

**Syracuse Contact Duplicate Bridge Club
(SCDBC)**

Bridging the Gap

A Situation Paper
by
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OBJECTIVE

To attract, sustain, and grow the active duplicate bridge-playing membership at Syracuse Contract Duplicate Bridge Club (SCDBC).

CURRENT SITUATION & MY UNDERSTANDING

The Board:

The current all volunteer board of SCDBC includes some of the WHOS'S WHO of the Syracuse Bridge-playing community. The 16 board members are appointed from within the club membership and serve a two-year term ending June. The four elected officers serve a one year-term.

The Club Officers are:

President – Judy Butcher
Vice President – Lorrie Desruisseaux
Secretary – Mary Lou Famulare
Treasurer – Fred Peisel

The other Board Members include:

Bill Burnell	Albert McCormick	John Hemmer
Fran LeBoeuf	Ron Dun	Rick Olanoff
Don Dalpe	Mary Ann Finn	Fred Peisel
Doug Lyons	Bernie Gorkin	Robert Simard

Historical Background:

Established circa 1937, the club is believed to be the oldest “continuously playing” duplicate Bridge club in the United States. Its rich history and long standing presence in the greater Syracuse community make it an organization its members can be proud to be associated with. Every effort therefore should be made to continue to support the club by implementing innovative ideas. It is the obligation and duty of the Board as well as the general membership of SCDBC to leave a strong and vibrant club for the future generations of Bridge players in the greater Syracuse community.

Frequency of Games:

The club has FOUR scheduled games over a THREE day period during a given week, including novice, intermediate, teaching, and open games. The club used to have SIX scheduled games over a FOUR day period during a given week. The normal fees are \$4.00 per session. (See matrix for details).

Local Competition:

There are approximately 10 functioning clubs in the greater Syracuse area, including nine non-for-profit clubs and one for-profit club, a professionally managed club, i.e., The Bridge Studio, Inc. There are about five clubs among the 10 local area clubs, that are invitational and/or for ladies only.

Tournaments, Unit 112 & American Contract Bridge League (ACBL):

The umbrella organization called “The Onondaga Bridge Association” (OBA) is a non-for-profit organization primarily is responsible for organizing sectional and regional tournaments for the Unit 112 and ACBL. There are some common members of OBA and SCDBC. All the greater Syracuse area clubs are affiliated with ACBL, for awarding the master-points and other tournament rules, ethics, and conduct.

WHY PEOPLE PLAY BRIDGE?

Some possible reasons:

- Play the game for enjoyment.
- Improving their existing game.
- Winning and accumulation of Master Points (MP) and becoming a Life Master and beyond.
- Wanting to remain mentally alert and active.
- For Camaraderie and friendship.
- For recreation and pastime.
- Socializing.
- Others?

THE MEMBERSHIP **WHO and from WHERE to get them**

The current membership of the SCDBC mainly consists of a core group of a few dozen Bridge players who have been in the club for 5, 10, 20 and 30+ years. The club continues to function due to the involvement of these dedicated members and their high level of interest (and love) of the game. The sixteen members on the Board of SCDBC are part of the core group of members.

In most instances and based on history, the typical profile of new prospective members have been that of middle-aged individual, retirees, and those who have the time on their hands and the interest of learning and playing duplicate bridge. This typical profile (mind-set) will need to be changed, going forward both within SCDBC and outside the club.

There are several members from the club’s so-called core group, who also belong and play regularly at other local area clubs. Maybe these SCDBC members are getting something from the others club(s) which SCDBC is not providing?

There have been minimal focused efforts made by the club management, especially in the recent past to attract new members and retain the active membership participation. Few membership drives for new members have been recently organized. In other words, the club has done very little to reach-out to potential members, outside the traditional pool of bridge players, in the greater Syracuse area.

Duplicate Bridge can be played by people of all ages and from all walks of life and therefore the pool of potential members is broad, deep, and long. (For details on who and where to get new members, see under ideas, suggestions, recommendations, and action plans.)

THE ISSUES AT HAND

The SCDBC is experiencing “club fatigue’ in the sense that the membership is systematically dwindling and/or becoming inactive and the weekly scheduled games have poor or inconsistent attendance. The major reasons for inactive membership over the past few years are (a) permanent departure of members from the greater Syracuse area, (b) ‘snow-birds’ migrating in and out of Syracuse, which can be disruptive, (c) demise of older members, (d) competition from local clubs, (e) the club’s real and perceived personality and characteristics, (f) other reasons.

