

ACBL DISTRICT 4 - MID-YEAR UPDATE TO THE BOARD

(no meeting)

June 18, 2025

INTRODUCTION

President Betsy Cutler decided that neither an in-person nor a virtual meeting was necessary due to the lack of action items to consider. Instead, the Secretary has published a compendium of reports submitted by officers, Committee Chairs & Coordinators and Regional Tournament Chairs.

REGIONAL DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Joann Glasson

The online bridge world is changing. The ACBL signed a new agreement with BBO effective June 1, 2025, which replaces any previous contracts.

The previous BBO contract gave BBO the exclusive right to give ACBL masterpoints to players competing online and to award masterpoints in robot games. BBO paid the ACBL \$550,000 annually plus the normal table fees for this privilege.

Under the new contract, there is no exclusivity of any kind. BBO and the ACBL will continue to work together to attract new bridge players and to increase online play under a revenue sharing agreement. This will allow other vendors like Shark Bridge, Real Bridge and IntoBridge to provide games on their platforms that award ACBL masterpoints, increasing the number of choices that bridge players have in their pursuit of masterpoints.

The goal is to provide a more competitive market and to get more players playing bridge. Real Bridge and Shark Bridge specialize in different kinds of platforms and each provides something different.

Real Bridge provides the opportunity for organized clubs and groups to hold their games on their platform, which closely resembles face-to-face play because of their audio and video capabilities. Real Bridge is a business-to-business model.

Bronia Jenkins, Executive Director of the ACBL, said, *"We are delighted to offer an ACBL sanction to RealBridge. Through RealBridge's work with the ACBL Educational Foundation and the ACBL's Social Bridge Nights, we have become familiar with their technology and their commitment to quality. We're confident that expanding the options available to players to include platforms like RealBridge is good for bridge."*

Shark Bridge, which has built its business on providing an excellent platform for teaching the game of bridge, is working with ACBL in the release of "Bridge War", an introductory bridge game that hopefully will attract new players to the game of bridge. Bridge War has no bidding, just trick taking fun. Shark Bridge is also planning to run daylong robot games to attract new players to its platform.

The new open online world will encourage innovation and give bridge players more opportunities to enjoy our game.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

The 2024 Lancaster minutes will be offered for approval at the October 31, 2025 Lancaster Board meeting.

The Secretary will announce his retirement after 22 years upon completing his current term of office which ends after the Lancaster Board meeting. Bill Herdle of U190 is expected to be nominated for the position at the annual Board meeting..

TREASURER'S REPORT

Pat Civale

Preliminarily, net income for the fiscal year ending May 31, 2025 is \$5,872.61 following a small plus in FY2024 and a number of years of losses. The District fund balance is \$80,003 and the National reserve fund balance is \$117,115.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Betsy Cutler

I went through my entire first year as president without any Executive Committee actions – what a difference a year makes. Please see the section on Executive Committee actions to review what has been approved.

It has been exciting to see growth in most of our regional and sectional tournaments. I hope this trend continues and that we have a truly huge NABC in July. The NABC committee chaired by John Dickenson and Ala Hamilton-Day is doing a fantastic job and has worked hard to make this event an amazing experience for all levels of players.

The passing of Elaine Weintraub was very hard for all of us, and I know that Kurt Engleman will be working hard to fill her shoes. There was a short period of no chair, but we should be back on an even keel moving forward.

District 4 has gotten word from the ACBL Charity Foundation that we are getting \$30,000 in grant money to be awarded to up to 5 charities. All unit presidents have been notified of the requirements to apply for grants of \$5,000 or more. The deadlines for this are hard and fast.

Unit 185, part of District 5, would like to dissolve and be merged into a few different unit, some in District 5 and some in District 4. Unit 185 has 2 somewhat active clubs - one in Altoona and one in Johnstown. The thought is to divide the unit with the areas closest to State College coming into District 4/Unit 217 and those closest to the Johnstown club being merged into the Pittsburgh unit.

I expressed a little concern that they be mindful about how close folks are to State College/Unit 217 and how close they are to Harrisburg/Unit 168. All the people in Unit 185 will be given a choice of which unit they want to be affiliated with once the map is drawn but new members from these areas will be assigned based on the ACBL zip code map.

The goal for this happening is September 1 of this year so I will have more info at the meeting in Lancaster.

RATIFICATION OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ACTIONS - COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Betsy Cutler

There have been six Executive Committee actions since the Lancaster Board meeting.

