



Hartford Bridge Club

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January 2021 Newsletter

Happy New Year!!

We hope all of you are warm, snug, and healthy. We are most happy to welcome a new year that promises to be infinitely better than 2020. In these monthly newsletters, we'll try to report on topics we think will be of interest to you, our club members. We'd love to hear from you with suggestions or questions. It's your club and, in these times when we often can do little more than say hello to our friends in a chat box, it would be great to hear from you. This month's letter is longer than we'd like it to be, but there's a lot happening, both behind the scenes and in plain Zoom view. We're particularly pleased to report on the many new initiatives at the club and, at the end of this newsletter, to recognize our new Life Masters during the past year. We hope you enjoy reading about it all.

With best wishes for the happiest and healthiest of New Years,
Donna and Felix

Club Reopening

Although it's likely that we're at least a number of months away from reopening the club, the Board of Trustees has started discussing reopening to, at least, try to get some of the big questions regarding reopening on the table. Linda Erickson, the club's vice president, is chairing the planning committee for reopening and is currently gathering information. Some of the initial questions raised by the Board were: What requirements will we establish before we allow face-to-face play? Vaccination? Other tests? What physical adjustments and cleaning may be necessary in the club? What protocols should we be considering after people have entered the club? What do we do about food and drink? What equipment and products may it make sense to acquire and have on hand? What should be the mix of online and face-to-face games? Should we be conservative and not open the club until a few weeks after comparably sized clubs in New York City, Boston, Westchester County and Long Island have opened so we can learn from their experiences and adopt their best practices? These are some of the key questions on the table. In the meantime, we're paying careful attention to guidance from the ACBL, the State of Connecticut and the CDC and looking at what clubs that have reopened are doing. We're committed to making sure that, when we do reopen, everyone's safety and health are our primary considerations.

Education

Laurie Robbins continues to give her weekly mini tutorials after the Wednesday afternoon game to very appreciative audiences. The Wednesday afternoon game is one of our most popular games, in no small measure because of Laurie's dedication to helping our advancing players.

Dan Finn continues to share his expertise at his first Tuesday of the month evening lessons. His loyal audience usually numbers around two dozen people.

More than 75 people registered to attend Frank Merblum's Zoom session on December 16, at which he discussed his team's triumph at the [JLall1 Online Tournament](#) sponsored by the United States Bridge Federation. Those who attended were treated to a very special presentation and discussion. Frank's expertise, love of bridge and graciousness were on full and splendid display. We've heard from many who attended who were most appreciative of the knowledge and wisdom Frank shared about bridge at its highest levels in this country. Thanks, too, to Trevor Reeves for lending his technical expertise and presence to ensure that the evening proceeded seamlessly.

This month, we're also going to list a few online educational opportunities that the Board finds particularly worthwhile. These are not meant to be comprehensive, but are suggestions for those looking for online education during the pandemic. We're hopeful also that if any of you are participating in online education you like and would recommend, you'll write and tell us about it so we can share it in an upcoming newsletter. Ann Lohrand is heading up the Board of Trustees effort to compile a list of online educational opportunities for our members, so forward any suggestions to her at alohrand@aol.com.

In the Free Category

If you haven't paid attention to **Peter Hollands'** weekly video lessons on BBO, they're worth watching. Hollands, an Australian expert, goes through eight hands every week. The lessons are available on BBO's message board starting on Tuesdays. Although Hollands is playing against robots, he does an excellent job of walking the audience through his thinking about what to bid and how to play the hand. His thinking process is that of an expert, but with worthwhile insights for everyone, no matter what their level of expertise. As an added bonus, you can compare your results to his by playing in a free weekly Instant Tournament. To do that, go to Solitaire on BBO, then Weekly Free Instant Tournament. Hollands' extensive (and we do mean extensive) library of entertaining and instructive videos are available on YouTube by googling "Peter Hollands Bridge Videos."

In the You Need to Pay for it Category

Boston area teacher **Kim Gilman**, whom many in the club are familiar with as a result of her partnership with Zach Grossack, will be teaching online courses for all levels, including beginners who want to learn from scratch. Kim teaches with Zoom and the Shark Bridge online classroom, in which students play hands as part of the lesson. After each deal, you receive feedback and see the expert techniques in the replay. Declarer Play, Bidding, and the popular "Dazzling Defense!" courses all start in January. Visit her website at www.bridgewithkim.com.

Play Bridge at Sea offers many different classes with popular themes. The cost per class is \$25, which includes a lesson preview by Giorgia Botta, the lesson, and a video of the lesson for repeated review, if desired. A series of four classes on 2 over 1 was offered this fall. For \$150, the classes included a one-hour lesson and a one-hour session on Shark Bridge, where students played with one another using demo hands. Also, on alternate Thursdays, "bridge professors" play about 10 hands, explaining the bidding and play of each. James Holzhauer, of Jeopardy fame, was a visiting professor. The website is playbridgeatsea.com. Many classes are scheduled in January.

