

## NATIONAL DIRECTORS REPORT SPRING 2022

### MARGOT HENNINGS, REGION 4 DIRECTOR (DISTRICTS 5 AND 6)

The ACBL Board of Directors held its spring meetings face-to-face (F2F) March 8 through 11 in Reno, NV. The ACBL Board of Directors, committees and work groups continue to meet regularly through Zoom and conference calls. Except for the “personalized content” as identified below and other info updated as noted in the text, the info included is current as of March 11.

The Board Communications Task Force creates a “Board Report” following every NABC for all District and Regional Directors to use as the basis for their individual reports to their districts/regions. The Spring Board Report is sourced from the following:

- Spring Management Report
- Input from ACBL Board and staff members
- Minutes:  
[http://web2.acbl.org/documentLibrary/about/2022/2022\\_March\\_minutes.pdf](http://web2.acbl.org/documentLibrary/about/2022/2022_March_minutes.pdf)

Much of what is reported below is from that report. In addition, I have included several items that I thought would be of particular interest to you as members of D5 and D6, as well as D7, including:

- A tribute to a long-time colleague
- Explanation of a regulation that changes the long-standing “device policy” for electronic devices in the playing area
- An initiative that is under consideration to address the increase in unethical behavior online, both to better identify instances of such behavior and to differentiate between so-called “high-level” cheating and cheating by newer members

Finally, I delayed the distribution of this report in order to include a summary of the recent “Royal STaCs” held throughout ACBL. This summary is included immediately following the tribute to Mike.

### IN MEMORY OF MIKE KOVACICH

The Reno meeting started on a sad note, as President Joann Glasson called for a moment of silence in memory of Mike Kovacich, who passed away very suddenly ten days before the start of this meeting. Mike had just begun his second term on the ACBL Board as the Director for Region 6, having been elected as the District Director for D7 when he first ran in 2018 before the Board reorganization took effect. A long-time volunteer for his district and friend to D6, Mike held countless official positions both in D7 and in the D6/D7 Mid-Atlantic Bridge Conference (MABC). Players and tournament

directors in D6 and D7 pooled their talents to make MABC Regionals the very best, and our Regionals were renowned throughout ACBL—Mike was instrumental in helping that happen. He brought his legal expertise, his keen insight, and his old-fashioned common sense to bear on a vast array of bridge policy discussions. Mike’s passing was an especially personal loss to me as we had worked together and known each other for over 30 years. As Vice-Chair of Governance for close to three years, his advice to me as Chair was invaluable. In addition to being Vice-Chair of Governance, Mike was a member of the Bridge Committee, Board Liaison to the Masterpoint Committee, and an ardent supporter of finding incentives to encourage players to return to face-to-face bridge. He will be sorely missed.

## ROYAL StaC SUMMARY

The Royal StaC was created as a management experiment to help encourage players to go out and play FTF at their local clubs—it was not available to online clubs. The Board of Directors is currently meeting at a “Special Meeting” (what these “extra” Zoom meetings are called when they are not held at the traditional times of the three annual NABCs) that will conclude the evening of May 23 to determine if one additional experimental Royal StaC should be held again this fall. Stand by for that decision.

The data below were produced by ACBL management to contrast club table counts before, during and after the Royal StaC weeks in which 24 out of 25 districts (D5 was the only district that chose not to participate) either singly or in combination with other districts ran these “glitter point” games. I have included the StaC D6 “hosted” as well as the one that D7 ran on its own—in Mike’s absence, I am including D7 in the distribution of this report.