The Executive Committee has approved the following:

1. D4 is incorporated in Delaware. At Richard Popper's suggestion the registered representative is the District itself and our physical mailing address will become Harold Jordan's home address.
2. The monthly D4 game has been decreasing in attendance and is no longer profitable. The Executive Committee voted to suspend the games.
3. The ACBL changed the NAP from 3 to 4 flights. The extra subsidy paid by D4 for this flight will be \$400. The Executive Committee approved.
4. There will be a teacher Best Practices program at the Philadelphia Summer NABC costing attendees \$150. The Executive Committee approved a \$75 subsidy for D4 members completing the course.
5. Honor Elaine Weintraub with a Philadelphia NABC named event. The Committee approved a \$500 expenditure.
6. Appoint two new Rochester (Finger Lakes) tournament chairs: Gerry Steenberge ('26) and Ken Kallio ('27).

COMMITTEE REPORTS

PUBLICITY

Jeanne Gehret

No report.

DISTRICT 4SPOT

Susan Morse

All's well with the 4Spot. Nothing to report.

TOURNAMENT COORDINATOR/D4 STaC COORDINATOR – Kurt Engleman

D4 TOURNAMENT COORDINATOR

Thank you to everyone who is helping me get up to speed with this role. As F2F bridge continues to evolve, I want to ensure that our units are running their preferred tournament schedule.

There is an opportunity to enhance our current overall schedule, so please reach out to me directly if you wish to discuss.

D4 DISTRICT STaC COORDINATOR

Turnout for our February STaC was slightly higher (+3%) compared to the winter STaC in 2024. Spring STaC (scheduled for May 5-11) was cancelled so that D4 could participate in Stardust Week.

CHARITY

Lois Fuini

As D4 Charity Chairperson, Lois is working on the distribution of the \$30,000 designated to D4 from the ACBL Foundation. I have notified all the units in D4, but have only heard back from two. Confirmation of my email was requested. At this time, I don't know if all Unit Presidents received the information.

We can support 5 not-for-profit organizations that are non-bridge related. Included in my email was the Foundation's process for the 2025 grants. Each grant must request at least \$5000.

FINANCE

Ala Hamilton-Day

As of the September 30, 2024 Balance Sheet of District 4, there was \$117,115.53 delineated as the "National reserve fund balance". The next NABC in Philadelphia is scheduled for 2030. Games run by the ACBL for fundraising have contributed approximately an additional \$21,000, while selling the naming rights for the regional events has raised an additional \$24,450. John Dickenson and Ala do not have the hard numbers from the Marriott as to how much four days of the afternoon hospitality will cost, but we expect that number soon. For four of the afternoons, which items must be purchased through the Marriott, we will be having Tastykakes, soft pretzels (probably mini), mini Cheesesteaks, and cookies. Chicago paid approximately \$60,000 for their afternoon hospitality.

There were additional costs for the welcoming gifts, the GR/IN (Gold Rush Intermediate/Newcomer) gifts, the fuzzy stickers, and Marriott coffee coupons. We will also be paying for the parking for 12 days for volunteers from Upstate New York, who have no other transportation options outside of driving.

Entertainment options are also under consideration and in the process of being arranged, specifically a Ben Franklin impersonator, a Betsy Ross impersonator, and possibly a Mummers String band appearance. For prizes, we purchased 1,200 "wooden" nickels from Bassett's, each one good for an ice cream cone. We had to pay an additional \$1,740 over what we were given by the ACBL. The reasoning behind "wooden" nickels was that this was not a food or drink item for which we would have had to pay the Marriott, nor is someone going to steal the "wooden" nickels. Thievery has been a problem at some prize desks at NABC's.

John and Ala are proceeding on the belief that the present NABC structure and length will change and mutate with the change in the bridge playing population. Who knows what the 2030 Philadelphia NABC will be like? Taking that into consideration, we are taking whatever steps we can to ensure that this NABC is going

to be highly successful and a boatload of fun. John guesstimated that when all is said and done, that the NABC reserve fund balance on the District 4 Balance Sheet will be \$80,000.

NAP

Lou Glasthal

NAP Conditions of Contest have been approved and are available on the ACBL website (or can be obtained from Lou Glasthal). Locations and dates for the NAP finals have been tentatively identified as follows (I am waiting for confirmation from one of the proposed host clubs):

Open -- October 4-5 at Harrisburg BC

A – September 14 at North Penn BC

B – October 4 at Harrisburg BC, Bridge Studio of Delaware, and Canandaigua BC

C -- September 14 at Greater Rochester DBC, Game Friendly (Cherry Hill, NJ), King of Prussia BC, Harrisburg BC, and West Elmira BC

Locations for Flights B and C were chosen with the goal of making these games accessible to as many members of our District as possible.