New Initiatives

In January, we're going to be launching four new initiatives.

On the second Tuesday of each month, at 9:30 a.m., a yet-to-be-identified club member will be hosting a Zoom meeting for those playing in the Tuesday morning open game. It will be an opportunity for club members to see each other and chat face-to-face. Details will follow in one of the, by now, almost daily terrific newsletters Linda Starr puts out with her usual aplomb announcing upcoming events.

On the second Thursday of each month, at 12:45 p.m., Ann Lohrand will be hosting a Zoom meeting for those playing in the Thursday afternoon 0-200 game. It will be an opportunity for club members to see one another and chat face-to-face. Details will follow in a newsletter.

Frank Merblum has graciously agreed to again analyze hands from a Tuesday morning open game **every third Tuesday of the month**. In this iteration of Frank's hand analyses, he will do it via a Zoom meeting shortly after the game. For those of us who remember Frank's many live Tuesday afternoon sessions, we look forward to hearing his always incisive and entertaining analyses that are invariably spot on. More details to follow in a newsletter.

The Hartford Bridge Club has conducted two Masterpoint races annually—for Life Masters and non-Life Masters—for many, many years. These were discontinued last year due to the pandemic and logistical difficulty in compiling results. We will be reinstating those races, starting today, for the next nine months of our fiscal year. In recognition of the club's changing demographics, we will now have four categories. We'll have races for those with fewer than 100 Masterpoints at the start of the year, for those with fewer than 300 Masterpoints, for those with fewer than 1000 Masterpoints and for those with 1000 Masterpoints or more. Each category will roughly comprise a quarter of the club's members (see the demographic chart later in this newsletter). The Board of Trustees also determined that prizes would be given to the top three players in each category; with three free games going to the winner, two free games to second place and one free game to third place. All the free games will be awarded when the club reopens. We expect to list the top 10 players in each category by the 15th of the following month in a newsletter. So, look for a newsletter around February 15th for January results.

Continuing Initiatives

In the first five weeks of the Trustee and Director Partnership Desk program, in which trustees and game directors volunteer to partner with club members, 38 partnerships were formed and 26 different club members participated in the program. Moreover, many of these partnerships achieved section tops or high placements. Participants have uniformly been appreciative of the opportunity to play in the club's online games at times when they would otherwise be unable to do so. Details about how to participate are provided every Friday morning (on Thursdays when holidays fall on Fridays) in a newsletter after Linda Starr gathers the names of trustees and directors volunteering for the next week.

In the first four weeks of the weekly Elizabeth Park Ask Me Anything Sunday Walks, an average of nine club members showed up for what has now become a 40-minute walk around the park. Although there is a group of regulars, each week has attracted a couple of newcomers and it's an opportunity to get some exercise and get to better know someone you may not know well or even meet someone new. We are hopeful more members will join the walk. Each weekend, Linda Starr issues a reminder about the walk, which starts at 11 a.m.

We have now had two Sunday games in which club members were paired with robots. These games were well attended and participants tell us they're loads of fun, even though—or perhaps because—the robots do unexpected and oftentimes disconcerting things on defense and in their bidding (not unlike our human partners). Because of their popularity, expect to see more of these games in the future.

Membership and Outreach

Last month, we reported that we had 388 members. Near the end of the month of December, we were up to 420 members. During the past month, both of us and other board members contacted more than 60 former members who had not yet paid their dues. The results were gratifying. A significant number renewed their memberships. But most gratifying were the conversations we had. To a person, folks were delighted to hear from us and chat about their lives, the effect of the pandemic, the club and their bridge playing. These outreach efforts are continuing to both former and current members.

Just a reminder that the final date for paying membership dues was extended until today, January 1, 2021. If dues are not paid, that person will not be allowed to play in Hartford Bridge Club's online games unless he or she is a guest of a member. Members have unlimited guest privileges. So do invite as many guests as you'd like, but please also encourage frequent guests to join the club.

We also want to illustrate a few other outreach examples.

A few Sundays ago, Ronit Shoham, Mary Sullivan, Xenia Coulter, and Mike Winterfield made the effort to get Cecilia Vasel playing online on BBO so she could eventually get back to playing at HBC with her many friends. Ronit visited Cecilia at her home to walk her through the mechanics, and Mary, Xenia and Mike were part of a casual game Cecilia participated in that morning and afternoon.