Some scheduled and announced games are consistently cancelled and/or have poor attendance (two or three tables), due to lack of bridge players. The overall health and the club’s very existence may be in jeopardy, if new or strategic actions are not considered and put in place. It is up to the club’s membership, led by the club officers and supported by the Board, to change the current status quo, by initiating and implementing some of the items suggested in the “ideas, suggestions, recommendations, and action plans” below.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Q. 1. What does the club do to increase its membership?
- Q. 2. Where does the club go to find new members?
- Q. 3. What is at stake here?
- Q. 4. Why should the club do anything?
- Q. 5. What is in it, for the current members?
- Q. 6. Is the club prepared to listen, change, and be flexible, in addressing the issues at hand?
- Q. 7. Is the club afraid to fail and therefore not try-out some of the ideas, suggestions, recommendations, and action plans?
- Q. 8 Does the club have an attitude of “been there – done that – tried it – doesn’t work, who is going to do it,” etc.

BRIEF RESPONSES TO ABOVE QUESTIONS

- A.1 There are many programs, initiatives, and events that SCDBC can start implementing in order to increase the membership and active participation in the club. For details, see below, under “ideas, suggestions, recommendations, and action plans.”

- A.2 Efforts should be made to look outside the current bridge-playing community in the greater Syracuse area. Development and initiation of new Bridge players and introduction of duplicate Bridge to non-bridge playing community, is essential.
- A.3 The survival of SCDBC and its core group of dedicated members, who would like to continue playing at SCDBC with increased membership enrollment.
- A.4 The continued existence of healthy bridge clubs is an important aspect of the general community and the society. When clubs ignore the issue of dwindling and/or inactive membership and do not take any concrete measures to change the course, they are essentially accepting their ultimate demise.
- A.5 As trustees the current board has an obligation to its current and remaining members, to see that the club continues to function with at least six or more tables (24+ members) at each and every scheduled session. The “six-table” benchmark should be the goal for every Bridge session.
- A.6 All organizations need to try new ideas and be open to implement some of them. If they work, so be it. If they don’t, one must continue to try other ideas. Membership building campaigns are a continuous process and strong & large clubs can become weak & small clubs overnight, due to changes in the local economic and social conditions.
- A.7 The membership campaign must not be allowed to become an exercise in futility.
- A.8 If the “attitude” continues to be negative, especially among the stakeholders (officers and Board members), it will be difficult for the club to turn around and make a reasonably strong comeback. I believe that most members want to see “membership growth” take place at SCDBC in the foreseeable future.

IDEAS, SUGGESTIONS, RECCOMENDATIONS, and ACTION PLANS

1. **Make bridge playing a user-friendly, non-intimidating, and fun-loving experience at SCDBC:**

The local area reputation (real or perceived) of SCDBC is as follows and I quote:

- (a) “An intimidating place”
- (b) “Those people are something”
- (c) “Who wants to go there and play”
- (d) “You must be kidding – play there?”
- (e) “I would never play there”
- (f) “I once played there and never again”

Taking into account the above quotations, the club management needs to self-evaluate and ask the following questions:

- Why this reputation?
- What is contributing to this paranoia?
- How long has this been going on or why is it perpetuating?
- Have some of the above mentioned quotes been brought up and discussed in the past or does this come as a surprise, especially to some of the board members?
- Is reputation based on reality or is it nonsense?

2. **Introduce the Mentor Program:**

When a new member joins the club, he or she has a choice of getting inducted into a “mentor program.” An experienced Bridge player is assigned to him or her, so that for the first three months (flexible period); the new member has a person (mentor) in the club, for moral and social support, for learning, for partnership when needed, for advice, etc. In other words, the mentor goes out of his or her way to see that the new member’s needs are adequately met, during the formative Bridge-playing period in the club.

Please note that the mentor may or may not play as a partner with the mentee, however the mentor will be responsible for mentee’s Bridge-playing needs, including the coordination of partner (ships), assistance in learning of conventions, answering questions about the game, local tournaments, etc.

