

Happy New Year, District 12 Unit Board Members!

Susan and I arrived in Denver November 20th and had dinner on an outside patio with our jackets off until the sun set. The weather forecast for Thanksgiving and the weekend following Thanksgiving was for ice and snow, and cancellations from players who feared the forecast reduced attendance significantly for the tournament. Denver's attendance was down 10% from the hoped for 10,000 tables. I believe the District 12 players who supported so well the Chicago (summer nationals) and New Orleans (spring nationals) may have maxed out of their bridge budget dollars prior to the fall nationals in Denver.

Fifty players from our district earned masterpoints, including #50, Ken VanCleve, who on his day off, managed to earn .73 of a masterpoint. Notable finishes in Denver in national events were: Owen Lein, who recently moved to the Detroit area, finishing 3rd in the Blue Ribbon Pairs; Bert Newman and Leonard (Bill/Doc) Melander, who were 2nd in the Super Seniors; and Dennis Kastle, 4th in the Senior Mixed Pairs. John Koschik and I made the finals of the Blue Ribbon Pairs for the second year in a row but crashed and burned in the final round. Jordon Kaye was the only other District 12 player to make the final day for the second year in a row, and with a nice last session managed to finish 33rd in a 78 pair final.

Jordan, with Julie Arbit (formerly of Ann Arbor) were on a team that won a 60 board playoff December 30th in Atlanta to qualify to represent the ACBL on one of the two teams in the under 26 year age group of the World Junior Championship in Salsomaggiore, Italy this year. This event is run by the World Bridge Federation (WBF).

For those of you following the current cheating and disciplinary scandals that have plagued the ACBL and worldwide bridge, here are a couple of statements recently published in Daily Bulletins from the Denver NABC:

Joint Statement of ACBL and Mike Passell

Due to the unprecedented publicity regarding the disciplinary charges brought against Mike Passell, the ACBL and Mike Passell have agreed to issue this joint statement. A complaint was filed against Mike Passell resulting from an incident at the Palmetto Regional in February 2015. A hearing of those charges was held in July before the ACBL Ethical Oversight Committee. An automatic review and appeal of the EOC findings was held in Denver on Sunday, Nov. 22, before the ACBL Appeals and Charges Committee. The conclusions of the A&C Committee were received by the ACBL Board of Directors. As a result of the appellate hearing and review before the A&C Committee: Mike Passell acknowledges fouling a board at the 2015 Palmetto Regional. Mike Passell acknowledges failing to call the director after the incident. The EOC found Mike Passell guilty of violating sections 3.1, 3.7 and 3.20 of the Code of Disciplinary Regulations. In its conviction for section 3.20, the EOC listed only an ethical violation (but not cheating). These findings were affirmed by the Appeals and Charges Committee. The EOC used section E13 of the sentencing guidelines to determine Mike Passell's sentence. The Appeals and Charges Committee determined the correct guideline was E18. The A&C Committee modified Mike Passell's 13-month probation to suspension for 14 days starting Dec. 20, 2015. The A&C Committee modified Mike Passell's forfeiture of 25% of his lifetime masterpoints except the 15.40 MPs earned in the Palmetto event during (Unfortunately, the printed article ends here, mid-sentence; a failure of proof-reading, to be sure.)

Bridge Integrity Task Force Report

In October, ACBL Chief Executive Robert Hartman assembled the Bridge Integrity Task Force. The purpose of our group is to investigate and offer recommendations as to how the ACBL can mitigate cheating and unethical behavior at all levels – from club play to expert competition. The group accomplished a great deal by email coming into the Fall NABC, and we met twice in Denver. While we intend to issue a more detailed statement in the next week or two, here's a quick look at a few of the topics we're addressing:

- Creating a climate where playing bridge ethically is the norm.
- Developing methods to detect suspicious behavior.
- Finding and recruiting the right people to investigate cheating allegations.
- Prosecuting offenders fairly and confidentially, but with finality.

Recognizing that we need new methods to deal with evolving and more complex systems of cheating, we're seeking out experts who can help us in fields where we are not fluent, such as technology and the use of statistics. We appreciate the involvement of Mark Friedlander and other professionals who are assisting the group. This volunteer task force is putting a lot of time and energy into the critical effort of making bridge as clean as possible: Karen Allison, Larry Cohen, Per-Ola Cullin, Eric Kokish, Jeff Meckstroth, Brad Moss, Steve Weinstein, Chris Willenken, and Kit Woolsey for their service. The bridge community owes a debt of thanks to Boye Brogeland and the other players who put themselves on the line this summer pushing this issue to the forefront. We're grateful, also, for the continued support of Mr. Hartman, ACBL President Suzi Subeck, and President-Elect Ken Monzingo.

— Howard Weinstein, chair



Board of Director Actions in Denver

Next year's budget comes with large costs associated with:

1. Technology improvements: upgrading our infrastructure
2. The commitment to removing "cheaters" from our game, which involves new audio and video equipment, and additional staff to monitor this equipment and events.
3. Continual hiring of new tournament directors and on-going training of all tournament directors.

