

History, Grand River Bridge Club

As at March 1, 2017

Setting the Scene

In 2010, Waterloo Region had four ACBL-sanctioned bridge clubs operating a total of eight games each week.

- The KW Bridge Studio, owned and operated by Helen MacDonald, rented space at the Waterloo Adult Recreation Centre to operate non-master and open games on Monday afternoons, Wednesday evenings, and Friday evenings. Attendance averaged 10 tables in each section for the Monday games and 4-5 tables for each section for the evening games.
- Baker's Bridge Club, owned and operated by David Baker, rented space at the St. John's Lutheran Church Coach House on Wednesday afternoons and, for a time, Friday afternoons. Attendance averaged 7 tables for the Wednesday games and 5 tables for the Friday games.
- Partners Bridge Club, owned and operated by Cindy Mahn and Liz McDowell, rented space at the St. John's Lutheran Church Coach House on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Attendance averaged 7 tables for each game.
- The Cambridge Seniors' Bridge Club, owned and operated by Joy Dundas, rented space at various locations to operate non-master games Monday afternoons and Thursday mornings; and open games every other Tuesday evening and every fourth Saturday. Attendance averaged 12 tables for the morning and afternoon games and 9 tables for the evening games.

Dianne Aves, Deaun Moulton, and Ted Boyd were concerned that the Coach House games, because of their location and financial situation, would not survive. An open meeting was held at the Coach House on November 4, 2010 to assess interest in a combined non-profit club and a new location. The meeting was attended by approximately 40 players. The consensus of the meeting was that interest in the creation of a permanent, dedicated location for bridge in the region existed, that planning was necessary to show financial viability for what would be a significant undertaking.

A series of meetings was held among some interested players and the owners of Partners' Bridge Club and Baker's Bridge Club. Both clubs noted that they could not afford to pay the rent and renovations for a retail leased location, but were willing to consider a merger of their clubs and to work together to find a permanent location. Concerns were raised about the viability of a non-profit club. There was a model in the recently opened Guelph Bridge Club.

Ted spoke at length with two Ontario bridge clubs that were the result of previously-existing merged clubs – the Bridge Centre of Niagara and the Nickel City Bridge Club in Sudbury. Their advice was that if the clubs were to merge at a dedicated location, table counts would increase substantially, in the range of 40% to 50%. They added that fundraising would be feasible if a suitable business plan could be developed, since many of the new club's potential members could access sufficient capital to support a club.

Ted developed a business plan with financial projections for the first three years of the new club. The projections showed that if the club could achieve reasonable membership and table count numbers it

could break even in two years and that fundraising could sustain the initial costs of start-up and operation. All local clubs were invited to join their clubs together to form a non-profit bridge club to which they would donate their assets, the owners of the Coach House games accepted the invitation.

Formation of a Non-Profit Corporation and Premises Search

With the help of Dave Shortt of Borden Ladner Gervais, the Grand River Bridge Club was incorporated on April 11, 2011.

Deaun convened the first meeting of the corporation on May 14, 2011. That meeting created the membership, approved the governing by-laws and elected the first Board of Directors, Dianne Aves, David Baker, Ted Boyd, Malkin Howes, Cindy Mahn, Liz McDowell, and Deaun Moulton – the three original owners, the three original interested players, and Malkin Howes. The board elected Ted, President, Cindy, Vice-President, Deaun, Treasurer, and Dianne, Secretary.

A fundraising committee was struck at this meeting, since renting a location would require money for renovations and a period of lease payments. By mid-June, a small committee headed by Al Charters had raised \$7,500 in zero-interest ten-year loans from eight local players. Fundraising was halted at this point, until the board was better able to elucidate its needs and build a compelling case.

A search for a new site was launched. Several possible locations were inspected and offers were made on two different sites over the summer of 2011. The site needed to be large enough to seat 15 tables requiring 80 square feet of space each, have two washrooms, and kitchen facilities. Parking was critically important, since most bridge players arrive singly, park near their club and leave their car in place for three and a half hours. The search ran afoul of Kitchener by-laws which state that a neighbourhood plaza, which is the designation of most small plazas, may not contain a bridge club. Entreaties to the Kitchener City Planning Department and a meeting with the mayor bore no fruit.