3. **Initiate a Life Master / Non-Life Master Partnership event:**

This type of program session should become a weekly or bi-monthly event, so that the less experienced and/or novice or intermediate members get opportunities to play with a variety of experienced members. This is a program SCDBC can immediately implement and enjoy the rewards of possible increased member activity.

4. **Reduce the so-called permanent partnership “cliques” other than at tournaments and special sessions:**

Members are free to choose their partners. Members have a right to play with anyone they choose. Members may refuse to play with a certain player, for whatever reason. Having said this, members should also be sensitive to look at the overall interest of the club and in accommodating newer members by bringing them to the club-fold. There will always be pre-arranged partnership for certain sessions, however a system must be put in place, where ALL club members, are available and open to playing with other club members, with proper advanced arrangement. When a club has an environment that certain members will play ONLY with certain other members, it quickly generates and confirms an environment of selectivity, exclusivity, and partiality.

5. **Partnership by (Random) draws:**

Have a session, at least couple of times a month, where on an announced day, members come to play without pre-determined partners and pick “draws” (numbers or names) and as a result, take partners for that particular session. SDCBC can implement this and see the results in form of increase in number of Bridge-playing members.

6. **Do not take members for granted, especially the new members:**

Newcomers in Syracuse have a choice to choose from approximately 10 clubs. They will join the club which best suits their temperament, where they feel most comfortable, and the Bridge-playing/learning is good quality experience.

When a newcomer is given the impression that the only way he or she can be well established at the SCDBC is to have a partner and/or come to play Bridge with a partner, the club may be losing prospective players, as many newcomers may not be able to find readily available partners. The club needs to change this false impression and/or image.

7. **Re-arrange to make the Board of SCDBC comprise of the following positions & responsibilities:**

President – The Club’s President is responsible for the overall directions and the day-to-day operations and management of the club, including the actions, duties, and responsibilities of the elected officers and the strategic use of the talents of the Board-of-Directors. The President leads as well as delegates all the club projects, events, and programs. Recognizing that SCDBC is an all volunteer as well as a non -for-profit organization, it is the President’s responsibility to motivate, empower, and support the officers in discharging their duties and responsibilities. The president also makes tough decisions, which at times are not popular. The interest of the club, the standard of the club, and the survival of the club, are paramount.

Vice President – Education & Training - Second-in-command after the President, the major responsibilities include: Scheduling of sessions (four to six weeks in advance), liaison with ACBL for updating the master-points; distribution of educational materials to members (especially the newcomers), communicating with members (phones, e-mails, post-card, etc., so that all the “scheduled” members are reminded (only if they choose to be reminded) of the

session-event and confirmation of their respective partnership, communicating membership related news such as winning of tournaments, receiving of awards, such as life master, regional master, junior master, etc.

Vice President – Membership Building - Major responsibilities include: Inviting potential bridge players to the club as well as arranging and coordinating visits to organizations, including high schools, community colleges, and other targeted audiences. Arranges variety of events for membership building and retentions as well as coordinates programs for specific events. Keeps and maintains the club roster and updates it every month or when a new member joins the club.

Vice President – Public Relations & Media - Major responsibilities include: External communication with various organizations, institutions, news-media, including radio, TV, newspapers, and educational organizations. Develops and distributes a “new membership kit” with club related information. Distributes and promotes club-related literature to news media and other broadcast organizations. Works closely with the VP of Membership, on joint-projects.

Secretary - Major responsibilities include: Internal correspondence, minutes, files, records, internal communication with members, Board, and elected officers.

Treasurer - Major responsibilities include: Maintaining and updating of all financial records, banking, dues collection, ACBL payments, financial books, statements, and reports.

Form sub-committees and task-oriented teams, to assist respective VP’s as follows:

- (a) Bridge Education and Training Courses
- (b) Membership Building Campaign
- (c) Public Relations & Media Coordination
- (d) Special Event Coordination
- (e) Other Sub-Committees, as needed and required

8. Increase the “Bridge playing fee” (only if necessary) by \$1 or more, to provide a wider variety of snacks, coffee, tea, sodas, etc. The snacks should be laid-out on each card table (or side tables) by the club (session) director, before the members come for the schedule session.
9. Provide soft and light soothing music in the background to make the “playing environment” congenial and pleasant. Soft and light music relaxes people and reduces tensions and some frustrations too!
10. Gradually attempt to change the club’s perceived culture from being exclusive to being an open and friendlier environment. The attitude that, “I have been this club longer than you” creates barrier (done intentionally or unintentionally) and can easily turnoff newcomers. Remember, the newcomer has “nothing to lose” but the club has “everything to lose.” The newcomer can pick and choose a club which gives him or her, the best environment to play Bridge.

