



Hartford Bridge Club

The with a

August 2022 Monthly Newsletter

Hi Everybody,

This month we would like to focus on the Summer 2022 North American Bridge Championships at Providence, which ran from July 13-July 24. Later on in this newsletter, we honor those high finishers at these Nationals by listing their results as posted in the Daily Bulletins.

Congratulations! Perhaps the most notable accomplishment was Dan Finn's. On the weekend before at the Summer 2022 Robot Individual Nationals, over 72 boards and three days, Dan finished 9th out of 2297 participants with a 65.87% result. Well done! And if we missed anyone despite our eagle-eyed scanning of the bulletins, let us know and we'll get you in next month's newsletter.

Also the Daily Bulletin's editors were good enough to give us space to tout our bridge club to a national audience as a result of the club's donation of \$3,000 for Victor King day. If you missed the article, it is repeated in at the end of this newsletter. We try to put the club's best foot forward and 2021's great first half made it a good year. The challenges arose with our reopening in June of 2021 and have continued. The article was submitted with three pictures, which also appear at the end of this newsletter, but apparently there was not room for them. They are repeated because they represent the fun that exists and can exist at the club.

Providence's attendance was 7600 tables over the 11 days. The heads of the tournament committee, Lois DeBlois and Joe Bouillard, told us that they and the ACBL were thrilled with the attendance. Well beyond expectations, they said. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that at three most recent summer ACBL nationals, pre-Covid, 2017, 2018 and 2019, attendance averaged nearly 13,000 tables. Similarly, the spring Nationals in 2022 in Reno were at somewhat less than 60% of the previous spring nationals. The ACBL also noted in the Daily Bulletin that membership is decreasing somewhat precipitously at the rate of 7% in the last year and they have finally and belatedly acknowledged that online bridge does not attract new ACBL members but rather clubs do. (The 7% figure is probably understated because many members sign up for a three year membership and the lapse will not be noted for a year or two.) The ACBL is starting a new program where they will try to spur marketing efforts to bring new players to the clubs and partner with teachers who then partner with clubs to get these prospective students into classes and then supervised play.

What does all this mean for the Hartford Bridge Club? We too are seeing much diminished play at our tables. We are doing better than the nationals at about two-thirds of previous highs but that is certainly not anything to crow about. We too have a much diminished membership. Year

over year we have lost about 10% of our members. Unlike the ACBL, we long ago recognized the importance of trying to attract new members to the club. But it takes a long time to develop a duplicate bridge player and a lot of effort. Over the past three year starting with summer of 2019 we have held beginner classes and tried to nurture those beginners into duplicate bridge players. We have attracted about 120 beginners to the club during that three year period. Our best estimate is that at this point we have about 18 of those beginners playing somewhat regularly in limited point games, either online or live, or playing in supervised novice games. An 15% yield we are told by others, who run such classes is very good, but again that is not nearly going to replace the members we have lost and are likely to keep losing.

We intend in the fall, with your help, to redouble our efforts to attract new members. Hopefully Covid will give us a break this time around. Last fall we had more than 40 persons sign up for beginner classes but then one of the Covid variants hit and more than a dozen dropped out. Again we are going to ask you to seek out friends and relatives who may be interested in becoming bridge players.

We are also including in this newsletter, the minutes from the club's Board of Trustees July 26 meeting. We are doing that because we want you to be aware of how much the Board is doing and of the myriad issues that come before it and the club manager. The club faces many challenges and the Board, the club manager and the directors are working hard to meet them. Your club needs your support . This is indeed your member owned club and we want you to be invested in it.

We are continually hopeful that the next season will bring more normalcy to the club and we can plan events like the one held last Tuesday night, July 26, where Mark Smith, our erstwhile limited game director on Tuesday nights, was up North from his home in Florida and gave a lecture on mistakes beginners and others should avoid. Mark's humor and upbeat style was much appreciated as was the bridge wisdom he shared. Even more appreciated by the eight tables in attendance was the sumptuous and bountiful Italian repast Lori Leopold provided and the numerous delicious desserts Linda Starr and Susan Seckinger made. We sincerely hope we are able to hold more such events in the future.

