



# Hartford Bridge Club

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February 2021 Newsletter

Each month, we will try to bring you behind the scenes at the club because much happens there out of sight. This month, we asked Linda Starr and Peter Katz to talk about what they do to communicate with you through our daily emails and our website. Linda, as our communicator-in-chief, and Peter, as our webmaster, do an outstanding job and we wanted to make sure you gain a little insight on how much they do on a daily basis for the club. We also asked Mark Smith and Sally Kirtley to describe the challenges and satisfactions of their jobs as directors. We feel our directors do terrific work that shouldn't be taken for granted. Each month, we hope to have a director talk about his or her work, but this month we thought we'd start with a doubleheader.

We're particularly pleased that Joel Wolfe, one of our top bridge players, will be giving a series of lessons on defense starting in February. Also this month, we're recognizing those members who have recently achieved milestones in their bridge careers. Twelve members achieved milestones, from Bronze Life Master to 20,000 masterpoints. We asked them to reflect on their achievements and a number of them did; you'll see their interesting comments at the end of the newsletter. We're proud of them and want to show it in the only way we can at this time.

Despite the fact that we're not meeting face-to-face to play, there's much happening at our virtual club. We comment on our new initiatives and our continuing initiatives, our attempts to satisfy our members' partnership needs, our renewed masterpoint races, our educational efforts and a host of other matters. In New England, many of us feel February is the longest month of the year. We hope this newsletter gives you plenty of interesting things to read. Enjoy, stay warm and stay healthy,

Donna and Felix

## People Behind the Scenes

### Our Daily Newsletters (Linda Starr)



I started playing bridge when I was about 12, “subbing” in my parents’ and grandparents’ home games, but I didn’t start playing “real bridge” (duplicate!) until after college, when a friend talked me into going to Ed Gentino’s Wethersfield game. I played frequently at Ed’s games for years, only occasionally venturing out to the much more terrifying Hartford Bridge Club. I didn’t start playing regularly at HBC until it moved to its current location—and instituted a zero-tolerance policy. Until then, HBC had an unfriendly (to put it politely) reputation and, of course, there were no limited-point games then to ease one’s entry into that seriously competitive duplicate world. We just had to dive in and suffer humiliation after humiliation (after humiliation) until we finally learned from our nemeses to play well enough to actually compete with them. And, wow, was that a high! It’s a source of frustration to me that so many bridge players today languish at a level below what they’re capable of because they don’t know how truly worth the humiliation the learning process and eventual victory is! Trust me, the higher the level of competition and the better you become at reaching it, the more fun and stimulating the game is!

Anyway, at first, I only played at night because like many HBC members at the time, I had a family and later a job. My job was as an education writer and editor, first at *Weekly Reader* (remember that erstwhile children’s magazine?), then at McGraw Hill, and finally at Education World, one of the very first online resources for teachers. When I retired about 10 years ago and began to play bridge much more frequently (i.e., night and day!), Nancy Krech decided I’d be the perfect candidate to send out the club’s emails for her when she was away. So, later, when she finally retired as the club’s chief communicator, I was already there and—at least partially—trained. It made for a relatively easy transition for the club and a chance for me to write again. (Writers have to write. Joan Didion has said, “I don’t know what I think until I write it down.”) So now I get to know what I think again!

As you can probably tell, I love creating the emails: searching Google Images for funny or inspirational messages to start off your day with a smile, writing clear, step-by-step instructions for a variety of tasks, and just communicating with you to maintain a sense of community both when we were live and now when we’re not. The task is just so much bigger now, both because we can’t see one another in person and because we’re offering our members so many more opportunities to stay connected. Recently, I began to feel as though I was constantly sending out emails—sometimes more than two a day. And I was pretty sure that the more I wrote, the less you read. I think the sheer volume of emails became overwhelming for all of us. Because of that, we recently inaugurated a daily newsletter to replace all those random messages—hopefully you find it more manageable, readable and understandable. Hopefully you read it. Because there’s really nothing a writer hates more than when her words of wisdom are wasted!

## Take a Deeper Dive into the HBC Website (Peter Katz)



In these pandemic times, the HBC website, [hartfordbridgeclub.org](http://hartfordbridgeclub.org), has become an even more important link to the club for our members. While [game results](#), [game schedules](#) and [club news](#) (especially special games and events) continue to be the most frequently visited areas of the site and are front and center on the homepage, there's plenty of other useful stuff on the site. Additionally, in response to the pandemic, many BBO resources have been added. Let's take a closer look at some areas of the website you may have missed.