11. Take frequent verbal and written survey of members to see whether the club is meeting the needs of most of its members, if not all its members. (See above, “why do people play bridge”?) Every organization must measure the performance of services they provide. In the absence of such performance measures, the club may believe that everything is A-OK, whereas the opposite may be true.
12. Prepare and distribute (hardcopy or electronically) a schedule of the weekly “game events” with names of members who plan to attend (committed to schedule), for four to six weeks in advance. Update once a week or as required to accommodate acceptable changes. (See the sample schedule matrix, attached).
13. Communicate by telephone, send e-mail, mail postcard and in other ways with those members, who may need to be reminded on their scheduled commitment, a day before, for confirmation and as last minute reminder!
14. Target certain professions such as school teachers and other educators in the local area. Offer free lessons to high school teachers so that they in turn can generate and develop interest in their respective students who can become the Bridge players of tomorrow. Invite the teachers to regular bridge sessions to witness and play. If the teachers want some club members to go to their schools, have the club’s “demo team” visit the school. The message and action-plan here is to take “duplicate-bridge playing” to all members of the community, (and especially the young kids in area high schools and community colleges), instead of advertising the prospective Bridge playing community, to come to the club’s location. Show them how advantageous it is to play with “real people” sitting across the table from each other, rather than playing Bridge sitting in front of a computer! Introduction of Bridge to young people also creates a long-term potential for growth for the respective clubs in a given area.
15. Invite a guest (friend, boss, relative, acquaintances) to a bridge session, to get the necessary exposure. Make a day in a month as “Bring a guest day.”
16. Use the “Five Foot Rule” / “Elevator Ride.”
Every time you are within five feet of someone in an elevator (or standing in a line at a public area or DMV or State or local governmental offices), ask them if they have ever played Bridge and talk about your club.
17. Distribute extra (or old copies) of ‘Bridge Bulletin’ (order from ACBL, if there are no older and/or copies available), in waiting rooms, libraries, Dr’s offices, coffee shops, health clubs, etc., to generate local interest in ‘bridge playing’ and with a “sticker” of SCDBC address, telephone # and contact information. This is an excellent vehicle to introduce and give the game of ‘Bridge’ the much needed community exposure. When members take there copy of the Bridge Bulletin to there doctor’s office, social clubs, and other events, the name of SCDBC and playing/learning of Bridge, will spread around and a high degree of interest level will be generated.

18. **Cooperative advertising:**
ACBL has a cooperative advertising program (CAP) which reimburses clubs, with 50% of the advertising expenses (in newspapers, radio/TV, fliers, yellow pages, etc.) for programs designed to recruit ACBL members, up to a reimbursement maximum of \$250, each time the club promotes Bridge to newer players. Check with ACBL for further information.
19. **Invest in club-related (and Bridge-related) Memorabilia:**
Items such as T-shirts, bumper stickers, coffee mugs, playing cards, key chains, and buttons, are some of the examples of promoting the club's presence in the community in particular and Bridge playing in general. Develop a "guest packet" with the club's and ACBL information, to be given to the visitors and potential members.
20. **Internal Membership Drive:**
Challenge each member to recruit at least one new member within six months or one year. Give awards and incentives or prizes for successful execution of the membership campaign.
21. **Target Previous Members:**
Find out where the former club members are and if they reside locally and play Bridge, where do they play, and why not at SCDBC? Many members may be back in town, and the club is either not been aware of it or do not know about their return to the Syracuse area.
22. **Create a Bookmark:**
Consider creating a bookmark with relevant information of the club. Distribute it to local libraries, community colleges, and other institutions of higher learning.
23. **Demo Meetings at the Club:**
Form a team of experienced as well as less experienced members for a demo meeting at the club. Publicize the event and invite target audience for an open demonstration of the game of Bridge in front of a live audience. Try a different or innovative approach to this special Bridge Demo, by emphasizing and highlighting the game requirements, such as cool strategy, quick use of math, team-work and trust, partnership confidence, memory jogger, concentration, accurate communication, discipline and control, and game etiquette. (Now how many people knew that they would have to use all these techniques, every 2 or 3 minutes, beside handling of the cards and playing the game of Bridge and following the conventions?)
24. **Provide name tags for ALL club members:**
The club should strongly consider providing name tags (first as well as last name) for ALL its members. This is important, especially for the benefit of the newer members. If the club wants new members to get quickly acquainted with fellow-members and become comfortable with the long-term members, the name tag program to be worn for ALL sessions and by ALL members (no exceptions) should be immediately implemented. (The name-tags can be placed on a bulletin board or other similar place at the front of the door and can be picked up at the beginning of the session and left-behind at the end of the session). The fact that most members know each other is not the issue here. This program is for the benefit and facilitation of the newer members, visiting guest, and potential members.