						Tables					
		STaC Week Gain over Previous Week	STaC Week Gain over Previous 2 Week Avg.	2 Weeks Following STaC Compared to 2 Weeks Before	STaC Tables % of Total Tables	Royal STaC Week					
District						-2 weeks	-1 week	Non-StaC Clubs	StaC Clubs	+1 week	+2 weeks
Mar.											
21-27	7	19.9%	19.0%	-4.4%	88.6%	1435	1413	193	1501.5	1404	1319
	6	0.3%	10.3%	-2.4%	78.1%	361	441	97	345.5	398	385
Apr.											
11-17	12	11.1%	16.8%	6.5%	76.9%	351	389	100	332	376	412
	13	6.6%	11.8%	14.8%	74.5%	273	301	82	239	325	334
	14	4.1%	12.5%	4.9%	60.1%	393	462	192	289	440	457
	Total	5.2%	12.9%	5.3%	71.9%	1378	1593	471	1205.5	1539	1588

Data across the total number of 16 STaCs varied greatly and can be attributed to the timing—these STaCs could be run between late January and the end of April, so that winter storms versus better weather definitely had an effect; and the general “health” of FTF clubs in each district since many clubs continue to struggle and table counts are a mere fraction of pre-pandemic levels.

D6 had one of the lower “bumps” in club attendance during its Royal StaC week, and the decision to combine with the Region 5 (Districts 12, 13, and 14 in the northern mid-west) clubs was a good one, since all participants benefited from the higher table count in all four districts. The single biggest session in our D6/D12/D13/D14 Royal Stac was 105.5 tables and the masterpoints paid out totaled just under 16 and were, of course, silver.

The immediate conclusion from the data ACBL-wide, is that club attendance at the FTF clubs increased just under 20% during the weeks the Royal StaC were held but that sustained increased FTF play does not appear to be a byproduct of this experiment.

## **ACBL ELECTRONIC DEVICE POLICY**

The way we register for and receive scores for events has changed significantly over the past few years, with more changes soon to come, making reliance on electronic devices in the playing area a must. A motion in Reno (Item 221-BR04) moved that electronic devices—phones, tablets, and watches—be allowed to be visible in and out of the playing area. Devices must be turned off during the play of the hand, but they can be used between rounds. Penalties will continue to be assessed for disruptions by devices that “ring” during play. Although this new policy was not approved unanimously, it carried 17/2/0.

This new policy applies to all events at NABCs and events where ACBL is the Sponsoring Organization. Regional and Sectional tournaments are encouraged to adopt and apply this policy or one more well-suited to their players.

I have briefly summarized some of the key changes in the paragraphs that follow. The full text of the new regulation along with the penalties for violating it can be found at [http://web2.acbl.org/documentLibrary/about/2022/ElectronicPolicy\\_AttachmentC.pdf](http://web2.acbl.org/documentLibrary/about/2022/ElectronicPolicy_AttachmentC.pdf).

- Electronic devices may be visible, although it is recommended to keep them out-of-sight when not in use
- You must keep all equipment (except for health-related equipment) in silent mode
- Just because your device may now be visible and be switched on, you are expected to pay attention to the game. While at the table, you may not use or interact with your electronic devices during bridge play. When between rounds or sitting out, use of or interaction with electronic devices is permitted, provided it is inaudible.

- These new regulations apply to all players, captains, coaches and kibitzers, except those persons granted permission by the ACBL, and are in force throughout any playing session or segment of play

## INTRODUCING EDGAR

This is a very exciting tidbit to share with you. This project has been managed by AJ Stephani, Chair of the ACBL Appeals and Charges Committee, as part of a comprehensive transformation in the way cheating cases are handled by the ACBL. AJ worked tirelessly to bring this to fruition and is hopeful that EDGAR will prove to become a critical tool in both detection and prosecution methods around the world. The paragraphs that follow are AJ's word, not mine, and although full implementation is not expected in the immediate future, I thought it was important to share this information with you. It has been posted to Bridge Winners, so some of you may have read about it there:

*“Methods of investigating and proving online cheating have not kept up with the times, and bridge organizations around the world have struggled to adapt. The ACBL is excited to announce the development of a new tool in detecting and prosecuting online (and perhaps in-person) cheating that offers great potential in changing the way we approach this problem.*