This is a lengthy newsletter what with the minutes of July 26, the write-up in the Daily Bulletin in Providence, and the honor roll from Providence, so we hope you read it all because it is your club—yes it is your member owned club—that is facing considerable challenge in a Covid world and you should know about them. On a positive note, I think after reading all these materials you will agree, the board, the club manager and the directors as well as the many of you, who have stepped up and volunteered in many ways, have done a commendable job in meeting those challenges.

Stay safe and healthy and come to club and join the fun and camaraderie at the table,

Donna and Felix

Minutes of the July 26, 2022 Board Meeting

Hartford Bridge Club Board of Trustees Meeting July 26,2022

The meeting was called to order at 1:32 p.m. Felix noted that Ann and Ben had Covid and would be absent; Roger has a conflict and would also be absent. Felix volunteered to do the minutes.

Present: Felix Springer, John Willoughby, Trevor Reeves, Carole Amaio, Bill Wininger, Nancy Calderbank, Mike Wavada, Donna Feir. Also present: John Dinius, Linda Starr, Joanne Lloyd.

The minutes of the June 14 board meeting were approved.

Treasurer's Report:

Trevor Reeves, as treasurer, gave a thorough presentation of the club's current financial status as well as projections for 2023.

The key takeaways:

Paid membership of 420 is down approximately 10% from last year. Net game revenues declined from the second quarter and are significantly short of what is needed to cover monthly expenses of approximately \$6500. Bottom line, year to date the club is \$3,069 in the black after nine months due to unplanned donations and profitable lesson activity of approximately \$26,000. The favorable result will likely not be sustained in the fourth quarter and the year will end with a deficit. June's table count was below 400 tables for first time since April of 2020, when the club was closed for live play and online games were just being started. It is likely that the table count in the months of the last quarter will not increase significantly, if at all.

The club will likely end the fiscal year 2022 with an equity position in the range of \$75,000-\$80,000. It is entirely possible that in fiscal year 2023, the club's operating losses will continue and expand and may reach the \$30,000 range for the year. If so, the club's equity may end up below the \$50,000 mark, a benchmark that the Board has long considered one that it is not wise to go below.

A lengthy discussion followed the financial presentation where everyone at the meeting was asked to weigh in with their thoughts. A consensus was reached that it would be prudent to raise live game fees \$1 in the fall but not to raise online game fees. No vote was taken and continued discussion of this subject will take place at future board meetings. The fiscal impact of raising fees for live games was projected to be approximately \$12,000. The subject of raising dues was also discussed but no consensus was reached.

Club Manager Report:

Donna talked about the game schedule and that she and the directors were going to raise the Monday evening online game limit to 500 masterpoints from 300 in an effort to attract more participants. The Thursday evening online 0-750 is being eliminated. This game is doing poorly, was cancelled a couple of times in the last month because of insufficient participation and the players in this masterpoint range have numerous other options at the club for play.

Donna also discussed the possibility of another live open game returning on Monday. The hope is that the fall will bring increased participation with membership renewal, annual meeting and summer activities ceasing.

Donna stressed that we should continually be reminding folks that we are a member owned club and that when we communicate it would be helpful to refer people to the fact that it is "your club." Too many members are not invested sufficiently in the fact that it is their club.

Lease Committee:

Felix appointed Ben Bishop as head of a lease committee with Ben to form the rest of the committee with consultation with Felix and John Willoughby. The club's lease expires in November 2023 and at a current rate of approximately \$42,000 annually is the club's biggest fixed expense. Felix expressed the view that a thorough search for other possible venues, given the club's current and projected needs, is warranted both to explore whether there is a viable alternative to the current space and to be in the best position to negotiate with the owner of the property.