To further elaborate the case in point, the currently used but outdated membership list indicates that there are 4 Ann's; 2 Bob's; 3 Carol's; 2 Fred's; 2 Gerry's; 2 Helen's; 2 Janet's; 2 Jeff's; 4 Joan's; 2 Jean's; 3 Judy's; 3 Mary's; 4 Nancy's; 2 Pauline's; and 2 Sidney's. This can be confusing for new members without ever finding out and differentiating them with their last names. (Whoever is responsible for updating the membership listings is not up to speed. The impact of this little housekeeping chore clearly gives a signal to the new club member, that he or she is not important!) The updates to the club membership listing should be kept-up-to-date by the VP of Membership, under the suggested reorganization and restating of the responsibilities of the club officers.

25. **Establish a club Bridge library:**

For education of the members, create a Bridge library of Bridge books (donated by members), Bridge videos, old bridge bulletins, and collections of Bridge related articles in local newspapers, national magazines, and other Bridge resources.

26. **Club Directors:**

This important position must be selected and managed not only from the board-members, but from any Bridge player within the club, who is willing to take up this responsibility and is adequately knowledgeable and experienced with the playing of duplicate bridge and the rules & regulations of ACBL. Very often, the clubs also uses the position of the "Club Director" as a last-minute step-in for a "walk-in" member or guest. In order to truly serve the players/members in a given session, this practice should be avoided, where possible. Where the so-called "walk-in" can be a good attraction for prospective area guests and potential members, the club should be discouraged from using this "crutch" frequently! The VP of Education and Training, working in close conjunction with the group of designated club directors, will plan and prepare various club sessions for the next 4 to 6 weeks in advance. With the proper pair/partnership arrangements, the so-called last minute "walk-in" issue can be gradually reduced. The club director will then be able to adequately perform his or her duties and serve the session players with support and enthusiasm. Cooperation from all club members is the key to the successful implementation of this forward scheduling program.

Duties and Responsibilities of a Club Director:

Major duties and responsibilities include: Assures that all equipment, including playing cards, bidding boxes, stationary, etc., are in order and adequate supply of convention cards, the card-playing facility is clean, card tables and chairs are properly configured and that the club environment is user-friendly. Greets every member, especially newcomers and introduces them to other members as much as possible and as many times, as feasible.

Note: When a Club Director cannot make it to the game, at least 15 minutes before the session game he or she cannot perform his or her duties effectively and in a responsible manner.

27. **Start a club newsletter:**

A monthly club newsletter is a powerful tool in membership building, membership retention, and membership commitment. Under the re-organization structure, the VP of Public Relations and Media Coordination, is responsible for publication and distribution (electronically as well as hard-copy) of the newsletter. Members will be encouraged to contribute Bridge related articles (including recent club related hands and events), personal & family information, etc., etc. The “bonding process” of a club membership is frequently done by such a newsletter. The club must strive to function in an environment of being “one big extended family.” In absence of mutual respect, stepping in for each other, accommodating one another, and at times, even bending over backwards to support the club and its membership, the club may just function as a group of people who are only looking to satisfy their individual agendas and needs.

28. **Provide Bridge demonstrations and other Bridge-related initiatives:**

Veteran club members can offer free “Bridge Demo Team” at local book stores like Barnes & Noble and Borders, as a special event in order to attract new Bridge players. These demonstrations can also be held at public high schools, community colleges, at malls, charity bazaars, local libraries, fitness centers, and so on. This can be done with prior arrangements (publicized) with the respective organizations or rely on the walk-in traffic. There are always people around, who always wanted to be part of a four-some demo, and play an orchestrated demo bridge game. The idea is to “bring them to the table” or “whet their so-called appetite.” Piggyback on local community events, especially during holidays and other local festivities.