*Developed by chief architects Franco Baseggio and Brian Platnick, “EDGAR” (Electronic Data Gathering and Anti-cheating Radar) will allow bridge organizations to scan thousands of cases and look for telltale signs of cheating. EDGAR is currently being tested and refined, and we expect to place it in use in ACBL cases later this year, initially in support of “traditional” investigations. The name pays homage to the great Edgar Kaplan, the father of modern bridge ethics.*

*Instead of identifying single hands that look suspicious in a vacuum, EDGAR will be able to identify whether funny-looking bridge decisions are representative of a larger pattern or constitute a one-off aberration. Inspired by the work of Nicolas Hammond, Kit Woolsey, and others in the field, EDGAR will finally show us the forest through the trees. We believe that players will have confidence in EDGAR's ability to identify cheaters without raising suspicion of innocent players.*

*While refinements to EDGAR continue, we are also considering how to best balance concerns around transparency, accessibility, validation, maintenance, and control. Our goals include:*

- Providing everyone the information needed to understand how it works, which gives bridge players important security in being evaluated by a machine
- Providing access to the cheating algorithm and operational details, which means it can be verified by statisticians, programmers, mathematicians, and anyone else who wants to “look under the hood” to see if it works as intended

- Inviting contributions of the brightest minds in the bridge world towards improvements and refinements
- Making EDGAR available to all bridge organizations at little to no cost. This project has been a labor of love and good will for the benefit of bridge (running the algorithm at scale will provide entrepreneurs an important opportunity here).”

## **FINANCE**

As of year-end 2021, net assets totaled \$9.9M. The increase in net assets for the year was \$2.65M. This included a COVID relief item from the federal government of \$1.5M and \$450,000 of non-operating items. Therefore, the actual gain from operations was approximately \$700,000. The budgeted loss for 2022 is \$858,000 which includes depreciation of \$302,000. The Reno NABC loss is being finalized following receipt of all outstanding invoices from the hotel, but will significantly impact the actual loss for the year if all other items remain as budgeted.

## **AUDIT**

The Audit Committee received the report of ACBL independent auditors Dixon, Hughes, Goodman (DHG). There were no significant issues reported as a result of the audit. DHG reviewed actuarial assumptions regarding post-retirement benefits and were satisfied with current calculations. DHG also reviewed its audit procedures, focusing on payables and receivables related to BBO and clubs, as well as timing and confirmation of deferred revenues.

The 2021 audits of the ACBL Charity Foundation and the ACBL Educational Foundation are nearly complete. The IRS Form 990 returns for these entities and the ACBL are being prepared.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

According to the latest ACBL Quarterly Unit Improvement Package (QUIP) Report issued 3/31/22, ACBL membership totals 139,108; a decline of 1.54 percent since the report was last issued on 12/31/21.

## **STRATEGIC**

The Board has established key goals and objectives for the organization that include a robust return to F2F club and tournament play, building and retaining membership and improving technology. Management is developing action plans and implementation strategies for established goals and objectives. The Strategic Committee is developing the long range or vision and setting quantifiable targets. Plans are to be delivered in Providence.

The Board held Breakout Sessions in Reno to address the challenges facing the ACBL today and into the future. This gave Board members the opportunity to share concerns from their District(s) and knowledge acquired from serving in bridge governance. A detailed report was prepared and delivered to Management to provide additional input into the planning process.

## **MARKETING**

The goal of the ACBL Marketing Department is to develop and implement initiatives to increase membership and member value.

The Intro to Bridge program has led to over 880 new bridge players, many of whom transition to the Guest Membership program. Over 2,500 guest members have come through this program since its launch in February of 2021. The ACBL will continue to build on these programs to support its mission to promote, grow and sustain the game of bridge while serving the bridge-related interests of its members.

Marketing has refreshed the ACBL website, streamlining content and improving functionality. It has redesigned the *ACBL Bridge Bulletin* and rolled out new logos and a tag line: Dealing Infinite Possibilities.

