

# Birmingham Duplicate Bridge Club

by Richard Telkamp

**B**irmingham, Alabama, a community of about one million people, is home to one of ACBL's elite three star clubs. Elected officers and a board of directors govern the Birmingham Duplicate Bridge Club, which in the last five years has grown from 166 to almost 400 members. A tradition of rotation of officers and inclusion of newer members in leadership roles maintains organizational vitality and fresh ideas. Current club President, Kristina Oliver, believes that a foundation of longtime members; committed game directors; a dedicated club manager, Carolyn Neyman; and enthusiastic newer players have established a true esprit de corps. Cooperation with other area clubs, through Unit 157, has also been a positive factor.

The club's growth turnaround began when Bonnie Jung, Bruce and Kris Oliver, and Carolyn Opdyke offered to present the Easybridge! program, using financial support from ACBL and the local Unit 157. Club members assisted not only in promoting the program, but also in helping with marketing, refreshments, registration, and other support services. The club is currently conducting its fourth series, with twenty-four tables of brand new players enjoying their sixth fun-filled

week of bridge. Newcomers from previous programs are active in local games, sectional, regional and even National events. In addition, they are serving in board and other volunteer positions, bringing a wealth of talent to the organization. The club conducts seven weekly Newcomer games. In 2002 the number of tables in play totaled 5,124 ... an increase of 121% over the previous year!

With the success in attracting new players, the majority of the members have less than fifty masterpoints. The challenge of integrating newcomers into the mainstream has been met through a mentoring program, instituted by Past President Richard Telkamp. Experienced players commit to play twice a month with their "mentees" for a three-month period. In addition, the club realizes the importance of continuing to help new players improve their bridge skills and offers an education program for beginning to intermediate players ranging from two hour Easybridge! workshops to the eight week ACBL lesson series and Audrey Grant's "Improving Your Judgment" classes. Another

service is a new, free lending library, well stocked with the latest bridge titles, which was made possible through a generous donation of books from club member Frank Steward and is organized and run by club volunteers.

A couple of years ago the Birmingham club borrowed an idea from a letter to the editor of the ACBL Bulletin and began a "guaranteed partner" host program. Last year over seventy club members, some with thousands of masterpoints, volunteered to serve in the program.

Providing a clean, attractive location for club activities is a major contributor to success. A Facilities Chairman coordinates a crew of able members who insure that needed supplies are on hand and all runs smoothly.

Volunteer Harry Lauderdale has supervised expansion and remodeling of the club's current 2400 square foot facility with a passion and attention to detail that money could not buy, always on schedule and within the budget.

Making members aware of club activities and volunteer opportunities is facilitated through a weekly e-mail, the BhamBridgeNEWS, now in its second year. Its witty articles and member news is eagerly anticipated by the 269

"connected" members. Also, quarterly game and event calendars are established by the game Directors and communicated to the membership in advance through this venue.

The club continues to move forward with new ideas. A project in the works is bringing the ACBL school program to the Birmingham area. Through volunteer efforts, several local middle schools are committed or in the process of introducing bridge into their classrooms. Future goals are determined by the Board using a strategic planning process introduced by past President Doug Hoadley.

A club in the finest sense of the word, the Birmingham Duplicate Bridge Club is owned and operated by its membership. The intangible result of this superior volunteer activity is the level of caring and the warm interpersonal relationships that are built and sustained through a common interest in bridge—the world's greatest leisure activity.

**Birmingham Duplicate Bridge: 205-979-5929**



At a Board meeting, President **Kristina Oliver** and Past President **Doug Hoadley** (standing) review the club's strategic plan with (left to right) **Norma Temple**, **Mary Elizabeth Conaway**, V.P. **Charlotte Rueschenberg**, and **Frank Galloway**.