29. **Make Bridge playing easier for Newcomers:**

Make some of the club’s sessions “stratified” to help new players. The ACBL requirements, if any, must be followed and complied. Encourage new players by “handicapping” some of the club games, based on the new player’s previous performance in comparable sessions, or on the player’s current ACBL rank, etc. Newcomers love trophies and therefore make programs where they win such trophies over a period of time and with precious and easily understandable goals and objectives. The new members will have an incentive to come again and again for winning such trophies. Welcome and introduce the newcomer’s to all older members (even if you have to once or twice, repeat the names or re-introduce them). Make the newcomer’s first visit and even the second visit free of charge. Before the newcomers leave, try to schedule them for the next session, where possible. Offer encouragement consistently to the newcomers. This is the club’s way of saying, that we appreciate you, your presence at the club, and are happy that you are part of our club family.

Do not take the smallest thing for granted, where newcomers are concerned. The smallest possible incident or inconsistency, can turn-off the newcomer and you may never see him or her again. For example, see that all ACBL scores of master points are timely posted in the newcomers account. See that his or her name is on the club listing. Inquire whether he or she is getting the local regional/district newsletter. Inform him or her of upcoming events (over an above the sectional and regional tournament schedules) like holiday parties, birthday events, etc., by e-mail or phone calls. Experience tells us that people leave a club for small things and inconsistencies, rather than major crises with the clubs, which rarely happen.

30. **Initiate the daily practice in the club of the principle behind the FIVE “C’s.”**

- Communicate
- Cooperate
- Commit
- Coordinate
- Collaborate

COMMUNICATE: Keep members informed, including reminders by telephone calls, e-mails, and other communicating tools, which will result in increased member participation, involvement, and interest. Promote the club’s website, both to members as well as prospective members and organizations. Keep the website current with the updates. Encourage members to visit the site for updates, write and post articles, and express opinions, etc. Use the website as a PR tool for the club. Link the web-site to other area & regional websites within Unit 112 and other New York State/Pennsylvania Bridge clubs, where feasible.

COOPERATE: All members (especially the newer members) need the assistance from the club’s (session) director for a given Bridge session, to a varying degree. It is the duty and responsibility of the club’s (session) director and in working closely with the VP of Education and Training to see that all schedule sessions are adequately attended (the six-table / 24 member benchmark) and that those members who require partners or any other requirement, are sufficiently met.

COMMIT: Members must commit themselves to individual Bridge-playing sessions, as much in advance as possible. For example, the sign-in schedule sheet (see sample attached), must be put into use, by having members commit themselves and sign-in, for similar future sessions and other weekly sessions in the club. Without such commitment, the club’s board (management) is taking members as well as the individual sessions for granted. The so-called walk-in; you are welcome; partner guaranteed; etc., etc., are good for those clubs with large, active, and growing membership. Besides, a club cannot seriously build its general membership on such a *laissez-faire* attitude.

COORDINATE: In order to make each session a success and a gratifying experience, the club board (management) must adequately plan the session/event and get members involved by way of commitment and in making each session and program, interesting and enjoyable experience.

COLLABORATE: Consider collaborating with local area clubs for joint playing sessions or inter-club mini tournaments and sessions for bridge playing community enrichment and member service. When a program similar to this is regularly scheduled, members get additional benefits in having to play with members from different clubs.

CONCLUSIONS

Many of the ideas, suggestions, and recommendations may sound redundant to some members, especially when they have been members of SCDBC, for a long period of time. This paper is directed towards attraction of new Bridge-playing members (newcomers) and also towards the retention and revitalizing the current membership. All clubs - from the newer clubs to the older (mature) clubs need to experiment with different ideas in order to sustain/reactivate its membership and grow by recruiting new members (with open arms). Most of the programs and suggestions recommended here cost little or nothing, but require time commitment, individual and team-based efforts, and most importantly the willingness to try-out new and innovative ideas. Although there are some “quick-fixes” suggested here, the real benefits will come from programs and events, which require perseverance, discipline, and commitment.