Joy Bacci may be our oldest member. Joy is a feisty, with-it 97½-years-young, and was good friends with Frank Merblum's parents. She was very desirous of seeing Frank on Zoom for his talk on the USBF tournament. The only problem was that Joy had never been on Zoom. So, we worked with Joy the preceding week to get her on Zoom, to register her and to make sure she did what she needed to do to attend the meeting. Joy attended the Zoom meeting and was thrilled to be there.

Marlene Hoerle is an 86-year-old resident of the Avery Heights assisted living facility in Hartford. Marlene is on a very limited budget and it's a sign of the importance of bridge in her life that she maintains her membership with Hartford Bridge Club. Both of us converse frequently with Marlene, who due to the pandemic, lives a very sheltered life at this time. We worked with her to get her online on BBO to play its free games and, although she complains about the robots, she nonetheless plays two or three hours a day and says that her ability to do so is a life-saver. We have a date to play live at HBC once the club reopens.

We also thought you might be interested in knowing a bit more about Marlene. She is a graduate of Wellesley College, has a Masters in Counselling from Saint Joseph's College, was a Founder of and the Chairperson of the Wheeler Clinic Board of Directors for four years. During a stint on the Board of New Britain General Hospital, in 1985 Marlene decided she wanted to be a hospital chaplain and thereafter obtained her Divinity degree from the Yale Divinity School. She currently is engaged in what she calls her "joke ministry," for which she calls folks around the state who are in assisted living facilities or are receiving in-home care and tries to make them laugh.

When asked to tell a joke, Marlene launched into this one: There was this impatient gentleman who rushed up to an airport ticket counter and demanded of the young female attendant, "I need a ticket to get on a flight to Los Angeles and I need it right now." The attendant calmly said, "Sir, you'll have to wait in that line right there." "I can't wait," he again demanded. "But, sir, you will have to," she again calmly responded. "Do you know who I am?," he said, trying to intimidate her. This time, she got on the loudspeaker and said, "There's a fellow here who doesn't know who he is. He's standing right in front of me. Anyone with helpful information please come forward." At that point the gentleman yelled at the attendant, "Sc-w you!" "Well, sir," she calmly replied, "you'll have to wait in line for that too." Marlene delivers the joke with pitch perfect timing and voice.

While we can't guarantee success, the club has helped a number of people with their technical issues over the past several months. If you want any help at all, by all means don't be bashful. Let us know. We truly enjoy the opportunity.

Club Attendance and Demographics

In November, we had 636 tables in play and finished the month with a total of 5386 for the first 11 months of the year, which meant we maintained our 37th position in North America. At 636 tables per month, we're roughly at the same number of tables the club enjoyed when we were open and playing face-to-face. That is a strong showing and we remain grateful for the support and loyalty of all of you who are participating in our online games. That support and loyalty has allowed the club to

maintain our fee per regular game at \$5, which remains one of the lowest table fees available. The board intends to maintain that table fee as long as the table count continues to be strong.

Donna and the other directors, Sally Kirtley, Susan Seckinger, Laurie Robbins and Mark Smith are currently running 14 games a week—seven open and seven limited-point games. Last month, the open games attracted 302 participants while the limited-point games attracted 334. It's noteworthy that, in November, more than 40 members who could play in the limited-point games also played in the open games. In December, it appears that even more non-Life Masters are dipping their toes into the open games, particularly on Tuesday mornings and Sunday afternoons. And often they place high in their sections and have come away with loads of Masterpoints. Good for them.

The Hartford Bridge Club Demographics as of November, 2020

Masterpoint Range	Number of Members in Range
2500-23689	41 (10.5% of club membership)
1500-2499	41 (10.5%)
1000-1499	24 (6.0%)
750-999	20 (5%)
500-749	30 (7.5%)
300-499	42 (11%)
200-299	27 (7%)
100-199	46 (12%)
50-99	39 (10%)
0-49	78 (20%)
Total	388

A couple of noteworthy points about the club demographics: Nearly 50% of our club members have fewer than 300 Masterpoints; 60% have fewer than 500. It is why we added several limited-point games in the past few months to cater to those demographics. Over the past several years, the percentage of members with fewer than 300 Masterpoints has dramatically increased. That is all to the good and a sign of a healthy club that's continuing to attract new members. We had very strong momentum before the pandemic in terms of gaining new members (we ended last fiscal year with nearly 500 members) and we're doing everything we can now to regain that momentum once the club reopens.

New Life Masters

As you know, the club usually throws a party for those achieving the signal honor of Life Master. However, with the pandemic we have needed to postpone those celebrations. At this time, we would like to recognize those who have earned Life Master status in the past year in this monthly newsletter. We asked the new Life Masters to tell us what they would like us to know about themselves and their bridge achievements. Below are the write-ups and pictures of our new Life Masters.

