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RECRUITING AND KEEPING A BRIDGE CENTER'S MOST IMPORTANT ASSET: NEW MEMBERS *Martha Hildreth*

The Mathewson Bridge Center in Reno, NV has had remarkable success in the last few years. In March we set an all-time table record of 326. In the first three months of 2024 our table count was up 42% over the same period in 2023. Recruiting and teaching new students has been the key to this success. This article is written from the perspective of a player who began bridge with the club just before COVID, has taken lots of lessons, and is a coach within Jill Wallace's instructional program.

A bit of history: before COVID, our club had a small group of newbies who were playing and being coached in a 49er game. Then came the pandemic. To keep things going, our master instructor, Jill Wallace, started online coaching and online lessons in 2019. This turned out to be the kick-off for an ever-expanding instructional effort that has continued ever since.

When F2F returned, the beginning bridge courses grew. Led by Jill, the club took advantage of the Learn to Play Bridge in a Day curriculum and ACBL's Project Boost to attract more beginners. The results: 29 first-time bridge students in March 2023, and nearly as many this last March. Now Bridge 1, 2 and 3 are all taught F2F three times a year. The courses for more advanced students, on topics such as NoTrump bidding/play and competitive bidding, are taught online using Zoom and Shark Bridge. All F2F and online lessons are recorded for review.

The instructional strategies had grown organically. Because students learn in different ways, not just from the white board, there are pre-dealt hands to play at every lesson and exercises to do on paper with their tablemates (obviously, lots of course prep). Jill has discovered that it's important to get students playing right away so that they can have some fun right away! For example, after very basic instruction on the first day of the eight-week course of Bridge 1, students play Notrump and Trump games. This works because there is a coach at each table. Over the last two years, about 30 club members had stepped up to coach for all three beginner courses, Bridge 1, 2 and 3. We donate our time because it's fun. Jill mentors the coaches to really coach and not just tell students what to do. And she reminds us to smile!

The positive atmosphere that Jill creates in these lessons is crucial. There is no such thing as a dumb question, and there are lots of laughs as Jill shares her own bridge foibles.

A successful teaching and support program such



Instructors and Coaches L-R: Brad Stone, Shannon Dressel, Jill Wallace, Don Rogers, Tam Gandert



Beginning students study their exercises

as ours needs club-wide support. Besides Jill's lessons there is much more to the program and more people involved aside from the coaches. Brad Stone assists Jill in the three beginning courses and joins Jill in practice sessions that are held each Saturday and open to all members and students. Two other expert players, Bob Luebke and Don Rogers, offer weekly drop-in coaching sessions. Students need games in which they feel comfortable, so the club has weekly 49er, 149er, 199er and 299er games, and a pro/am game.

It's important to expose beginners to the wider world of ACBL. Our limited sectionals four times a year also draw in players from nearby communities. In recognition of this success, Reno was chosen as one of three sites for the upcoming non-life master tournament.

The Mathewson Bridge Center's celebrity bridge teacher events bring together students at all levels. These bi-yearly seminars have been taught by Barbara Seagram, Robert Todd and Michael Berkowitz with more to come. Our bridge players hear from our speakers in the morning, have lunch and then play in a game in the afternoon, limited or unlimited. At the last event with Robert, we had 118 enthusiastic attendees including many students from the courses.



A rapt crowd listens to Michael Berkowitz



The well-dressed celebrity teacher

All these programs have led to the creation of the Reno Bridge Academy. You can learn more about the events, games, upcoming tournaments, and Reno Bridge Academy's teaching and support program at:

<https://renobridge.com>

Jill Wallace also has a students' website at:

<https://alwayssup4bridge.com>

which provides the schedule and descriptions of all courses, links to course materials, and practice hands to play.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

I was so excited with my first time meeting 28 fourth grade students at my neighborhood elementary school that I totally forgot to take pictures.

My daughter teaches fourth grade and has a math club at 7:30 in the morning (45 minutes before school starts) Wednesdays. I approached her about forming a Bridge Club at her school and we brainstormed whether it would be better to toward the end of the school year, to get give them a taste of Bridge, or just go cold turkey in the fall.

I'm writing this because last week we had 28 students in our introductory Bridge class in which we played "War" and got the hang of "NoTrump". The word got around campus and the next week we got 20 more students bringing us up 48 interested kids. The experience players helped the new ones and off we went into lesson number two.

Our plan for the next three weeks is to keep them excited enough to want to return in the fall to continue the fun.

*Linda Mackenzie and Valerie Voboril
Richmond St., Elementary school
El Segundo, California*

APPLE BASKET Brenda Montague

Our popular Apple Basket contest will take place again at our meeting in Toronto. Please submit the method you use to interest your students in a particular concept, hand or a dilemma that they frequently encounter. An entry may be a way that you present a concept, things you do in class to hold their interest, or any other way that you make their learning experience memorable. Your tip must be original.



Remember that your successful technique(s) may be of great use to other teachers, so please send in your best teaching tip. We request your discretion in not speaking about your submission until the voting process is finished on the final day of the convention; we may ask the winner and top place finishers to showcase their entries. Bring your own props, if needed, to our annual convention in Toronto. You may submit more than one entry!

Please send your submission directly in the body of an email or as a Word file. Submissions must be received by June 30, 2024. They may be made by regular mail to: Brenda Montague, 14 Capstan Way, Swampscott MA 01907, or you can send an email to: applebasket@abthome.com