The first Member Appreciation event was held in October with more than 160 prizes awarded. The event produced strong engagement through ACBL social media channels, improving the ability to identify, target and attract bridge-playing audiences. Additional events are planned for 2022.

The *Speakeasy* newsletter electronically delivers updates and event reminders to membership twice monthly, reducing email overload. The *Speakeasy* is now posted on *BridgeFeed* and the ACBL Facebook page.

Long term, Marketing will embark on a research program that will help the ACBL better understand and meet the needs of prospective and current members. Through this process, Marketing has created member/prospect personas and journey maps. Both will provide a clearer picture of each touchpoint and how to improve them, which in turn will lead to greater member retention and membership growth.

## **Supporting Alzheimer's Research**

The ACBL has raised \$7.8 million for Alzheimer's patient care and research through participation in The Alzheimer's Association's The Longest Day fundraising event. During 2021, approximately 300 Units and Clubs raised \$917,000. All Virtual Club Games held the weekend of June 18 and 19 are designated Alzheimer's Association games, and the ACBL sanction fees will be donated to the Alzheimer's Association. Clubs that have returned to F2F play can choose any day during the week of June 19-26 to hold their events and offer upgraded games.

Marketing is working with The Alzheimer's Association to schedule informational webinars about the latest scientific research and caregiver/patient support opportunities for ACBL members.

### **Supporting the People of Ukraine**

The United Nations World Food Program will receive net proceeds from the Hollywood Magic Online Regional held March 24-27, and additional proceeds from games held F2F and virtually March 28-31. In the early May edition of the *Speakeasy*, ACBL reported that online games raised \$108,000 for this project. BBO will donate \$10,000.

The ACBL Charity Foundation will donate up to \$25,000 of funds raised in virtual clubs, April 4-10, to UNICEF - Help Children in Ukraine.

### **COMMUNICATIONS TASK FORCE**

The Task Force Chair reported the accomplishments of improved communication within the Board, between the Board and ACBL Management, and the Board and ACBL membership. A review of the Codification as it relates to communications and communications protocols is complete along with recommendations for improvements to process and timelines. Motions will be put forth in Providence.

### **APPEALS AND CHARGES**

In Reno, under Item C221-AC01, the Appeals & Charges Committee reported the outcome of its most recent hearing.

The Anti-Cheating Commission (not to be confused with the Anti-cheating Committee of the ACBL Advisory Council) was formally disbanded. The Commission was formed in the wake of high-level cheating scandals in 2015 and 2016, resulting from a recommendation of the Bridge Integrity Task Force. Over time, the committee made recommendations and reviewed players of concern to it. However, the committee was not in the position to do anything concrete, and the members did not feel that retaining the structure served any purpose. Discussion between the ACBL Executive Director and the National Recorder about possible reconstitution of the committee as a clearinghouse between bridge organizations resulted in action being taken in that direction apart from the committee. ACBL management believes that it is time to retire the formal committee. Many of the people who generously agreed to serve on the Anti-Cheating Commission will still be available to consult as needed.

The ACBL Board heard a confidential presentation concerning exciting new developments in detecting online cheating. Those developments are noted above under the heading "Introducing EDGAR."

Complete information about the ACBL Disciplinary Process can be found at <https://www.acbl.org/ethics/>. This includes an explanation of how the process works,

Disciplinary Disposition Summary Charts, and various disciplinary committee hearing reports.

## **GOVERNANCE**

Governance had a relatively light agenda for Reno, with three motions, a non-agenda item and two discussion items:

Motion (Item 221-GV01) eliminates the National Charity Committee and recognizes outstanding members who participate, organize and/or promote charity endeavors in their respective communities through the receipt of a Charitable Recognition Award. It proposes that District Presidents make the selections instead of the Regional or District Directors. Details regarding process and timeline will be reported. Approval was unanimous.

