaching out and "touching" someone.
- Be a "table buddy." The initiatives we have to bring beginners and others to the club are likely to require table buddies in the future to help out and make sure participants are keeping up and getting the most out of what they are doing. Let either of us know if you are willing to be a table buddy in the future.
- Tell us what you think will help enhance people's experiences at the club—either live or online. Suggestions made in response to the survey were both helpful and provocative. We can use more of both. We welcome emails.
- Keep in mind friends, relatives or acquaintances who might want to learn bridge. Recent retirees are a fertile field. Bring them to Felix's attention and we may hold a beginners' class even more frequently than every six months.
- Try to participate in one more game a month than you usually do. It will make a big difference to the club's bottom line.

Some common courtesies to follow to help directors and your fellow players:

- Be sure to register for live games (get help if you need it).
- If you find you can't make the live game, don't forget to cancel the registration or let the club know as soon as possible.
- Be nice to everyone, but particularly to new and less experienced players.
- Try to register 10-15 minutes early for an online game, particularly one that may have a small number of players. After you register, take the time to catch up on personal stuff. Many people make a decision to play based on the size of the game and don't sign up for small games. We want to avoid that if we can.

If you've read this far, please accept our deep appreciation. Thank you for your commitment and loyalty.

All the best,
Donna and Felix

December Game Schedule

(Games in red are at the Hartford Bridge Club.)

Sunday

December 19, 1:00 p.m.

Swiss Team Game

Monday, 9:45 a.m.

Open, BBO

Monday, 1:00 p.m.

(12:45 p.m. beginning 12/13)

0-750, HBC

Monday, 7:00 p.m.

0-300, BBO

Tuesday, 10:00 a.m.

Open, HBC



Tuesday, 1:30 - 3:30 p.m.

Supervised Novice, HBC

Tuesday, 6:45 p.m.

Open, HBC

Tuesday, 7:00 p.m.

0-500, BBO

Wednesday, 10:00 a.m.

Open, HBC

Wednesday, 2:00 p.m.

0-750, BBO

Thursday, 10:00 a.m.

Open, HBC

Thursday, 2:00 p.m.

0-200, BBO

Thursday, 7:00 p.m.

0-750, BBO

Friday, 12:45 p.m.

0-500, HBC

Saturday, 10:15 a.m.

0-500, BBO

Saturday, 12:30 p.m.

Open, HBC