The board took advantage of the search time to develop a governing model and policies for the new club. A 13-part set of By-Laws was passed; a non-compete policy was agreed; Mircea Giurgeu developed a website for the new club and Alison Burkett became its first webmistress; a series of sub-committees was established; and annual membership, lesson, and game fees were set.

During this period, the owners of the Coach House games agreed to continue their normal operations. The players were advised that a non-profit club had been formed but that nothing would change until a permanent location had been found.

The first annual general meeting was held on September 27, 2011, and a new board was elected: Ted Boyd (President), Cindy Mahn (Vice-President), Malkin Howes (Treasurer), Roz Shortt (Secretary), Dianne Aves, Dan Korbel, Mike Peng, and Dave Quarrie.

In mid-November of 2011, a possible location at 330 Gage Avenue was identified. It was first viewed by board members on December 2, 2011 and, after considerable discussion and with strong legal support by Dave Shortt, a five-year lease with an option to renew for three more years was negotiated and signed on January 27, 2012, effective March 1, 2012.

The board asked Dave Quarrie to oversee the renovations which included adding a washroom, building a kitchen, removing a partition, tiling some of the floor and drywalling the open areas. Dave, Roz Shortt, and Margot Stockie worked with the contractor on the design of the facility. Many members donated time, painting, cleaning, moving, and other work needed to match the facility to our needs. Significant donations of equipment were made by Gary Stockie, Moira Hollingsworth, and Paul Puncher. The original cost estimate was \$15,000, but extra demands saw it increase to \$23,600.

The identification of this location galvanized the board into a flurry of activity in the following areas.

Fundraising

Fundraising restarted in earnest in January 2012, with a target of \$30,000 and a list of potential donors. By the official opening, a total of \$23,500 had been raised from 24 players. A brief effort was made to approach local companies for support, but this approach was abandoned in favour of asking local bridge players to support the new club by lending it money.

Goals and Objectives

Two planning and goal-setting sessions were held on January 9, 2012 and January 16, 2012. The following mission statement and goals were set by the approximately 35 participants.

Mission Statement: Play and Learn Bridge in a Welcoming Environment

Goals:

1. Develop a more comfortable atmosphere at the club as measured by feedback from its members
2. Increase the number of weekly games by one per year and the number of regular players by 30 by the end of 2013
3. Break even on operations by 2013 and pay back the loans by 2016
4. Offer bridge lessons to players of all skills levels and increase the number of members by 20 per year
5. Increase membership by 10% annually and change the novice/master ratio from 40/60 to 60/40

Mentoring

Larry Woods first introduced the idea of a widespread mentoring program for the club, developing a two-level concept. Level 1 mentors would cater to newer players, helping them to integrate into the club. Level 2 mentors would take advantage of the high skill level of the club's experienced players and pair them with intermediate players wishing to improve their games. Mentor week was held on June 18 to promote this concept. Larry's "Holding Hands" mentoring program was introduced in the summer of 2012 and continues to this day.

Lessons

Dianne Aves was a staunch advocate of the development of a comprehensive set of lessons and developed a plan to offer lesson series several times a year. Spring 2012 saw 65 registrants in four lesson series: Beginners, two Intermediate I sections, and 2 over 1. As time went on, this teaching program increased and strengthened, with lessons for advanced players being added and specialized

courses and modules for players of all levels being offered. Bridge lessons have become a hallmark of the club with over 150 lesson registrants every year.

Ontario Trillium Foundation Grant

The Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) is a government organization that provides grants to non-profit organizations starting a new venture or upgrading. The new club applied for support in March, 2012 but were refused on the grounds that the club was applying for renovations to a rented space. A new application that avoided this problem was submitted in the fall of 2012 and received approval on March 15, 2013 for a total of \$23,400. The grant money was used over the next year to purchase a new computer and software (\$1,598), a sound system (\$906), a dealing machine (\$5,163), and a Bridgemate electronic scoring system (\$3,338). In addition, the club spent \$3,001 on architect's fees to design a new wheelchair-accessible washroom. It turned out to not be feasible to build such a washroom, and the club returned \$8,323 to the OTF with thanks for their contribution. The club continues today to make full use of all of the capital purchases made with OTF funds.

Game Director Guidelines

A set of guidelines for game directors was established. These guidelines included a policy of non-playing directors, a process for responding to undesirable conduct, and affirmation that the game director is in control of the game and club while a game is in progress.