Fee increases will help pay for these improvements, such as:

1. STAC fees, 3% approximate increase
2. Regional & Sectional fees, 2% approximate increase
3. Tournament Director fees, 9% approximate increase
4. STACs and all unit & special games will now be charged the \$1.25 game table sanction fee
5. On-line short games of 12 – 17 boards will see a 6% fee increase

A motion passed that requires the President of the ACBL to appoint a Board Composition Advisory Committee of 9 members. These 9 members will consist of 3 BOD members (one of whom would serve as chair of the committee), 2 members from management, 2 Board of Governors members, and 2 members at large. The BOD appointees are: Bob Heller, District 7, Chair; Claire Jones, District 18; Russ Jones, District 10. As another BOD member has written, this is a serious attempt to decrease the size of the 25 member BOD, which many believe to be too large and unwieldy. This committee will submit a status report at each BOD meeting, with the final report due no later than the Spring 2017 BOD meeting. Other members have not yet been announced.

I believe the Board could be served efficiently by a smaller number of members, which would reduce administrative costs, and I did vote to support this motion (19 yeas, 5 nays). However, if the board is reduced, it is likely that the number of districts (currently 25) will also be reduced. If district boundaries are redrawn or if districts are combined, this could involve greater travel for our North American Pairs and Grand National Team events, as it would be likely that District 12 would be merged with an adjoining district or redrawn to include a greater area.

A discussion item at the Competition & Conventions Committee resulted in a motion that will go to the BOD in Reno to allow “drop ins” to the 2nd day of the Life Master Pairs, as a one time trial event. These “drop ins” would come from members of losing teams from the 3rd day of the Grand National Team event, which is held only at the summer nationals. No LMP players would be eliminated on the second day, as a result of the number of “drop ins” entered on the second day. The “drop ins” would begin final play in the LMP with a carryover in the lower third of the field. I supported this motion.

2016 BOD committee assignments have just been released by the ACBL President. My assignments are: Website/Bulletin (Chair), Appeals & Charges, Finance, Tournaments, Cheating Task Force Support.

The ACBL President, Ken Monzingo, has also announced his goals for 2016. To summarize:

1. I am dedicated to facing the cheating scandals – abroad and local – and working with management to not let up until we have reached a new chapter in controlling it. I will be also be working closely with the Cheating Panel Task Force (very impressive and dedicated), and I have formed a Cheating Task Force Support Committee of our own for board support of our CEO’s task force.
2. I am tired of being asked the same old technology questions and having no answers ... the blame defaults to us. Our tech environment has to be improved with even more determination than we have ever seen.
3. Finances. To work towards a better balanced budget I plan to create committees and task forces to file motions or actions to eliminate several excessive programs that have been “that’s the way we’ve always done it.” Waste elimination is to start at the highest and lowest levels. I will be cutting my expected presidential travel budget by at least 25%. I will spend more time with boots on the ground in Horn Lake and online to work on these plans. I’ll also take a close look at our board compensation history re: per diem, housing, travel, etc. If we will be asking management and players to tighten belts, we must do the same lest we have no real grounds to insist. Also, we should be more transparent in all our spending.
4. I have scheduled a couple of full board workshops for us in Reno to begin settling some of our very expensive programs, including our involvement in world travel/play and how to handle it in the future. Not to simply discuss, but to get something done. The bleeding and bickering needs to stop. Under the microscope must also be our teaching stipends, advertising effectiveness, the Patron Member program (or lack of). The strategic program appears to be of utmost importance, but easy to become mired in politics and atrophy. Either it goes full bore, or goes south. We need to understand progress and reachable goals.

5. To our 2016 committees I have added several management personnel, and a few outsiders. I need them to be more than silent observers in the back of the room; therefore, they will be voting committee members, and will expect full input from their perspective.

District 12 Appointments

My annual appointments of district members to the National Goodwill Committee and to the National Charity Committee have been completed. These are lifetime appointments. I am allowed two appointees each year for each Committee, and I'm allowed to replace up to two deceased members of the Goodwill Committee per year. (Deceased members in 2015, appointed from District 12, include Ethel Mitchell and Jim Peterson.) These appointees receive a lapel pin and a certificate from the league. Goodwill members are also invited to attend the Goodwill Committee receptions at national tournaments.