Motion (Item 221-GV02) reorganizes, updates and clarifies the Codification relating to a Unit's relationship to the ACBL, Unit requirements and Unit responsibilities and privileges. It eliminates the requirement for Units to hold at least one sectional every two years, and clarifies that the 11 percent of full dues payments and life master service fees paid by their members is intended to supplement Unit funds for activities related to membership building and retention. Approval was unanimous.

Motion (Item 221-GV03) addresses a discrepancy in the election procedures for Board officials, non-Board committee members and representatives to international bridge organizations. Approval was unanimous.

Motion (NA221-01) was introduced as a non-agenda item (NAI), which means that it was not submitted in time to be included as part of the formal Reno agenda. NAIs are time-sensitive and require immediate Board attention. This NAI addresses the special election procedures that are needed to fill the vacancy left by the sudden passing of Regional 6 Director, Mike Kovacich. The procedures adopted unanimously by the Board will govern the election of someone to serve the remainder of Mike's term.

Discussion Item (DI221-GV01) addresses a fairly complicated motion (213-GV04) having to do with the formation, transfer and dissolution of Units that had been submitted and then tabled in Austin last fall. A thorough discussion was held, both in Committee, and then again with the Full Board, where the Governance Committee made a number of recommendations concerning Unit formation, transfer, and dissolution; geographic boundaries; how to address administrative challenges borne by Units; and the processes whereby changes to a Unit's status may be made. Based on Board input, a motion will be submitted for consideration in Providence.

Discussion Item (DI221-GV02)—addresses the more extensive changes regarding election procedures, e.g., how notifying interested parties of upcoming vacant positions should be accomplished; declaring candidacy for these positions and a date by which this must be done; allowing nominations from the floor; the election procedures that

govern them; and announcing the number of votes cast for whom. The Governance Committee met virtually in advance of Reno and presented a detailed set of recommendations to the Full Board concerning these and other procedures related to elections of Board officials, non-Board Committee members, and representatives to international bridge organizations. Based on Board input, a motion will be submitted for consideration in Providence.

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REVIEW**

Executive Director Review (EDR) generally meets in executive session to protect the confidentiality of what is said by both the Board and the Executive Director. In Reno, there was one “public” motion (Item 221-ED01) which updated the Executive Director Succession Plan in the Codification Part 1 – Governance and Policy, Chapter II – Business Management, B. Employees and Consultants, Section 5. The wording in this section was significantly condensed and a new detailed Succession Plan was incorporated as Appendix 2-D. Approval was unanimous.

## **BRIDGE**

As the National Board reduces in size to 13 members, non-core related functions continue to be transferred to outside Committees and to Management. This will ensure that a smaller Board can focus on the strategic and financial goals and objectives of the ACBL. This transfer of authority is reflected in the majority of motions and a discussion item brought forth by the Bridge Committee.

Motion (Item 221-BR01) was put forth to refine the structure of the Competition and Conventions Committee and to define lengths of service. Approval was unanimous.

Motion (Item 221-BR02) to strengthen the eligibility restrictions for limited Masterpoint events was deferred to the Competition and Conventions Committee.

Motion (Item 221-BR03) to permit the use of robots to continue without over-inflating Masterpoint awards was deferred to the Masterpoint Committee.

Motion (Item 221-BR05) was put forth to streamline the process of Masterpoint modifications. Approval was unanimous.

The pandemic has impacted the ability for Districts to hold all allowed NABC fundraising weeks (for hospitality) in local clubs. A motion (Item 221-BR06) clarifies the current regulation that applies to F2F clubs, allows weeks that were missed in one (or two) of the three years before the NABC to be moved into the last year and adds one week of NABC fundraising in Virtual Clubs (only those run by clubs within the District). Due to IT constraints, NABC fundraising in virtual clubs was removed from the motion. Management will report timeline, schedule and cost to run said games during Board meetings in Providence. Approval was unanimous.

Also, a clean-up motion (Item 221-BR08) was put forth to eliminate the redundancy in NABC hospitality requirements. Approval was unanimous.

