

## EFFINGHAM COUNTY SCHOOL BRIDGE LEAGUE

by

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This effort has become a model of how to start a student bridge league in a rural community. The program got started when Sharon Osberg approved a mini-bridge grant for the 2006-2007 school year that paid for teaching seven teachers in five schools how to play mini-bridge. They then taught their students how to play. It finished with a mini-bridge tournament between the five schools in March 2007.

The student response to learning mini-bridge was so positive that the school administrators wanted to continue the program in the fall of 2007, but they could not find an experienced bridge teacher to “teach the teachers” how to bid.

In September 2007, we contacted the Assistant Superintendent of the Effingham School District, Debra Owen, and offered to give the “teach the teachers” seminar at no cost so that the program could continue. She made the arrangements to pull the teachers out of the classroom on Tuesday, October 2, 2007 to attend our one-day seminar on bidding and provided the Effingham School Board meeting room for the seminar.

Seven teachers attended the seven-hour bidding seminar that we presented that day. The last hour of the session was spent on planning a school bridge league. Each of the five schools agreed to host one of the monthly tournaments that started in January 2008. They started after-school Bridge Clubs in October and a total of 75 students in the five schools participated. We met with the teachers on a school night in both November and December to keep them ahead of their students.

The five school districts in this program have treated Bridge as a school-sponsored activity. This approach required that a coach’s stipend be paid for the after school activity. The amount is stated in each schools’ Collective Bargaining Agreement. Three American Contract Bridge League funding sources; the School Bridge Lesson Series, and the ACBL Educational Foundation grants, and ACBL Unit 223 were discussed.

All five schools registered their after-school classes with ACBL’s

School Bridge Lesson Series. The teachers received the \$350 stipend after teaching 16 hours of lessons to at least eight students. They also received the Club series text, T-shirts and trophies for their students.

Two schools submitted grants to the ACBL Educational Foundation. These grants requested the additional funds needed beyond the \$350 from the SBLS to cover the cost of the after-school activity stipend for the teachers. The Board of Trustees approved them with payment to made after completion of the School Bridge Lesson Series classes.

Unit 223 provided the \$500.00 needed to buy the boards and bidding boxes needed to play duplicate bridge. Unit 223 also voted to pay up to \$1,000.00 of the travel expenses of the top pair to the first Youth North American Bridge Championships to be held in Atlanta, GA in early July 2008. District 8 voted to match the Unit 223 reimbursement to allow the runner-up pair to travel to Atlanta.

We worked with Debra Owen to submit a grant application for the November ACBL Educational Foundation Board of Trustee's meeting to provide funding for the resources needed to support transportation to an ACBL Sectional event. Another grant application was submitted by Teutopolis. Effingham requested \$2750 and Teutopolis requested \$350. Both grants were approved at the Fall NABC meeting by the Board of Trustees for the ACBL Educational Foundation.

On January 15, 2008 at Teutopolis Middle School in Illinois, 45 students from five schools participated in their first duplicate bridge tournament. Three local members of the Effingham Duplicate Bridge Club helped with the directing and scoring of the tournament. Two of them played in the tournament to fill out the 12<sup>th</sup> table.

The second tournament was held at Dietrich on February 19, 2008 with 41 students participating. We were able to announce that Unit 223 had agreed to pay up to \$1000.00 in travel expenses to the Youth NABC to be held in Atlanta, GA for the overall winners of the five tournaments.

The boards for this tournament were sent by the School Bridge LEAGUE and were scored as part of its Valentine Day Tournament. Two students from St. Anthony's School placed 5<sup>th</sup> in the beginner category and 11<sup>th</sup> overall. There were 100 beginner pairs and 76 intermediate pairs

competing in the School Bridge LEAGUE's Valentine Tournament.

The third tournament was held at St. Anthony's School in Effingham on March 18, 2008. This time 48 students participated in the pairs event.

The fourth tournament was held at Beecher City on April 8, 2008. A Swiss Team competition was held for the 48 students. Four three-way matches were held so that each team competed against two other school teams. St. Anthony's teams placed first, second and sixth. Beecher City took third, fifth, and ninth. Teutopolis took fourth place. It is extremely important that the students record the board number of the hands that they play and the team they played for each board.

Twenty students from the Effingham Country School Bridge League participated in their first ACBL Sectional Tournament in Effingham on April 26<sup>th</sup>. A total of six tables were played because four students from Carlinville participated.

The fifth tournament was held in Effingham on May 7<sup>th</sup>. There were 40 students playing the six boards provided by the School Bridge LEAGUE's End of Year Tournament. Over 450 middle and high school students in 35 schools in the United States and Canada competed in this event. The top pair from this league, Michael Goldstein and James Ritz from St. Anthony's, will be participating in the Youth North American Bridge Championship in Atlanta with the travel expenses for them and their chaperone paid by ACBL Unit 223, Southern Illinois and Paducah, KY.

The last activity for the 2007-2008 school year took place on May 17<sup>th</sup> when 24 students from three of the five schools in the Effingham County School Bridge League rode a school bus for two hours to travel to the St. Charles, MO Sectional. Rick Beye, the Chief Tournament Director of ACBL, directed the eight-table event and used the new remote scoring system being tested by ACBL. These middle school students caught on very quickly to using this technique.

The students are looking forward to continuing playing duplicate bridge in their Effingham County School Bridge League next year. Their coaches are planning to be there for them next year as well.