GRBC Logo

A logo was designed for the club by Mike Peng, with the able help of his son – referencing the Bridgeport bowstring bridge spanning the Grand River.

2012 Milestones

Official Opening

The club held its first game on Tuesday, April 3, 2012, and the official opening took place during the week of April 28 through May 4. The week included free lessons for beginners on Saturday, April 28; a reception on Tuesday, May 1; Bridge Bingo on Wednesday, May 2; a BBQ and potluck on Thursday, May 3; and a Barbara Seagram Play of the Hand seminar on Friday, May 4.

Addition of New Games

After much discussion, a relaxed mentor/mentee game was added on Monday evenings, effective May 28, 2012, with the goal being to encourage more experienced players to partner newer players. The game was designed to allow the director and mentors to give pointers at the table as requested. The table counts for this game languished through the summer of 2012 but picked up in the fall, and is currently one of our most popular games.

The club added an evening open game on Tuesday, September 18. Unfortunately, this game never gained traction, consistently ran with approximately three tables, and was cancelled on December 2, 2012.

Supervised play/bridge lab sessions were begun on Wednesday mornings.

Special Events

- The ACBL encourages its clubs to hold charity events, and the new club's first event was held on May 20, 2012 in support of Caring Partners, a local charity that helps a school in Africa.
- Sylvia Bell sponsored a special individual game in honour of Ethel Robinson, a well known local bridge player, donating prizes and a special trophy that she renovated. The first of these games was held on June 12, 2012, and this tradition has been continued.

Newsletter

Editor Malkin Howes began to publish an email newsletter dubbed "The Alert" on August 27, 2012. The Alert now goes out to approximately 700 readers each week.

Club Manager

Judi Carter became the club's first manager in May, 2012. The Board moved to provide support for the Club Manager and Carolyn Baechler took on that role in June 2013. Jim Dalgliesh took over the Club Manager's role when Judi resigned in 2013, and he has been assisted by Joan Slover and a working management team since then.

Town Hall Meeting

The club's first town hall meeting was held on September 12, 2012 to discuss its future activities. Important issues were member/volunteer expectations, social activities, and facilities. Since then, other town hall meetings have been held to update members and seek their input on pertinent issues, including changes to the facilities and the club's finances.

Subsequent Years

Year 2 (2012-2013)

The second annual general meeting was held on September 30, 2012, electing the following new board: Ted Boyd (President), Dean Moulton (Vice-President), Malkin Howes (Treasurer), Roz Shortt (Secretary), Dianne Aves, Susan Lawton, Adrian Record, and Larry Woods. Adrian joined the board as a representative of the Guelph Bridge Club marking the beginning of a very cordial long-term relationship. Although the club's fiscal year is July 1 – June 30, it started operations in April, meaning that at this meeting the board reported the results of only three months of operation. At the end of that period, the new club had achieved table counts of 292 and 104 members. The unaudited financial statements showed a surplus of \$2,400 and liquid assets of \$11,600. Students attending classes to June 2012 were 71.

A board retreat was held on October 19, 2012 to review the activities of the club. It was agreed to move away from being a "working board" towards being a policy-making board, establishing a management team to oversee the day-to-day operations of the club.

In recognition of the efforts of individuals to support newer players, the board created a Mentor Award in the name of Grant Fryer to memorialize his contributions. Subsequent members so recognized were Al Charters, Malkin Howes, and Ted Boyd.

A Friday afternoon game restricted to players with fewer than 500 master points was added on April 5, 2013, and it has become one of the club's most popular games.

Deaun Moulton and Dianne Aves persuaded the Waterloo Regional District School Board to allow bridge lessons to be taught to grade 8 enrichment students at Centennial Public School. Approximately 25 students enjoyed bridge lessons for three years, with assistance from Roz Shortt, including sessions at the GRBC and competition at the Youth Games at the Toronto Regional.

Year 3 (2013-2014)

The club's third annual general meeting was held on September 15, 2013, electing the following board: Deaun Moulton (President), Susan Lawton (Vice-President), Malkin Howes (Treasurer), Roz Shortt (Secretary), Stephen Carpenter, Jim Dalglish, John Hayward, and Adrian Record. The board reported that the table counts from July 2012 through June 2013 were 1,174 and that the number of members as at June 30, 2013 was 193. The unaudited report showed a surplus of \$4,420 and liquid assets of \$21,200. In the course of the year, the club became liable to pay GST, but the board decided against raising its fees to reflect this additional expense. Students attending classes to June 2013 were 186.