90th Anniversary Celebration/ Annual Meeting

The club had contracted with the Farmington Club in Farmington to hold the annual meeting and gala belated celebration of its 90th anniversary on October 23. A lengthy discussion of the prudence of going forward with this plan occurred. The board concluded that the uncertainties that continue to surround the Covid pandemic in addition to the financial risk involved in going forward with our commitment to the Farmington Club warranted yet another postponement until October 2023. The club has a \$1,000 deposit which it hopes to carry forward. The annual meeting is now planned to take place on October 23 at the club's facilities at 19A Andover Dr. Notice of the annual meeting will go out in early September with the notice of dues renewal. Payment of \$10 will be required for the game and accompanying meal at the club. The meal arrangements will be made once there is a better sense of attendance at the annual meeting. Donna noted that space will be limited at the club, and we may want to tell people that space will be limited and that they should get their reservations in promptly.

Nominating Committee

A discussion of potential candidates for the nominating committee occurred. Carole volunteered to be on the committee as a past president of the club. Trevor, as head of the committee, said he believed Bill Watson would be willing to serve as another past president. Several names of members who were not life masters were mentioned as candidates with the

caveat that persons on the nominating committee cannot be nominated for the board. The Board members suggested several names to Felix, who is empowered as president by the by-laws to select the nominating committee members. Felix passed on those names to Trevor who will approach those persons to see if they are willing to serve.

Treasurer Replacement Status

Trevor and John Dinius reviewed the status of the work they have been doing with Eric Vogel and Joanne Lloyd, the prospective candidates for treasurer and bookkeeper, to ensure that the transition will be smooth and Eric and Joanne will be knowledgeable about the club's current procedures. It was noted that the appointment of Eric as treasurer is a board officer appointment, which is subject to the nominating committee approval (and ultimately membership vote). Joanne attended the meeting and the board acknowledged that the club will be fortunate to have Joanne fulfill the role of bookkeeper that John Dinius has ably filled.

Educational Committee/Beginner Classes

Felix noted that due to the disruptions of the pandemic for the past several years he and Trevor have been administering the educational programs and that when they are both off the board come October 23, an educational committee needs to be formed and to undertake a robust educational program to the extent possible in keeping with the club's mission under its 501 (c)(3) status. Felix noted that he and Linda Starr would, as they have done in the past, undertake to teach two beginner classes starting on Saturday morning, September 10 and 17. A discussion ensued and the consensus was that these lessons be given for free as they have in the most recent past and that follow-up lessons as in the past would be given for a fee. The hope was that Laurie Robbins would also present another series of lessons on Shark bridge. It was noted that these lessons have been extremely popular and profitable for the club and that Laurie is a master teacher much appreciated by her students and by the board for all she does.

Victor King Memorial and Providence Nationals Report

Donna reported that many persons expressed their admiration for the club write-up and Victor King write-up. These appeared in Friday's Daily Bulletin at the Nationals on Victor King day. She also noted that the club's current charge of \$7 for live games is on the low end of charges for most of the clubs in the area and for those she talked with in the region.

Covid-19 Assessment

Several people at the club came down with the virus at the Providence Nationals. Donna noted that the co-chairs at the Nationals also came down with Covid. The directors have been suggesting that those that attended the Nationals wear masks at the club. Most have done so. The board will continue to monitor the degree of Covid's virulence and presence in the area as it has done for the past two years.

By-law Revisions

It was noted the revisions the board has passed need to be prepared for the annual meeting.

Planning Committee Report

John Willoughby, as chair of the committee, noted the committee's desire for continuation of the Swiss teams events on a monthly basis and the hope that a bracketed Swiss team event could take place soon. The discussion of the mentor program was postponed in Roger's absence. The committee will meet again shortly and will have other items to report.

Public Relations Initiatives

Debbie Bogatz has found it slow going in trying to get the club publicity. Felix noted that perhaps with the new round of beginner classes some outlets may be favorably disposed to give the club publicity. Debbie also thought it might be a good idea for the club to join Facebook. The value of this was unclear to the board in light of a superb website which few members visit. Debbie may visit the board in the future to describe the potential benefits of Facebook for the club.