The original plan to hold Flight A at Lehigh Valley Active Life in Allentown was abandoned after we had a poor experience there with the NAP due to noise and space limitations, and the site manager was unable to provide assurances that these issues could be satisfactorily rectified for future events.

Please feel free to reach out to me at glasthal@comcast.net with any questions.

GNT

Lou Glasthal

GNT Finals were held during the first two weekends in March, with a slight increase in attendance over the past two years (34 tables vs. 32 tables in 2024 and 25 tables in 2023).

NAP Finals are scheduled for mid-September and early October, with the new four-flight format to mirror that of the GNTs. As previously reported, masterpoint limits for the flights will be redefined as follows:

Open – No limit

A – Under 6000

B – Under 3000

C – Non-LM under 750

One of the goals of this restructuring is to open Flight C to a greater number of players while continuing to exclude Life Masters (so that newer players are not intimidated away from participating).

EDUCATION

Mike Kohler

A summary spreadsheet was compiled in late January that listed various learning and playing opportunities for beginners throughout District 4.

With some guidance from Dennis Shaub, Unit 133 embarked on two free beginner classes taught by members of the Lehigh Valley Bridge Association. Both the Bethlehem Public Library and the Lower Macungie Community Center provided free facilities and advertising that provided opportunities for teachers to conduct both series of the "ACBL Intro to Bridge" courses. The classes started in January and will be completed in August. Between both locations, we have approximately 50 students in attendance. 22 are new beginners that are expected to complete both Series 1 and 2. An additional 28 beginners with some bridge experiences are only attending Series 2.

INTERMEDIATE/NEWCOMER

Linda O'Malley

The I/N programming and success rates vary throughout District 4 both with tournaments and opportunities at the local clubs. Below is a summary:

Oswego County Bridge Association held their first I/N tournament on May 17th and were pleased with the turnout from several surrounding cities and the overall outcome. They plan to offer sectionals in the future.

In Rochester, their tournament was significantly higher than before, and they are now looking to host two a year. On the other hand, the NLM sectional in Ocean View reported a low turnout and a financial loss. Their local clubs do not have games for I/N players, and they felt they did advertise well outside their area. Their suggestion was to open it up to Life Masters 0-750 and then offer two sections.

Areas that are succeeding both with turnout in the sectionals and regionals as well as growth within existing clubs are utilizing similar methods to attract and retain newer players. This programming includes but is not limited to the following:

- *Offering a weekly limited duplicate game and/or a casual mentored playing session* : Newer players are often hesitant to play in an open game. Once they have been introduced to bridge through lessons, they need a non-threatening place to play with others at a similar level.
- *Pro-Am or mentor/mentee opportunities*: In addition to other benefits, pairing up a new player with an experienced player helps with the transition from a limited game to an open game.
- *Barometer limited games*: Tables all play the same boards simultaneously and then an instructor goes over the bidding/play of hand after each one. Players are getting a lesson while at the same time, getting experience playing in a duplicate game.
- *Free 30 minute - 1 hour lectures*: Whether before a club game or at a tournament, free lectures or lessons often incentivize players to attend.
- *Free beginner lessons at a library or community center to teach bridge to brand new players*: These lessons take advantage of the organization's ability to promote the classes to their community. Once "hooked," these new bridge players are then introduced to the programming and educational opportunities at the local bridge clubs.

Our bridge clubs and tournaments will not thrive unless more attention is given to recruiting, teaching, and retaining new players. These new players need learning and playing opportunities that are at their level to ensure that they will continue enjoying the game, attending games at local clubs, and playing in local tournaments.

TOURNAMENT

Jeanne Gehret

Equipment: Regional feedback about the condition of our tables is prompting action to upgrade them. Later this year we will undertake replacing badly damaged card tables with new ones. The plan is to buy 10 to 20 replacement tables annually, as needed. This plan will raise the overall appearance, quality and usability of our table stock without significantly impacting the budget in any single year.

As to other District game "equipment", we currently have a sufficient supply of bidding box replacement inserts and new decks of cards, so no expenditures are planned for those items at the present time.

Regional Entry Fees: This item is intended to keep the Board apprised regarding the sufficiency of our entry fees limits (currently up to \$25 per session), and that it is likely the allowable entry fee will need to increase before the 2027 or 2028 events.

The existing Board-approved fee structure is sufficient for the near-term. The \$23 fee charged in Lancaster and FLX will likely need to rise in the coming year or two. The \$25 fee charged in Rehoboth Beach is feeling pressure as their continuing table count growth means running games out of two locations. They will likely still be OK for the coming year, dependent upon food/hotel negotiations that are currently underway.