Team league games were offered in the fall of 2013, attracting 10 teams. Team league games were offered twice more but have languished because of lack of interest.

Through several board meetings, a management team structure was set as eight management segments, appointing one or two members to lead each department – Administration (Jim Dalglish and Joan Slover), Premises (Stephen Carpenter), Hospitality (Bill McDonald), Games (Dave Baker), Lessons (Cindy Mahn), Marketing (Margot Stockie) Events (Liz McDowell) and Membership (Ted Boyd). A board/management team retreat was held on June 16, 2014 to review board/management team relations and to update the club's goals and objectives.

A Wednesday morning restricted to members with fewer than 100 master points was added on April 23, 2014, and a second supervised play/bridge lab session on Thursday evenings.

Dianne Aves received a grant from the ACBL to offer Learn Bridge in a Day (LBIAD) at the club on January 11, 2014. A full house of 48 new players attended and was taught by Melissa Bernhardt from Georgia, Dianne Aves, and a group of the club's volunteers. Subsequently, LBIAD has been offered three more times, introducing many new players to the game.

Jim Dalglish replaced Malkin Howes as Treasurer in December, 2013. Bob Livermore was elected to the board to replace John Hayward. Susan Lawton took over as president when Deaun Moulton resigned in June, 2013.

Fay Teal, a popular local bridge player, passed away in July, 2013 and left a substantial donation to the club in her will.

Year 4 (2014-2015)

The fourth annual general meeting was held on September 21, 2014. The new board was Susan Lawton (President), Malkin Howes (Vice-President), Jim Dalgliesh (Treasurer), Roz Shortt (Secretary), Stephen Carpenter, Robert Livermore, and Adrian Record. The board reported that the year's table counts were 1,624 while the number of members was 206. The unaudited financial statements showed a surplus of \$13,600 and liquid assets of \$40,200. Students attending classes to June 2014 were 191.

A Friday evening open game was added on August 15, 2014.

On January 1, 2015, a New Year's Day Swiss teams event was instituted, and 16 tables enjoyed champagne and toasted the New Year with bridge and lunch. This tradition was continued.

On August 29, 2015, the first annual inter-club Swiss teams challenge was held with the Guelph club. The GRBC won.

The five-year rental contract on the Gage Street location was due to expire in March 2017, and the Board recognized that the club needed a larger site to accommodate its growth. The Board convened a sub-committee to commence a search for a new site; the search is ongoing.

Year 5 (2015-2016)

The fifth annual general meeting was held on September 23, 2015. The new board was Susan Lawton (President), David Longstaff (Vice-President), Jim Dalgliesh (Treasurer), Vivian Zochowski (Secretary), Stephen Carpenter, Moira Hollingsworth, and Carl Lucas. The board reported table counts of 2,770 and membership of 235. The unaudited financial statements showed a surplus of \$17,590 and liquid assets of \$66,200. Students attending classes to June 2015 were 189.

Following a survey, a 0-99 masterpoints game was added on Thursday nights.

Year 6 (2016-2017)

The sixth annual general meeting was held on September 14, 2016. The new board was David Longstaff (President), Jim Dalgliesh (Treasurer), Vivian Zochowski (Secretary), Stephen Carpenter, Moira Hollingsworth, Susan Lawton, Carl Lucas, and Adrian Record. The board reported table counts of 3,340 and membership of 258. This made the GRBC the 111th-largest ACBL-sanctioned club in terms of table counts – and 16th in Canada. The unaudited financial statements showed a surplus of \$22,650 and liquid assets of \$87,189. Students attending classes to June 2016 were 152.

On August 27, 2016, the Guelph Bridge Club won the second annual challenge match.

In September, 2016, a new website platform named Pianola was introduced.

The GRBC was founded by and is operated by volunteers. The club's volunteers range from Board Members through dealing machine operators, the members of the food committee to people who bring goodies, the members of the Management Team to the club's mentors, the marketers to the special events staff, and the librarians to the launderers. As well, we depend on our ACBL-sanctioned

Game Directors to run the games and post the results and the teachers and bridge lab leaders who have made lessons such a large part of our success.