Application to the Town of West Hartford for Grant and Property Tax Appeal

Trevor stated the Town has a fund from which it can grant up to \$10,000 to small businesses and non-profits like the club that have been damaged by Covid. Trevor said he is in the midst of preparing an application for the grant which application is due by August 5. While he thought it unlikely that the club would get \$10,000 it may get some money and there is no risk to applying. Similarly, Felix noted that he is prepared to try again to get the club property tax relief because most of the work has already been done and comparatively little effort is necessary to pursue an appeal this year.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, August 23 @1:30 p.m.

Meeting Adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Felix Springer

Article from the Daily Bulletin at the Providence Nationals-Friday June 22, 2022-Victor King Day

The Hartford Bridge Club—Thriving in the Pandemic

The Hartford Bridge Club (HBC) is the oldest bridge club in North America. It was founded in 1931 as a member owned club and it recently marked its 90th anniversary. It is housed in a spacious rental facility that can accommodate 44 tables with ample surrounding parking. At the start of 2020, HBC was riding high. It had just completed its best and busiest year. It was running thirteen live games a week. It had 7441 tables in play in 2019 to rank first in New England and 25th among more than 3000 bridge clubs in North America. Its membership had grown to nearly 550 and the first two months of 2020 were gangbusters. Then the pandemic hit and in March of 2020 the world changed dramatically for many organizations, and certainly for the Hartford Bridge Club.

When the pandemic hit, the club closed its doors at 19A Andover Drive, West Hartford for 15 months from March 15, 2020 until June 15, 2021. Prior to the pandemic, 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 is constantly tinkering with a mix of live and online games in the challenging environment created by the pandemic and inexpensive online games that have proven lethally attractive. The club remains an all volunteer endeavor with Donna Feir as its club manager. Donna, the heart and soul of the club, has been its club manager since 1997 and has seen the club through thick and thin.

The Hartford Bridge Club has survived the pandemic 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.

Furthermore, to try to maintain and build its loyal community during the pandemic, the club sponsored a host of new initiatives including, weekly club walks in a nearby park hosted by the board of trustees, almost daily newsletters announcing online schedules and special events, monthly newsletters highlighting members' milestones and achievements, zoom chats before games, frequent zoom seminars offering playing tips particularly for advancing players and weekly newsletters teaching members about playing with robots. All these efforts enhanced the glue that binds members to the club.

Even in the pandemic, the club sought to emphasize that bridge should always be fun and to focus on beginners. More than a 100 new players have attended the club's beginner lessons in the last two years and the club has started to hold "graduation" exercises for its beginners who complete a series of classes. It is but another example of how the club tries to make bridge fun and build and maintain its community.

A graduation exercise was held where graduation certificates of achievement were given and a short commencement-like speech was made about the journey that the graduates had been on and what awaits them in the future. For instance, from Art Linkletter—"Things turn out best for people who make the best out of the way things turn out. You are going to get bad breaks playing duplicate. So is everyone else. How you handle them will mark you as a player."

The graduates came up to receive their certificates with "Pomp and Circumstance" playing in the background. The graduates then assembled for a group photo. Prior to the graduation talk, the table buddies, who provided invaluable assistance throughout the lessons, were recognized and applauded for their efforts. A small but vibrant token of appreciation, a long stemmed red rose, was given to each table buddy.

The club's emphasis on community, education and lessons, and the charitable donations it has 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 and vibrant community—in the last calendar year, 2021, it had more than 460 members and 6881 tables in play to rank 33rd in the nation. It is that dedicated and loyal community that allowed the club quickly to raise \$3,000 to honor Victor King's memory so that there can be a day at Nationals dedicated to the memory of one of the club's finest members.

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 hold many of the events it has postponed for more than two years, including a belated celebration of its own 90th anniversary this fall.