### BBO Support

The most recent expansions of the website involve supporting the club's presence on BBO. Topics include:

- [the basics of using BBO](#),
- [how to play with HBC on BBO](#),
- [how to get an HBC/BBO partner](#),
- [a list of BBO names for HBC members and friends to help us find one another](#),
- [the BBO Buddy program to help HCB members get on board BBO](#),
- [an online form to ask questions about a specific BBO hand](#), and
- [an award-winning series of articles on playing with BBO robots](#).

### Online Educational Opportunities

Since in person educational events are now on pause, the website's educational resources have been expanded. The website now contains a [library](#) with dozens of bridge lessons on a variety of topics that had been presented live at the club.

Also available are the lesson documents and videos of the ongoing First Tuesday online mini-lessons presented on Zoom by HBC member, Dan Finn. These lessons and replays can be accessed [here](#).

HBC is fortunate to have a number of world-class champion players among our ranks. Be sure to check out their [Hand of the Week articles library](#).

### Governance

The website makes available for review by our members the minutes of recent board meetings and financial reports. Since the club's closure, members no longer have access to the suggestion box, but a [feedback/suggestions website form](#) offers an online alternative. Want to know who's in charge and who's on which committees? You can also find this out in the governance section of the website.

*If you're limiting your use of the HBC website to just results, game schedules and news, you're letting a lot of valuable information slip by. Visit it today!*

## Some Background on Two of Our Directors

### Mark Smith



I started directing during college when the Board of Directors for Tampa Bay Bridge Center was running low on directors and asked me to become one. I have been a director for about 30 years as well as practicing as an attorney. Interestingly enough, all my attorney jobs are somehow connected to bridge.

After directing club bridge for about 25 years, I applied to direct tournaments for the ACBL and I auditioned at the Daytona Beach Regional. They hired me and I directed for about four years at ACBL regionals and sectionals.

About three years ago, I started directing speedball tournaments on BBO and that was a very unique experience. Nonetheless, it prepared me to direct virtual games. Learning the software took some time, but the most difficult part of directing speedballs is that we have to adjust scores at the end of every round. In a busy speedball that can be difficult because you receive a pile of boards that need adjusting and, unlike virtual games, the computer won't adjust the boards. Also, if you're in a speedball and BBO starts crashing, it becomes a nightmare because your grid screen of the players starts disappearing and then panic begins. Given this previous experience in speedball, changing over to direct virtual club games was easy.

Thanks to Donna being such a pleasure to work with and all the Board Members and other directors and players in the game, it makes working as a director for the Hartford Bridge Club a wonderful experience. I want to thank all of you and hope to see you soon in person.

### Sally Kirtley



I joined the ACBL in 1990, and took the director course almost immediately. I only directed on cruises for many years, but then Donna discovered that I was a licensed director and asked me to take over a Hartford Bridge Club game. I directed the Thursday night game for a few years, before it became so small that it was not a viable game any longer. Since I still have a "day job" as an attorney, I was only able to sub on occasion after that.

Once Covid hit, I was determined to do what I could for the Hartford Bridge Club. I found out what we needed to do to get our online games up and running, and the few directors that were willing to direct online and I got some training on how to set up and direct games. I volunteered to be the go-between with BBO and the ACBL when they asked that only one person from each club attend the weekly Zoom meetings. The group of directors has worked closely

together to try to determine when the best times are to hold open and limited games—some have worked and others have not, but we are constantly discussing options and fine-tuning.

Many of you know that I am currently the Tournament Manager for District 25, which means that I negotiate with the hotels for all of the Regional tournaments that are held in New England. I love the game of bridge and love to be around it as well as playing. Although online games are, in my opinion, a poor substitute for face-to-face games, it's certainly better than not being able to play at all. I look forward to when we can reopen the club and start running tournaments again, but in the meantime, I will continue to support the club in any way I can.

One of the many differences between online play and in-person play is that many distractions happen at home that don't happen at the club—the doorbell rings, the phone rings, the dog barks, or the cat walks across the keyboard. It's very difficult to determine if a hesitation is caused by one of those disruptions or by a momentary daydream. This is the biggest reason that we are constantly asking for everyone's patience, and why it's important to be kind to one another.