D4 Regionals are being squeezed by the increasing costs of facilities, food, Directors, etc. Tournament Chairs continually evaluate how to provide a fabulous bridge experience while eliminating unnecessary expenses. They are doing their best to avoid unnecessary entry fee increases.

A review of entry fees charged by other Districts is showing they are also increasing, with an average range of \$16-18/session - which does NOT include a complimentary lunch.

Lastly, an analysis of District 4 Regionals compared to all ACBL Regionals during the 2024-2025 season shows D4 in a favorable light. As shown in the following statistics, we have a lot to be proud of! (*statistics compiled from post-tournament surveys accumulated by Fast Results*)

- "Recommend" rate of 91%, vs 85%
- Site approval - rate of 90% vs 79%
- Hospitality - rate of 88% vs 77%

REGIONAL TOURNAMENT REPORTS:

Valley Forge

(8/3 – 8/9/26)

Rex Saffer & John Dickenson

Rex has no detailed report beyond that submitted prior to Lancaster. Our next tourney is in August 2026. I will be making a major revision to our flyer and will upload that to ACBL in the next few weeks. -

Lancaster

(10/27 – 11/2/25)

(10/26 – 11/1/26)

Jeanne Gehret

As is the experience with many regionals, Lancaster has seen final day attendance dwindling. Rather than watch Sunday attendance continues to decline, a proactive decision has been made to eliminate Sunday in-person play. That day is now reserved for online regional pairs games.

Rochester

(6/9 – 6/14/25)

(6/8 – 6/13/26)

Betty Youmans (with Jim Patton)

The Finger Lakes Regional (FLX) was held on June 9-13 (face-to-face) and June 14 online. The FLX Regional is now the only one in New York more than fifty miles from New York City. The Albany area stopped having regionals years ago, and Buffalo has decided to discontinue its regional.

The tournament attracted 312 tables (308 F2F and 4 online) compared to 436 tables in 2024 (402 F2F and 34 online). The drop in attendance resulted in a financial loss of nearly \$4000 (District VIP charges were another \$400).

Local attendance of Unit 112 players (half the field) was 3% higher than last year. Concerted efforts were made to encourage Rochester area players to participate, and partnerships among local players were made.

The 23% drop in F2F tables was driven by three factors which explain virtually all the change.

1. In 2024, the FLX Regional had 78 tables of Canadian players (19% of the total). That number dropped to 26 tables in 2025. This accounts for 56% of the lost tables. We knew that we would face a decrease in Canadian participation. Over a month ago, individual emails were sent to the Canadian players who had played 3 or more days last year, inviting them to come this year. Many Canadians responded that they did not plan to travel to the United States. Thus, politics affected our attendance.
2. There was a Regional in Fairfax, N.J. the same week this year as the FLX Regional. Fairfield is much closer to eastern N.Y. and to the eastern stretches of our District. Attendance from players from the Albany area, eastern Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New Jersey dropped from 53 tables to 25

tables, 30% of the total loss. For example, only 6 players from eastern Pennsylvania attended our Regional.

3. In 2024, the Regional was held in August. The Regional was moved to early June to avoid bumping into the Philadelphia NABC. Unfortunately, the number of students playing dropped from 32 sessions to 2 (a loss of 7 tables or 8% of the loss). In Upstate New York, public schools were still in session during our tournament. We suspect the early date cost us both students and teachers who could have played in the summer.

Driven by the lower attendance, the revenue was \$10,000 less than the budget. By controlling expenses (fewer directors, fewer caddies, a flexible food vendor who adjusted the lunch count daily), we were able to convert the \$10,000 revenue shortfall into only a \$4,000 loss.

The attendance drop was most keenly felt in the bracketed team events. Two years ago, the team games did quite well. Last year, three dominant teams seemed to scare off the rest of the field so participation was low. This year, there were again three strong teams that dominated the game. A valiant effort was made by the DIC to handicap the game. There were only 8 teams on Monday, 5 on Tuesday, and 5 on Wednesday. The Director chose to not hold team events on Thursday or Friday. We need to consider our approach regarding teams next year.

The Saturday online game was a huge disappointment. Although an announcement of the online games was sent to all of District 4 with the same wording and timing of the other District 4 Online Regional games, participation dropped from 34 tables in 2024 to 4 tables in 2025. Both the Open and Midflight games were not held as too few players registered. The Gold Rush pairs was held with only 4 tables. The entry income was \$360.00, but the fees for 2 directors cost \$795, resulting in a net loss of \$435.00. We need to decide if we should hold an online game next year.

