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FALL 2021 NABC

93rd Fall North American Bridge Championships NABCDailyBulletin@acbl.org | Editors: Paul Linxwiler, Chip Dombrowski and Amy Casanova

Glasson to guide smaller Board as F2F bridge returns in 2022



It's a transition year for the ACBL as the return to face-to-face bridge continues. For the Board in particular, 2022 is unique, standing between a past when it was made up of 25 members and

it will consist of 13. Under the reorganization plan that was passed in 2020, for this transition year there are 20 members.

Overseeing these transitions is the new president, Joann Glasson of Pennington NJ, who has represented District 4 (eastern Pennsylvania, central New York, southern New Jersey and Delaware) since 2016.

In the years before the plan was passed, Glasson championed the idea of a smaller, more efficient Board. Considering the loss of membership that has been shrinking the

organization, shrinking the board seems even more prudent, she said. While serving on the governance committee and the board reorganization task force, Glasson was involved in designing the plan that is now being implemented. Now she'll have the opportunity to guide the process.

Other goals include stemming the tide of declining membership, getting technology issues resolved and improving communication within the Board and between the Board and management.

The big issue for the organization at the moment is continuing to bring back face-to-face bridge, which Glasson strongly supports.

"We have to do as much as we can to encourage face-to-face clubs and tournaments to come back," she said. "They provide a valuable resource to players, and that is also a source of new players."

While revitalizing face-to-face bridge is necessary for the long-term viability of the organization, in the short term it means pivoting away from the focus on more profitable online games. With that come financial implications suited to Glasson's skills and background.

"We have seen during the pandemic that online play is more profitable for the ACBL," she said. "In post-pandemic years, we will be dealing with

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Itabashi, Grabel lead LM Pairs

In today's qualifying round of the Nail Life Master Pairs, Mark Itabashi of Murrieta CA and Ross Grabel of Palm Desert CA scored 61.66% and 63.98% in the afternoon and evening sessions respectively to lead the event.

In second are Larry Sealy of Owens Cross Roads AL and Wafik Abdou of Bakersfield CA, who posted a strong 65.84% in the first qualifying session and 58.05% in the second.

Atlanta-area players Olin Hubert and Kevin Collins are currently sitting third.

Of the 130 pairs who entered the contest, 64 advanced to today's two-session final.

Hollman leads Soloway quals

The squad captained by Robert Hollman leads the field in the Soloway Knockout Teams after Friday's opening Swiss team qualifier. Hollman and company scored 113.59 victory points, setting the pace in the contest for today's conclusion of the Swiss qualifying set.

In second with 107.52 VPs is Warren Spector's team, while third place is occupied by Andrew Rosenthal's squad at 98.40 VPs.

Forty-two teams entered the event, and the top 32 at the end of today's session will advance to the

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the more delicate budget balancing that will be required without the online events that produced record profits. My background in finance and experience running a nonprofit organization will help to navigate this difficult issue."

Glasson served as president of Spirit Financial, a Philadelphia area credit union. While on a break from her career when her two sons were babies, she discovered bridge in the mid-1970s. Craving intellectual stimulation, she quickly became addicted to the game. She is now a Grand Life Master with eight national championships and over 15,000 masterpoints. She has three world medals, including silvers in the 2015 Venice Cup and 1994 women's teams. All but one of her titles are in women's events: the 2017 Truscott/USPC Senior Swiss Teams, which she shares with husband Bob Glasson.

When she and Bob married in 1983, they each had two sons the same ages, 8 and 11; they now have 10 grandchildren. When the kids were leaving the house in the early '90s, Glasson became involved in bridge administration, serving on the board of Philadelphia Unit 141 in various roles and then District 4: webmaster, editor of the District 4Spot and daily bulletins for district regionals, publicity chair, vice president, president. After serving as hospitality co-chair for the Philadelphia NABC in 1996, she was tournament co-chair in 2012 and 2018.

After retiring in 2011, Glasson began a second career, discovering a passion for teaching intermediate and advanced players. She hopes her perspective as a teacher will be beneficial in reversing the membership decline.

"I used to think I loved to play bridge more than anything else," Glasson said. "Now I realize it wasn't just the game. I really miss the social interactions. When I learned, it was all about going to the bar afterward to go over the hands."

The past two years of primarily online bridge have divided the membership into two groups: those who love it and those who hate it.

"Some absolutely want one and some want the other," Glasson said. "I have friends who say, 'I'll never go back,' and friends who say, 'I'll never play online.' We're going to have to keep both contingents engaged. The key is going to be to create a hybrid so that all players will have a product they want."

The ACBL lost about 18,000 members in the 17 months following May 2020, a little more than a thousand a month on average. That's not much more than the average losses during the two decades when the total membership number stayed relatively flat. The difference is there used to be about the same number of new members coming in each year as there were leaving: 11,000 in, 11,000 out.

But in the first 10 months of 2021, the ACBL gained just 3648 new members, losing that number plus 10,000 in the same period. It's not that members are leaving in droves. It's that many fewer new ones are coming in to replace them.

The key is teachers – those who offer beginning bridge lessons – and face-to-face clubs that provide a friendly environment for new players to get started.

While many bridge teachers saw the pandemic as an opportunity to bring their teaching online, many, many more did not. Glasson and some others on her district board called every teacher in District 4, trying to find out what they could do to support them in transitioning online. But the teachers weren't interested, Glasson found. They thought converting their materials would be too much work, so they decided to wait it out.

And without them and teachers like them across the ACBL in action, the number of new members plummeted to a fraction of those lost to death or nonrenewal.

That's why revitalizing face-to-face bridge is so critical. But how?

"I wish I knew the answer," Glasson said. "You can't drag people to the bridge table."