

WBL Board Minutes

January 24, 2024

Board Members Attending: Hadi Abushakra, Ron Zucker, Bob Ives, Bob Bell, Alex Stille, Alex Gretsinger, Kim Gandy, Carole Banks, Clyde Kruskal. Board Member Absent: Melanie Manfield. Brad Theurer (Tournament Chair) Ted Ying (former Club Manager), Lloyd Rawley (new Club Manager), Linda Marshall (Communications Chair), and Margot Hennings (ACBL Board President and Region 4 representative to the Board) also attended.

Minutes: The Board approved the minutes of the December meeting.

Visit from ACBL President: Margot briefed the Board on the current state of the ACBL, with special attention to the new 5-5-5 initiative, which seeks to provide units with financial incentives to retain existing members and recruit new members. She stressed that 5-5-5 was not intended to be punitive and agreed that it might have different effects in different units, depending on differences in recent unit efforts to recruit and retain members and in other unit characteristics.

Margot characterized Bronia Jenkins, the new ACBL Chief Executive Officer, as dedicated, energetic, open to feedback from the membership, oriented to measuring the effects of her policies and innovations, and willing to try new initiatives and adjust or abandon them if they were not sufficiently effective. Margot said that these were the kinds of leadership qualities that the ACBL needed in the current challenging environment.

Kim noted that ACBL membership had been declining slowly before the pandemic, but the pandemic had dramatically accelerated the trend. She said that the smaller decline in 2023 showed encouraging signs of a return to the pre-pandemic pattern. She viewed this as a bad time to reduce funds going to the units and clubs, which would need to spend money to attract and retain new players. Kim pointed out that, despite the membership trends, ACBL funds appeared to be increasing, and she expressed the hope that available funds could be invested in education, retention, and recruitment.

Linda observed that member engagement had been a problem during the pandemic and that some players had been lost to online bridge. Ron saw the main threat to in person bridge elsewhere-- as disincentives to attend smaller games with fewer players. He said that a few big games, perhaps beginning with a "welcome back" night, might help a lot. Alex G. agreed, stressing that small games in the lower flights were the biggest problem. Ted reported that Rebecca Allen was planning to bring her novice bridge students to the unit game soon and intended to continue doing this once a month. He hoped that this would build momentum for reestablishing the unit game as a bigger and more attractive event. The Board will not charge novices for attending their first unit game; they will be charged \$5 per session after that.

Board members raised the issue of developing programs in schools to attract young people to the game. Ron noted that America's decentralized education system created practically insurmountable barriers to widespread adoption of school bridge programs. Ted said that past efforts have not led K-12 students to start playing duplicate. Carole reminded the Board that the WBL Education foundation had available funds that could be used for promising efforts in bridge

education. Margot commented that Patty Tucker, a leading bridge teacher based in Atlanta, has found that it is necessary to establish a strong pipeline between bridge classes and big club games that can create an appealing atmosphere for new players.

Margot said that the ACBL Board is working to develop a clearer strategic perspective and plan that recognizes the diversity both among individual groups of players (e.g., world class experts and casual, occasional club players; players who prefer face-to-face and those who prefer online) and among ACBL units and regions. The plan will also need to address issues involving tournament funding (e.g., playing space and hotel room blocks for regional and national tournaments) and criteria for selecting a provider for online bridge events (ACBL's contract with BBO expires in 2025).

Margot also noted that, as the membership ages, volunteers are in increasingly short supply, which limits our ability to run bridge events and recruit new members. She emphasized that sustaining and increasing volunteer participation will be critical to ACBL's future.

Historian: Peter Boyd is retiring as WBL historian. Barb Devaney and Alex Stille have agreed to replace him. Peter told Alex S. that he has a large volume of saved material and gets occasional questions about unit history and requests for information to be used in obituaries. Alex S. said he has some available storage space for the historian's papers. Board members agreed that information on the division of the WBL into two local units (WBL and NVBA) over the issue of racial integration ought to be archived, since it might be interesting for historians. Alex S. said that Barb was interested in interviewing past chairs of the WBL Board. Kim suggested that it might be possible to involve the membership in identifying people in our old photographs.

Treasurer's Report: Bob I. reported that the sectional had a net loss of about \$1000. This does not include the \$300 for Friday between-session pizza that Melanie Manfield generously volunteered to fund in view of Friday's inclement weather or \$558 from players who purchased lunches at the tournament. Carole said that reductions in free plays and frugality on hospitality had helped reduce our losses. Bob I. said that the WBL's overall funds declined by about \$6000 last year. He estimated that monthly unit game losses were about \$1000.

Sectionals: The Schweinhaut Center will be unable to serve as the site for more than one sectional in 2025. We have arranged to play the January sectional there next year. In searching for a suitable site for the other sectionals, the WBL has been contacting other Montgomery County recreational facilities, Montgomery County schools, and other venues in its search for an affordable site that is in a good location and has enough space. Carole noted that our decreasing size makes some smaller venues feasible and that we might also consider sites we have used in the past.

Attendance at the January sectional, despite Friday's snow, was 5.5 tables larger than at the sectional in June 2023.

Growing the Game Committee: The committee is considering creation of an online bulletin board to help players find suitable partners. This would enable players to describe what kind of partner they are looking for, what bidding system they play, their level of experience, and other relevant information.

The committee plans to discuss ideas that Melanie and Kim have for growing the game; Linda suggested that the committee consider some promising initiatives that the NVBA is planning to try

to entice new players to participate in duplicate bridge. Carole said that it would be good for the committee to focus its efforts on a limited number of new initiatives.

Annual Meeting: The 2024 annual membership meeting will take place on May 18 at the next sectional.

The next WBL Board meeting will be Tuesday, March 26.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Bell

Secretary