Last year, there was much dissatisfaction with the daily lunches. We insisted in the contract with the venue that we could select the food vendor and not use the onsite provider. We interviewed several vendors and selected one that provided excellent and varied menus. Players expressed positive comments on the food.

The 2026 Regional is scheduled for June 8-13 (f2f June 8-12 and online on Saturday). June dates were selected as the King of Prussia tournament asked to use our traditional August dates as hotel costs in that area in June of next year would be prohibitive. At this point, there are no nearby Regionals that might negatively impact our attendance. We hope that the factors that negatively affected our attendance this year will not be repeated next year. We need to keep an eye on other online Regionals to see if others see diminished attendance; perhaps the sixth day is something we will not continue.

The Finger Lakes Regional provides an opportunity to win gold, meet new friends and enjoy fellowship with other players. Although suffering a financial loss is a disappointment, we understand the reasons. Hopefully, all the factors except for the loss of students will be diminished next year.

Gerry Steenberge (2026) and Ken Kallio (2027), two of our players, volunteered to chair the next few Regionals. Our volunteers are committed to promoting our Regional and providing a great experience for all who attend.

Philadelphia Summer 2025 NABC (7/23- 8/3/25)**John Dickenson & Ala Hamilton-Day**

Please consider this as a supplement to the Finance Report above, which has been reviewed and discussed with Treasurer Pat Civalé.

The Committee Chairs are in place and prepared. They are as follows:

Registration: Mary Miller and Lynn Ackerman

Partnership: Dan Boye

Publicity: Susan Morse

Information: Mark Cohen

Volunteer: Cathy Strauss

GRI/N (Gold Rush Intermediate/Newcomer): Linda and Brendan O'Malley

Prizes: Lisa Mita

Fundraising: Mark Bolotin

Finance: Pat Civalé

For those individuals who volunteer, on the day that they volunteer, lunch will be provided so that they can work at their position from 1:30 to 2:45. This is how we intend to show our appreciation of their hard work, along with a \$10 chit. There was an initial hiccup about obtaining volunteers for the Youth NABC, which begins on Thursday July 31st and goes through Saturday, August 2nd, but that appears to be working itself out.

There is only valet parking at the Marriott, at a cost of \$70 per day. We have partnered with SpotHero, a parking application. In exchange, they have given us a 10% discount code which is ACBL72483. The earlier reservations are made, generally the cheaper the cost.

For transportation to the Marriott, the Jefferson SEPTA station is directly across the street. If someone has a SEPTA Senior card, they can ride all of SEPTA for free, with some minor fees from Delaware. The train, for those bridge players coming in from the collar counties, is easily the most economical, even if they don't have a SEPTA Senior card. The SEPTA train station parking app is also very easy to use.

We received some revenue from the Philadelphia Convention Bureau for purchasing bags with the Philadelphia NABC logo. We're planning to make 3,500 regular welcome gifts and 700 GRI/N gifts. Toronto made 3,000 welcome gifts and then had to rush and make up an additional 400 gifts. Memphis made 3,000, but that was too many. At last reckoning, perhaps two weeks ago, the hotel was 90% full. It is expected that there will be 9,500 tables in play.

In support of the local community, the ACBL is making a \$5,000 charitable donation to Project Home. This will take place on Thursday, July 24th at 2 pm and Ala is media contact.

The costs of the afternoon hospitality need to be determined and we will need to figure out which item will be distributed on which day. We are still evaluating possible entertainment options, including a small Mummer's String Band, a Rocky impersonator, along with Ben Franklin and Betsy Ross impersonators.

The two evening events are Beyond Bridge on Sunday July 27th, which involves all kinds of games, karaoke, and bowling at Liberty Lanes in the basement of the Marriott. On Wednesday July 30th, there is Bridge Mania. There will be Family Feud run by the Grossack Brothers, Jeopardy hosted by Jeopardy James Holzauer, and a Wear Your Favorite NABC T-Shirt Contest.

A Restaurant guide has been prepared by Ellen Berkowitz and Christina Valente.

Things are coming together and everyone is working hard to make this NABC a fabulous event!

Wilkes-Barre

No report.

Walt Mitchell**Rehoboth Beach Delaware****Kim Holm & Harold Jordan**

(4/28 – 5/2/25)

The Rehoboth Regional had year over year growth of approximately 17%. We had great weather, and we think attendees enjoyed themselves.

Harrisburg (U168) I/N

No report.

NEXT MEETING

Friday, October 31, 2025 at 7:00 PM during the Lancaster Regional held at Spooky Nook. The meeting will be preceded by dinner at 5:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted by: William L. Bauer III

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