The Board must believe and accept the fact that Bridge as a game is not only for middle-age or senior citizens. When the Board continues to believe that the potential membership pool will come from middle-age and senior citizens; it limits its customer-base and therefore the Bridge playing community. Have an attitude that Bridge is for all people of all ages, for all sexes, for all social classes, and for people from all walks of life and educational backgrounds, including the democrats, republicans, independents and yes, the nonbelievers! (As long as he or she believes in playing Bridge, on a regular basis and with interest, who cares about the rest?) This is truly an international game with no language but its own, and no physical or social barriers. Emphasizing the fact that Bridge cost little money to play, can enhance social and business networking, keeps the mind alert, establishes discipline in following rules and regulations (conventions), and when marketed correctly, can include a broader and diversified membership.

The club’s management (the club officers), must be ready to listen and act upon in meeting the various needs of ALL its members (See under “Why people Play Bridge?”), so that the Syracuse Contract Duplicate Bridge Club becomes the club of “first choice” to those who want to play competitive duplicate bridge in the greater Syracuse area community.

Every member needs to be treated as a customer. If the service is good, he or she will come back and remain loyal (to the club). If the service deteriorates, he or she will look elsewhere, where they will find the right service, the right environment, and the right players, the right partners – essentially the right club. (We as consumers do it all the time, why are we then expecting anything different from our member/customer?)

Make the first and second time “visitor” or “guest” to the club an event and celebration. Showcase the member, and make effort to go out of your way to meet him or her. Introduce yourself. Make them sign a guest book. Welcome them by making them “quickly” part of your Bridge family. Ask them if they need a ride. Find out which member resides in the area. Send a “thank you note for coming” within 24 hours. Call a day or two before the next session. Briefly educate them about the ACBL master point-system as well as the clubs mentoring program. Expose them to the different games at the club. Assure them of a partner (not the club director, please!). Give them some old copies of Bridge Bulletin and magazines. In other words, bend over backwards if you can. If you don’t, some other club will!

The good news for Bridge-playing community and individual area clubs are the impending influx of the baby-boomers. Even if one out of ten will take up Bridge seriously and play regularly (presumably the other nine will take up golf!), the area clubs will have a positive effect of this invasion. The challenge for SCDBC and other clubs in the area will be attracting and retaining these newcomers. They will go to clubs where they feel most comfortable to play. Is SCDBC ready for the challenge? I personally don't think so! Can it be ready for the challenge? I believe it can, provided that it is ready and takes some pro-active steps.

Once again, the commitment and efforts of the members of the board of SCDBC will be the first step in making the transition from being one of the oldest continuously functioning clubs in the nation, to that of the best overall functioning club in greater Syracuse area, to play quality & competitive game of duplicate bridge.

I am a "newcomer" to SCDBC [since May 2003] and I am writing this paper from a newcomer's perspective. Others, and especially long-time members may see it differently. I encourage those who read this paper, do so with an open mind and not to rationalize. The facts are on the ground. The club membership is inactive and dormant. The session games are reduced and so are the numbers of Bridge-playing days. The club's management can either roll up their sleeves and take bold and innovative actions, as suggested, or wait for the inevitable. The choice is yours.

I thank the President and the vice-president of SCDBC for giving me the opportunity to write this paper and share my thoughts with the Board. I wish the officers and members of the board of directors of SCDBC, all the success.

Sincerely,

Sam Mehta

Sam Mehta has used the Toastmasters International (TI) and its affiliated clubs "model" in order to write this paper, due to the many similarities with American Contract Bridge League (ACBL) and its affiliated clubs nationwide.

Sam is a Toastmaster for the last seven years. Sam has held most of the club offices (President, VP Education, VP Membership, Treasurer and as a Club Specialist, responsible for increasing the club's membership) at his club, The Empire Statesmen. Sam is currently the Eastern Division Governor in District 65. He is responsible for the performance of 22 clubs in his Division (476+ members), which includes membership development and retention. Toastmasters International is a non-for-profit organization, started in 1924, and currently has approx. 9,300 clubs in over 70 countries, and has over 190,000 strong and active members. Over four million men and women have benefited from its variety of programs, including prepared speeches, impromptu speaking, conducting meetings, leadership development, evaluating skills, and use of parliamentary procedures. TI also has twice a year, contests (tournaments) at the Area, Division, District, Regional, and International levels. Many of the suggestions that Sam has recommended here, is based on the principles of his experience with Toastmasters International, and that of customer service 101.