

# The Bridge Center of Rockford

The Bridge Center of Rockford is member owned and a three-star club—the American Contract Bridge League’s highest ranking. It started in 1986 when Dr. Robert Whitsitt sold the club to the Unit. The members then bought it back over a four-year period. Now the eight members of the Board of Directors make decisions and guide the activities of the club. They all work together to make the club the success that it is.

The manager, Kathy Owens, handles fiscal responsibilities and daily operations. Her determination and enthusiasm is seen in the way she handled the club’s recent move. Craig Bontjes, the President of the club, has high praise for Kathy. “Our club growth required us to relocate. Despite the challenges with finding the right space, dealing with property managers, running out of time due to the holidays and the end of our lease, Kathy remained a rock—and none of this stopped her from leading the club in their participation in Bridge Week in North America. The result was that the club received nation-wide recognition for bringing non-ACBL members into the club and signing up 14 new members to the league.

The spirit of the Bridge Center of Rockford was in full force and very visible during that week! A kick off theme party was held Monday Evening. Players came dressed in nostalgic 30’s fashions. Leaping Lizards! They had Jane without Tarzan, a couple of riverboat gamblers, as well as hats, hose with seams, boas, and stoles. Needless to say, a great time was had by all! And it carried on throughout the week. Hands from the actual Culbertson-Lenz match were used in their week of Marathon Bridge. They had a pajama party with hot chocolate, a pizza party and midnight madness, breakfast with a bridge tip and Rubber Bridge, a pro-am game, two sessions of Swiss team play on Saturday and the finale was a pot-luck and game on Sunday.

The Board of Directors gets involved in many ways. Craig Bontjes, the president, in addition to directing the board, substitutes as a game director when needed. Judy Coffey is in charge of decorating and her seasonal changes make the club a fun place. Pam Eden produces the newsletter. Mary Belle Moss can be found stirring things up in the kitchen at the club’s special events. Dennis Ryan acts as the Liaison with the Unit Board. Mary Jo Sergent is involved in the teaching program and Ed Stoyanoff is the Property Manager who does the shopping to make sure the club has the supplies needed to run the games. Dian Ulrich is the Novice representative. It’s a going concern.



**Craig Bontjes, Flo Pier, Kathy Owens, and Pam Eden.**

The game directors, in an entrepreneurial spirit, rent space from the club to run their games. This works well and gives the club a wide variety of playing opportunities.

The club worked hard for its three-star status. The goal is to promote a friendly atmosphere at the table. It has a good teaching program. Kathy Owens, the manager, will receive her Star Teacher pin, for teaching 100 students, at the Teachers’ Dinner at the regional in June.

The club participates in at least two ACBL special events in the year. They are strong recruiters of ACBL membership. They have a new player services program designed to welcome new players to the club games and create a comfortable atmosphere within the duplicate environment. On most of the games, they guarantee partners and there are games for limited master point players. There are bridge tips before some of the games. They have the pro-am games. There is a mentoring program, a club newsletter, special Intermediate newcomer activity at least once a year, and a social activity once a month. It takes a lot of work and commitment to become a three-star club!

The club was operating at a deficit in 1999 and now they’re operating on a profit. They’ve moved into the new location which has a classroom, kitchen area, and room for twice as many tables. Their games are growing. The Bridge Center of Rockford deserves the national recognition it received as part of Bridge Week in North America. If you’re in their neighborhood, drop in for a game.