Lynn Tavormina and John Boettcher

John and I joined HBC during this year and it has been a lovely club to play in. We had often met folks from HBC when we played at regionals and felt that they were a friendly bunch of people, but it was a bit too far for us to play in Hartford. It's been nice to connect to HBC online and once this pandemic is over and we're all vaccinated, we hope to make our way up from East Lyme to actually play and meet some of you all. Here's our origin story: My parents and John's parents knew each other for many years through their bridge group in Evansville, Indiana, although, as children, we never met. Both couples lost a spouse within a month of each other in 1973 and a year and a half later my mother married John's father, forming a blended family with 10 children. John and I met when our parents were dating and six years after they married, so did we. Perhaps it was in the cards all along—the one picture we have of our parents together is a picture of them playing bridge! We joined the ACBL in the early 80s, but then raised a family, so it wasn't until retirement a few years ago that we jumped back in. We love the game and are fortunate that we share this common interest. Thanks to HBC for being so welcoming!



Lori Leopold

In late February, just before the pandemic closed sanctioned bridge games, I called my friend Dr. Shiue from HBC and begged him to please come to Sturbridge with me on the last day of the tournament to help me get the elusive .44 gold points that I had sought for a year. True to his word, YL showed up the next morning with his impish smile and bridge knowledge and a few hours later, I was thrilled to become a Life Master.

Many years ago, Ken was a bridge director when he worked at Dartmouth and his enthusiasm for the game was palpable. I thought it would be fun for us to play together and he taught me the basics. One night, Ken's regular partner cancelled at the last minute and Ken asked me to play with him. Mercifully, Ken played most of the hands and we came in first. I decided then that I'd leave on a high note, that bridge was too stressful for me and I didn't play again for twenty years.

Fast forward to 2015 and an established life in CT. After a few years of Ronit Shoham's relentless encouragement, she and I played in the Thursday afternoon game at HBC. From

there, Helma insisted that I play on Wednesday afternoons and then Jan Rosow pulled me into the Monday afternoon game. I remember well the Jains telling me how well I was doing, all while my leg was shaking up and down under the bridge table. From there, Debbie Katz and I started playing in the open games almost every day. Each morning was horrifying, but Deb and I persisted; 25%, 30%, finally a 40%! After about six months, I realized that when Geof opens 3 clubs NV in third seat, I shouldn't pass with 25 points in my hand. Thank you, Geof. You are a true learning experience. I've learned a lot about bridge at HBC and for all of the instruction I've received from the great Frank Merblum, Geof, YL, Joel Wolfe, Joel Krug, Vic and Doug, I am forever grateful. I am equally appreciative of the deep sense of community the club provides for me, and for the many friendships I've formed here. The Hartford Bridge Club is a place that I call Home. Many thanks to all of you.



Buzz Kohn

I was introduced to bridge by my parents. They often played rubber bridge with friends and couples and I was encouraged to watch. My first taste of duplicate occurred while I was a freshman at Lehigh. I played rubber bridge for many years until some of my friends started playing duplicate. I love the game and love to compete. Looking forward to more normal times and interacting in person with the HBC community. A special thanks to my teacher Doug Doub and frequent partners Eric Vogel, Felix Springer, Trevor Reeves and Jeanne Striefler.



John Price

One year, when I was in training for my medical degree in New York City, I had the opportunity to treat a number of celebrities, one of whom was Jackie Gleason. He gave me some great advice that I will never forget: "If you love something, go for it!" With that advice in mind, I completed my training and medicine became my first love. Working in the same NYC hospital, I met Kathleen 56 years ago. She quickly became my second love and we raised four wonderful young men together. We now have 11 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren. Unfortunately, a few years ago, my wife developed dementia and I needed to keep busy. I joined Hartford Bridge Club and found my third love!

My first contact with serious bridge occurred in Alabama in 1964 when I was a Captain in the Army. A patient asked me to go to a local bridge club—and we actually won! They gave us a paper that read, "0.11 master points." With that same advice from Jackie Gleason in mind, about 5 years ago, I decided to 'go for it' to add to these points.

My sincere thanks go to Donna and all the terrific directors who have helped guide me along this path. I didn't do this alone, so many thanks also go out to my wonderful partners who helped me to 'go for it' and achieve this goal. My partners were my wife Kay, Rollin Shank, John Calderbank, my sister Sharon Kwash and Kay Hill.



In next month's newsletter, we will be recognizing more club members who have achieved a new rank during the past year. In the meantime, please take advantage of all the club has to offer, take good care of yourselves and be kind to each other at and away from the bridge table.