## **New Initiatives**

### **Masterpoint Races—Please Register**

Last month in this newsletter, we announced that we'll be having four categories of masterpoint races for the first nine months of this year (January to September—the remainder of our fiscal year) for our members. The categories are 0-99, 100-299, 300-999, and 1000+ masterpoints. Prizes will be three free games to the winner of each category, with second place receiving two free games and third place one free game when the club is open.

The masterpoint races will be based *solely* on points won at Hartford Bridge Club online games until the club reopens. Because these point totals are readily only available through BBO, we need every member who wants to participate in these races to register on the Hartford Bridge Club website during the next seven days. Go to [Hartfordbridgeclub.org](https://Hartfordbridgeclub.org). Then go to "Results and MP Races" and register by putting in your name, your BBO username, and "Yes" if you have played or intend to play in other clubs' online games in 2021 or "No" if you haven't played and don't intend to play in other clubs' online games in 2021. We will need to subtract any points won at other clubs' online games from members' totals. The BBO point totals for our online games will not include the 1.5 multiplier that HBC applies for masterpoint winners nor will it include the additional points awarded for combined open and limited-point games. It's a level playing field for everyone.

We hope most of our members register. We expect that as the year progresses and the races heat up, there will be considerable interest in who's doing well and achieving bragging rights in each of the four categories. We're particularly eager to see the results in the 0-99 category as those members typically have had to compete against others with far more masterpoints. The top ten in each category will be published in a newsletter the following month as well as in our monthly newsletter.

### **A New Series on Defense to Commence in February**

Joel Wolfe, one of the club's most experienced and able members, has graciously agreed to present a series of five lessons on defense, said by many to be the most difficult facet of bridge. These lessons will start on Monday, February 8, and take place every other week thereafter at 4 p.m. on Zoom. They will be an hour in duration, with time afterward for questions. They'll be the perfect preparation for the Monday evening HBC online games. Listen to Joel talk about such topics as opening leads, defensive carding, defensive bidding conventions, signaling and more, have a leisurely meal to reflect on all you've learned and then implement it at the Monday evening game.

### **New Initiatives Regarding the Partnership Desk**

The club is continuing its efforts to try to ensure that our members find partners for all the games they want to play in. We're trying to make the partnership desk more frequently utilized at our online games. We revamped the club's procedures for the partnership desk by asking those utilizing the desk to register at least 30 minutes before game time so members seeking partners or members seeking to become partners have enough time to prepare to play. See those new procedures on our website at [What If I Need a Partner?](#). In addition, a number of trustees and directors are volunteering to go on the partnership desk once a month to encourage its use. These volunteer efforts are in addition to those for the Trustee and Director Partnership Program. See an updated status report on that program under "Continuing Initiatives" in this newsletter.

### **New 0-200 game in February**

As we noted last month, Donna and the directors are continually reviewing the schedule to try to meet the needs and interests of all of our members and balance that with the availability of directors to achieve the most robust schedule of games while serving all of our demographics. Accordingly, we are adding a 0-200 masterpoint game starting this month, on Sunday afternoons at 1:30 in conjunction with the open game at the same time. Those members with 0-200 masterpoints have shown great enthusiasm for the games we have in that category and we are hopeful that Sunday afternoon will provide another welcome opportunity for this group to play.

## **Continuing Initiatives**

### **Frank Merblum Hand Analysis**

In a lively give and take session after the open game, Frank Merblum provided his expert analysis of the 18 boards played on January 19. Sixteen members attended the session and enjoyed Frank's crisp and acute commentary on the bidding and play of the hands. These sessions will continue on February 16 and on the third Tuesday of every month.

### **More Education**

Laurie Robbins and Dan Finn continue their valuable and valued lessons. Laurie's mini-tutorials are on Wednesday afternoons after the game and Dan's are on the first Tuesday of each month preceding the evening game. We continue to get terrific reviews from their audiences.

