

Reno By Martha Hildreth (473)

An Academy is defined as a center of learning in a specialized field led by a group of experts. At the Reno Bridge Academy expert players and assistants bring their passion for the game to new and continuing players through a multi-faceted learning program. See our website at renobridge.com/reno-bridge-academy.

What are the results? In February the table count (302) exceeded 300 for the first time in the club's history (in a month without a special event.) March's count (326) broke that record. In the first three months of 2024 our table count was up 42% over 2023.

The club's leadership and organization, as well as the spacious and comfortable environment of the Mathewson Bridge Center helps bring players in. However, the outreach/ teaching program of the Academy is central to the expansion. Over the last three years, it has brought in many new members. The program also helps retain newer players through ongoing lessons and mentorship.



Unit 473

Within the academy, Jill Wallace, assisted by Brad Stone, has created a structured series of courses that begins with Bridge One, then continues with two courses on bidding and playing (Bridge Two and Three). These are followed up with several specialized courses such as competitive bidding, and bidding and playing NT. The beginning lessons get students practice-playing right away. For advanced beginners, there are workshops on topics such as opening leads, specific conventions, and filling out the convention card. Two of our experts offer weekly drop-in instructional sessions with lessons and

supervised play. On Saturdays, practice play is open to all students and club members. Often, it's "stratified" with boards for three different levels of play, focusing on specific aspects of the game that student have been learning.

The Academy encourages students to play in sanctioned games as soon as they are willing to give it a try. Limited games happen each week and there are regular stratified and limited sectionals. In fact, the next one is coming up soon: April 18-21.

Working with beginning students is gratifying and inspirational. Students are enthusiastic; if they get perplexed during practice play, coaches are on hand. Many club members have stepped up to play this role. It's fun for the members and it helps their own game.

The Academy students have told us they appreciate the cognitive and social benefits of the game. One of the newest students, Ray Gonzalez who works in wealth management, has decided to take time from his very full schedule to learn the game. He had observed that bridge players among his clientele were notably "sharp" mentally. Bridge, he says, "develops new neural pathways and at the same time develops new friendships." In bridge lessons he has found "joy" as well as "intellectual and social stimulation."

The Reno Bridge Academy could not happen without the steady contributions and enthusiasm of several experts and coaches. However, the Academy owes its inception to the vision and skill of a special individual, Jill Wallace. Jill began teaching online courses during the difficult years of Covid. She continues to expand and perfect the curriculum as it has moved largely to F2F. To sustain the Academy, Jill is mentoring a new generation of teachers. Several of them will go with her to the ABTA this July in Toronto. It's an exciting new trajectory.