Discussion Item (DI 221-BR01), reviewing opportunities for expanding hybrid online and F2F bridge, was deferred to the Strategic Committee. Current technical constraints are impeding immediate developmental activities. The longer-term vision is to optimize the combined features and benefits of both online and F2F bridge capabilities.

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

In 2022, the ACBL will invest heavily in Information Technology. In Reno, IT reported progress and timelines for building a reliable, streamlined and cost-effective infrastructure.

IT will rely on third-party vendors and staff to continue architectural changes to the website, complete migration of the AS/400, update and finalize the Masterpoint Engine and improve ACBL Cloud. In addition, TRAX will be moved to a cloud-based application while ACBLScore will be moved to a web-based application. Progress regarding the tournament registration platform is highlighted below.

The Board liaison will communicate progress and challenges.

### **Masterpoint Engine**

Improvements have been made to the Masterpoint Engine special events calendar, allowing for queueing of special events months in advance. In addition, IT fixed AWS scaling rules to better handle additional load. It created new application workflows to process large games files previously restricted due to maximum file size limitations.

### **Report Migration**

IT continues the monumental effort to migrate the reporting from the old AS400 platform. It is building the pipeline to deliver reports and graphics through email distributions as well as the triggering and scheduling elements needed to deliver these emails in a purely automated manner.

### **Pre-registration Platform**

IT has made significant progress toward completing the tournament registration platform. In Reno, members had the option of pre-paying and pre-registering for various events through the ACBL Express Entry application. In the future, data analytics and reporting information will be provided to help tournament sponsors refine tournament schedules and reduce hospitality and director costs. A partnership “desk” component for those seeking partners for pair and team games will be provided.

## **APPOINTMENTS**

### **Appointments to the Competition and Conventions Committee**

Franco Baseggio, D25, Doug Doub, D25, Jeff Ford, D19, David Grainger, D2, and Jeff Meckstroth, D9, were all appointed for three-year terms from the end of the Spring 2022 NABC through the end of the Spring 2025 NABC.

### **Appointments to the Ethical Oversight Committee**

Kevin Bathurst, D9, Jon Brissman, D11, Bruce Ferguson, D17, Hendrik Sharples, D20, and Eddie Wold, D16, were all appointed for three-year terms from the end of the Spring 2022 NABC through the end of the Spring 2025 NABC.

### **Appointments to the ACBL Disciplinary Committee**

Chris Benson, D8, Mark Friedlander, D13, Jan Martel, D21, and Chris Moll, D7, were all appointed for three-year terms from the end of the Spring 2022 NABC through the end of the Spring 2025 NABC.

### **Appointments to the Hall of Fame Committee**

David Grainger, D2, Adam Grossack, D25, and Joe Grue, D24, were appointed for three-year terms from the end of the Spring 2022 NABC through the end of the Spring 2025 NABC.

Iftikhar Baqai, D23, was appointed to complete the remaining term of Neil Chambers, D3, through the end of the Spring 2023 NABC.

Lisa Berkowitz, D9, was appointed to complete the remaining term of David Berkowitz, D9, through the end of the Spring 2024 NABC.

Josh Donn, D17, was appointed to complete the vacant term through the end of the Spring 2024 NABC.

### **Appointments to the Laws Commission:**

Bart Bramley, D16, Allan Falk, D12, and Aaron Silverstein, D24, were appointed for a five-year term from the end of the Spring 2022 NABC through the end of the Spring 2027 NABC.

Oren Kriegel, D13, was appointed to complete the remaining term of Jeff Goldsmith, D23, through the end of the Spring 2024 NABC.

Doug Couchman, D17, was appointed to complete the remaining term of A.J. Stephani, D11, through the end of 2026.

## **ELECTIONS**

Paul Cuneo, R9, and Doug Couchman, D17, were elected as North American Bridge Federation (NABF) Board members for a three-year term beginning March 9, 2022, to December 31, 2024.

David Lodge, R11, was elected as ACBL Treasurer for a one-year term beginning May 1, 2022, through April 30, 2023.