

Hilton Head Island Bridge Club

Imagine a club with members from Maine to Florida. That's the nature of the Hilton Head Island (SC) Bridge Club. Its roots started over 15 years ago with the formation of the Hilton Head Island Bridge Association.

How did a group whose connection was merely an interest in playing the game move toward managing and owning such a splendid bridge club? Like many successful projects it took timing, talent, and perseverance.

At first, the group worked together to take over the responsibility of the lease of a privately owned club on the island. They wanted what most bridge players would like: a good location, safe well-lit parking, a bright attractive reasonably priced playing space, and a working relationship with their landlord! Last year, they elected a new Board of Directors that had the expertise to work toward their vision. They had real estate, fund raising, and financial backgrounds ... and the energy to complete the task.

Lee Sturm, the first president of the Association, and Peter Seery, the President Elect, went looking for appropriate space. It was a challenge because they had neither the credit history nor any substantive financial reserves to encourage commercial property developers to talk seriously with them. Rejections were part of the long process. There was a positive side, however. They were able to present

an appealing growth chart which showed expansion from 40 tables per week in 1991 to 90 tables by 2002. They could also show that their fees brought in over \$100,000 annually. They had their attention getter!

Persistence paid off, and they did find a developer with whom they were able to establish a business rapport. They had found a good match. A center that had all the features they wanted and a developer who could see the potential in having a bridge club as part of the mix. The membership could help populate any of the six nearby eateries before and after games. There was a collection of French, Italian, Mexican, Chinese, and pub restaurants ... and even a cooking school that served breakfast and lunch.

But wait, there was more to it than that. There was one

more challenge that could have been an insurmountable obstacle. The association was still carrying a nine-month lease on its existing location and didn't feel it could carry two leases at the same time. The new landlord agreed with the assessment and gave them a significant "abatement" or curtailing of rent. In short, they had found a developer who saw them as a tenant that would likely be there for a long period of time and who was therefore willing to make the up front investment necessary. This was the ideal partnership; each party had something the other wanted.

There was still work to be done. The association needed an additional \$55,000 to start the bridge club. Finally, at a

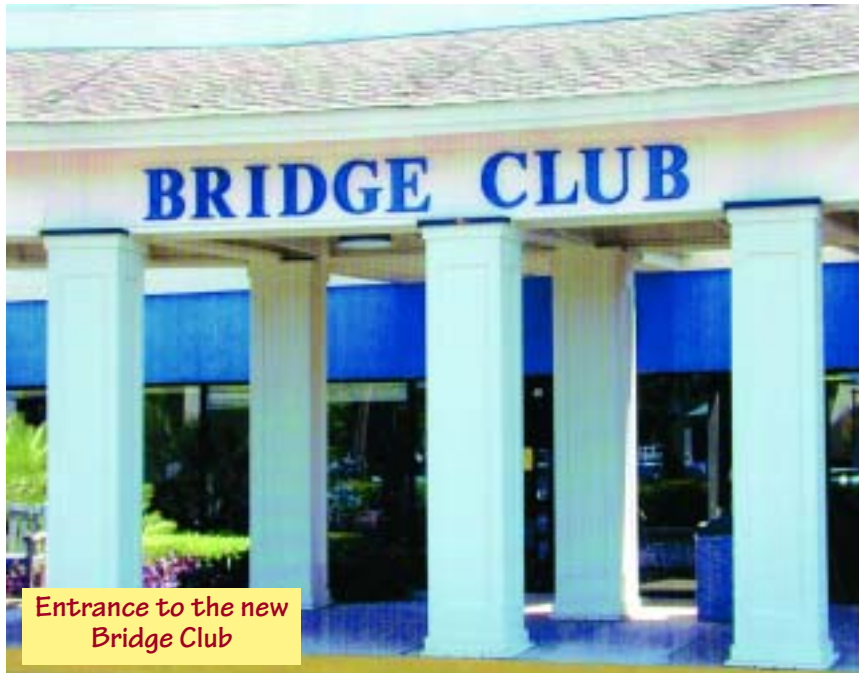
Town Hall style meeting, a full 97% of their on-Island members joined a new Stakeholder Program and raised the necessary funds.

Once the physical needs had been met, attention turned to features that would make the club grow. Communication with the members was important and Mike Ray redesigned the club's existing website into a more user-friendly format.

Then the focus moved to the bridge training program. Frank Deakon, who had success with the Easybridge! program, was committed to moving overseas. Kathie Walsh, a former college professor and then current Board Member, took over the challenge. Her outstanding success is due to many factors: her unbridled enthusiasm for the game and the warmth of her personality; her diligence in conveying particulars of the program to the local media; her personal touch with countless hours on the phone.

The Association is proud of its achievement, and rightly so. Its success story shows the importance of good will, talent, and synergism ... the right team at the right time.

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Entrance to the new
Bridge Club