### **And More Education**

In a follow-up to last month's listing of online educational opportunities, several club members have written to Ann Lohrand (mail to: Alorand@aol.com) with suggestions of online educational opportunities. They are:

"Barbara Seagram, author of *25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know*, offers many different classes online. I've taken the class on Declarer Play which was four two-hour sessions. The cost was \$100. She is a wonderful teacher and offers a full spectrum of lessons. See [barbaraseagram.com](http://barbaraseagram.com)." Recommended by Fran Bard

"Many lectures by Patty Tucker are offered on You Tube. Patty presents a host of workshops at bridge conventions and you can find many of these on [You Tube](http://You Tube). They are free." Recommended by Carla Pariser

"Larry Cohen offers many online lessons on a variety of topics for free or for a small fee. You can also search his website ([Larryco.com](http://Larryco.com)) for specific bridge topics and receive Larry's analysis of the topic, many of which were first presented in the ACBL Bulletin." Recommended by Rachel Peled.

### **Tuesday and Thursday Zoom Chats**

In last month's newsletter, we announced that there would be Zoom sessions once a month on a Tuesday before the Open game and on a Thursday before the 0-200 game. It is intended to be an opportunity for club members to see one another and chat face-to-face for 30 minutes. The first sessions were such a success that we will now have these Zoom sessions twice a month—on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month and on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month. Trevor Reeves is acting as host on Tuesdays and Ann Lohrand is acting as host on Thursdays. Join the conversations. It's great seeing members we haven't seen for some time.

### **Trustee and Director Partnership Program**

In the first 10 weeks of the Trustee and Director Partnership program, in which trustees and game directors volunteer to partner with club members, we had 67 partnerships formed and 30 different club members participate in the program. Starting later in February, John Willoughby, new to HBC's Board of Trustees this year, will take over as administrator of the program. Many members have voiced their appreciation of the opportunity to form these partnerships. Details about how to participate are provided every Friday morning in the daily newsletter after Linda Starr gathers the names of trustees and directors volunteering for the next week.

### **Walks in the Park**

In the first two months of the Elizabeth Park Ask Me Anything weekly Sunday Walks, we have been able to walk nearly every Sunday. Between 7 and 12 members have shown up for what has now become a 40-minute walk around the park. Although there are a group of regulars participating, each week has attracted one or two newcomers and it's an opportunity to get some exercise and get to know someone better who you may not know well or to meet someone new. We are hopeful more

members will join the walk. Each Sunday morning, Linda Starr issues a reminder about the walk, which starts at 11 a.m. at the Pond House.

## **Year End Club Attendance and Comparison to Other Clubs**

In December, we were surprised and mightily pleased to see that we had 717 tables in play. We thought winter and cold weather would bring more play online, but this is a high-water mark for a month in the club's history!! If we sustained this monthly total, we would have more than 8600 tables a year, which would rank us among the top 20 clubs in table count in ACBL land in North America. As it was, we finished the year at 6103 tables and ranked 33<sup>rd</sup>, having lost nearly a month getting started online.

We should note that we are exceeding December's pace in January and we can only sincerely thank all of you who participate in our online games. Your attendance is a testament to the fact that we must be doing something right. We certainly are trying. Donna and the other directors are constantly discussing the best mix of games and tweaking the schedule to find the best opportunities for all our members.

As we scan the results of bridge clubs across the country, we see some very interesting results for 2020. Some clubs banded together in alliances when the pandemic closed live bridge clubs, most notably the Sagamore alliance and the Boston Area Bridge Club alliance. The Sagamore alliance is a group of ten bridge clubs across the country, mostly on the east and west coasts and featuring some of the most prominent clubs in the ACBL, e.g., Jourdan's Bridge Club (FL), Essex Bridge Center (NJ), Sagamore Bridge Club (Long Island), The Bridge Deck (Scarsdale), In Tempo Bridge Club (AZ), Long Beach Bridge Club (CA) and Beverly Hills Bridge Club (CA). This year, the Sagamore alliance had 37,550 tables in play online (to rank 1<sup>st</sup> in the ACBL) and, individually, the ten clubs had 17,646 tables in play face-to-face before the pandemic, for a total of 55,196 tables. However, in 2019 the 10 individual clubs had a total of 66,648 tables in play. Down 20%.

Closer to home, the Boston Area Bridge Club Alliance has the Bridge Spot and the Newton Bridge Club as its main Boston clubs. It also has three other small Eastern Massachusetts clubs as members and has combined with the Seven No Trump club in Stamford and the Bridge Table, a New Jersey club. They were 6<sup>th</sup> in total tables with 14,826. When those clubs pre-pandemic and pre-online games are added together, the total is 20,832, which is below the 2019 total of 21,821 tables for those clubs individually.