Felix Springer, Club President





High Finishers as Noted in the Daily Bulletins from the Providence Nationals-July 14-25

July 14

Educational Foundation 299er Pairs-Joseph Nesta-Claudia Carbonari- 2nd in B-1.43 masterpoints (mps)

Education Foundation Bracketed Teams-Bkt 1- Tom Joyce -3rd-16.59 masterpoints

July 15

Connecticut Bridge Association Friday Gold Rush Pairs-Mike Shore-Doug Eitelman-11th-1.66 mps

Connecticut Bridge Association Friday Open Pairs-William Sprenkle, Jr. Dave Peloquin-11th in A and 4th in B- 6.72 mps

Friday Afternoon Side Pairs-Sally Kirtley-Helen Pawlowski-5th in B- 1.37 mps

July 16

Saturday Top Flight Pairs-Tom Joyce-4th -18.27 mps

Saturday Gold Rush Pairs -John Willoughby-John Pelegano-8th in A and 4th in B, 4.01 mps

July 17

NABC 0-10,000 Pairs-Frank Blachowski-Y.L. Shuie-11th—19.20 mps

Gold Rush Swiss Teams-Mike Shore, John Pelegano, John Willoughby, Dan Koepf,3rd/4th-4.66 mps

Gold Rush Swiss teams-Lester Lipsky, Deb Walsh, B. Willard, Kathy Watson-9th/10th, 1.18 mps

GNT Teams-Championship Flight-Doug Doub- 3rd/4th-60mps

GNT Teams Flight B-Trevor Reeves-Felix Springer-3rd/4th- 35.00 mps

Sunday Top Plight Swiss Teams- Geof Brod- 17-19th, 4.79 mps

July 18

Monday Open Pairs-Xenia Coulter-Mary Sullivan-14in B, 7th in C-1.66 mps

July 19

Truscott Senior Swiss Teams-Geof Brod, Jay Steifel-16th-19.05 mps

Tuesday Bracketed Round Robin-Brkt 3-Tom Gerchman, Linda Starr, Bob Hughes-Bkt 3-2nd-
13.97 mps

Tuesday Bracketed Round Robin-Brkt 5-Judy Hyde-3rd-7.84 mps

July 20

Wednesday 0-3000 Round Robin Swiss Teams Bkt 5-Nancy & John Calderbank, Mary Sullivan,
Xenia Coulter-4th-3.20 mps

July 21

Thursday Fast Pairs-Sally Kirtley-Helen Pawlowski-3rd in A, 1st in B-6.47 mps

Thursday Morning 299er Pairs-George Waller-Kathy Wilson-2nd- 2.25 mps

Thursday Top Flight Swiss Teams-Geof Brod-14th/15th-5.03 mps

Thursday 0-3000 Bracketed Teams Brkt 4- Judy Hyde-3rd-5.56 mps

Thursday 0-3000 Bracketed Teams Brkt 5-John&Nancy Calderbank, Mary Sullivan, Xenia
Coulter, 3rd- 4.88 mps

July 22

Friday Open Pairs-William Sprenkle, Jr-Dave Peolquin-4th in B-6.44 mps

Friday Gold Rush Pairs-Doug Eitelman-Dan Koepf-1st in A-9.45 mps

Thursday Evening Side Pairs-Tom Gerchman-Linda Starr-5th-1.65 mps

Victor King Bracketed Teams-Bkt 1-Joel Wolfe, Trevor Reeves, Mark Smith, Tom Joyce-1st-23.43
mps

Victor King Bracketed Team-Bkt 3-Mike Wavada-3rd/4th-11.53 mps

July 23

Saturday Bracketed Teams-Bkt 1-Mike Wavada-2nd-9.83 mps

RIBA Fast Pairs-Judy Hyde-4th in B-1st in C-4.23mps

Saturday Top Flight Swiss Teams-Frank Blachowski-Y.L. Shuie-8th/9th in A, 1^{st/2nd} in B & 1st/2nd C-13.22 mps

July 24

Roth Open Swiss Teams- Doug Doub, Geof Brod, Jay Steifel, -29th-25.26 mps

Sunday Fast Pairs-Doug Eitelman-Tom Archambault-13th in A, 5th in B, 3rd in C-2.86 mps

Sunday Top Flight Swiss Teams-Frank Blachowski-Y.L.Shuie-13th/14th in A, 1st in B, 1st in C-12.90 mps

Congratulations to all!!!!