ACBL Goodwill Committee appointees for 2016 from District 12 are:

- Brenda Bau, Unit 195, Western Michigan, Kalamazoo
Brenda has worked for many years with the Kalamazoo Bridge Club and with Sectional and Regional tournaments in Unit 195. As Partnership Chair for the Kalamazoo tournaments, she has worked beyond the call of duty to put together people without partners. She has also helped make the Kalamazoo Bridge Club the success that it is.
- Paul Pomeroy, Unit 137, MBA, Livonia
Paul has been the Secretary/Treasurer/Tournament Coordinator of District 12 for the last several years. His attention to detail with the units and with the ACBL has made the district run smoothly. Paul rarely plays in the district events for which he is responsible, but he is in attendance making sure all details carried out without a hitch.
- Kathy Twomey, Unit 203, SOMBA, Bloomfield Village
Kathy is Vice-President of SOMBA and can be found greeting players at SOMBA tournaments as well as working many years with their SpringTacular and Spooktacular Intermediate/Novice events. Kathy is also known to contribute to Unit 195 events in northern Michigan and is affectionately called "the cookie lady". I cannot remember not getting a smile from her on all occasions.
- Ed Herstein, Unit 137, MBA, Ann Arbor
Ed was playing bridge when I moved to Ann Arbor 42 years ago. Over the years I have watched him mentor new players and have always respected his desire to help improve players' bridge games.

ACBL Charity Committee appointees for 2016 from District 12 are:

- Victoria Vallone, Unit 203, SOMBA, Macomb; and
- Dolores Bright, Unit 201, SOMBA, Milford
Victoria and Dolores ran two sessions for The Longest Day fundraising event on Monday, June 22, 2015. Last year was the 3rd annual ACBL event that raised money for The Alzheimer's Association. In the first two years the ACBL raised over \$500,000 for each year. In 2015, \$700,000 was raised. I applaud clubs that run these events and contribute to this ACLB charity.

Closing Notes

As your District Director, in addition to making these annual appointments, I have the pleasure of receiving notification of when members of District 12 reach masterpoint milestones. I have been able to congratulate these people and ask them for a story or for suggestions on how the ACBL can improve their bridge experience.

Susan Payne Woodrow became a Bronze Life Master in March, 2014. She provided me with some comments about the ACBL's Zero Tolerance policy that I have anonymously passed on to the League.

Tony Savant became a Silver Life Master in February, 2015. Tony says, "In January 2009, I got my 5th Master Point and 6 years later I got SLM. I have learned in the past 6 years that District 12 has some of the better bridge players which is the challenging competition any bridge player wants."

Here is Nita Brunett's story about becoming a Life Master this year:



"Around the year 2000 when I retired, a friend, Marge Farrand, encouraged me to join the Ann Arbor City Club and take the bridge lessons offered there. My husband and I already played something that resembled bridge with another couple, but it was more of a gut-bidding competition with a contract seldom made. I joined the City Club and took lessons from Pat Amort, an ACBL accredited teacher. My husband also took some lessons with me and we enjoyed playing in social duplicate groups."

"I remember the first day I played at the City Club in a sanctioned game. My partner and I took first place and the director made the announcement that it was my first game there and that I won some 'points'. I had no idea what she was talking about. I soon learned what masterpoints was all about, the status of Life Master, and how the mandatory silver and gold points were earned only at Sectional, Regional or National Tournaments. From that moment on I became a pursuer of points. At the end of every game I was anxious to see how we placed. There was either the exhilaration of winning points or the disappointment of 'not this time'. I also took more lessons from accredited ACBL teachers and learned the 2/1 System. One of my teachers, Ray Gentz, took me under his wing and became my mentor."

“The first time I played in an out-of-state Regional Tournament was in Gatlinburg. Marge Farrand and I played all three sessions each day we were there.

I met more people to play with, and one person in particular, Bev Leclerc, who was also playing at the same level as I was and had the same goal of achieving her Life Master rank. We both needed the same amount of gold points. With both of our husband’s encouragement, we spent one whole summer travelling to all the Regional and National Tournaments we could get in. We both lived in different states so we would fly in and meet at the tournament location. We always checked in at the Partnership desk to try to find another pair to make up a Knockout team. We were really amazed to find that we could hook up with another pair of total strangers and become a winning team. We earned about 15 gold points during that summer, all we needed to complete the gold requirement. I still needed about 25 more silver points.”

“About this time my husband, who had previously been diagnosed with Parkinson’s Disease, began showing signs of a rare type of dementia called Corticobasal Degeneration. The dementia progressed much more rapidly than the Parkinson’s and our vision of how we would spend our retirement years changed dramatically. He reached the point where he could no longer play bridge and needed my help with more activities of just daily living. I played in fewer tournaments. I dropped out of the City Club because I felt that I couldn’t spend that much time in one day playing bridge. I heard the phrase “you have to take care of yourself too” many times over. I thought I was, because by this time I had outside help coming in to help care for my husband. Until I realized depression was setting in. Then another friend, Marcia Knapp, told me ‘You have to come back to the City Club’.”

“I did, and I had a goal to reach for again. In fact, I was playing with Marcia on the day I finally received the final silver points to make Life Master. The Tournament we were playing in was called The Michael Graham Memorial Sectional Tournament. Michael Graham was a member of the City Club who was also a great bridge player in spite of the many adversities he faced from early-onset Parkinson’s Disease. It was an especially meaningful day for me.”

Congratulations, Nita, on your accomplishment!

Hope to see many of you in Reno!

Dennis Carman
District 12 Director