The pandemic has brought, and will continue to bring, challenges to bridge clubs. We don't take for granted for one minute the support of our members and we are trying to continue to earn it every day. Please tell us what we can do better. We assure you that we'll listen.

## **Milestone Achievers**

### **Doug Doub: 20,000 Points-Grand Life Master**



20,000 masterpoints means I have spent a whole lot of time playing bridge. It attracts an interesting cast of players who tend to be intelligent and enjoy a challenge. In the 48 & 1/2 years since I first learned (the last 41 as a member of the Hartford Bridge Club), I have had the pleasure to play with hundreds of partners and teammates and thousands of opponents. Partners have been as young as 13 years old (Harrison Luba) and as old as 95 (Helen Fuss). They have brightened my life with their wit and spark. I won my first national championship with John Rengstorff, my last one with Yiji Starr, and the other nine with Frank Merblum and Adam Wildavsky, who have been friends and partners for a very long time. Victor King was also a great friend and partner.

There have been some positive changes to the game since I started. The use of bidding boxes ranks number one for me. Others are computer scoring, screens, 300-point penalty for the fourth doubled non-vulnerable undertrick, five-card majors, and numerous other bidding innovations. No matter how much you play, you never see everything. Just around the corner there's another hand just waiting to test me and show me something amazing that I have never seen before. I look forward to the next time I sit down to play with you, my friends from HBC. I can hardly wait. See you at the table.

### **Frank Blachowski: 5000 Points-Diamond Life Master**



Having attained this milestone means that I've played so much for so long (50 years) that I've accumulated a whole lot of points. It's been enjoyable, but presently, I miss everyone.

### **Mike Smith: 3500 Points-Sapphire Life Master**



**Susan Seckinger: 3500 Points-Sapphire Life Master**



I was surprised and amazed to find out I had so many masterpoints. A long way from when I thought my friend with 79 points was a pro. I have had a great deal of fun and met some great people along the way. I look forward to the day when we can all play in person again.

**Donna Feir: 2500 points-Gold Life Master**



In 1980, I took three bridge lessons and jumped into duplicate bridge with three feet, playing day and night. I made Life Master in 1986 and Silver Life Master in 1996, in a world with no novice games. In 1997, I volunteered to direct at and manage the HBC, which greatly reduced my playing time. Never thought I would achieve the goal of Gold Life Master and am excited to do so.

**Ann Clark: 1500 Points-Ruby Life Master**



**Trevor Reeves: 1500 Points-Ruby Life Master**



It's always nice to reach a milestone. Playing bridge is not just great fun, it is also a continuous learning experience and I think it is important to set goals along the way to measure your progress. I would like to thank my partners for their continued advice, support and friendship. I am also grateful to all who have done so much to keep the club growing during these difficult times—we are truly fortunate to be able to play bridge online with so many fellow members.

**Jeanne Striefler: 1500 Points-Ruby Life Master**



My initial reaction on reaching 1500 points was a quiet cheer. When I first started learning bridge, it seemed overwhelming and I never thought that I would even reach the Life Master level. As each ranking level was met, I gained more self-confidence and an appreciation of the complexity of the game. It made me want to learn more and challenge myself. But perhaps more important, in retrospect, are the partnerships in both pairs and team games. I am grateful to all and appreciate their support, advice, respect and friendship.

**Michael Joyce: 1000 Points-Silver Life Master**



Due to the vast majority of games at HBC being in the daytime, my high-stress and very demanding employment encouraged me to take a hiatus from HBC for 9+ years. Then magic occurred—I retired and started playing at HBC again in 2019. Then the pandemic struck, but BBO came to the rescue! Due to these two events, I am pleased that I am now able to progress through the ranks of a sport that encourages lifetime learning.

**Nancy Narwold: 1000 points-Silver Life Master**



Thank you to my partners and friends at the Hartford Bridge Club, the Town and County Club and the Hartford Golf Club. Hope to see you soon. Have a Seven NoTrump Day!

**Phil Olschefski: 1000 Points-Silver Life Master**



**Pat Shimkus: 500 Points-Bronze Life Master**



Congratulations to all my friends at the Hartford Bridge Club who have attained these bridge achievements. I look forward to rising to the next level, even at my age. Goal setting is my MANTRA.  
I miss you all!