

Bridge Club

(by Katie Grasso - January 29, 2009)

TJ hosts tournament full of strategy, tactics

Though some may think the Bridge card game is for older, experienced players, on Wednesday, Jan. 21, students of Thomas Jefferson Middle School (TJ) proved that theory wrong, hosting its first Bridge Tournament. The tournament joined TJ with River Dell Middle School and West Brook Middle School (in Paramus) students and was a friendly, competitive day of play.

According to TJ's club advisor, Karen Hughes, TJ's Bridge Club has been in existence for the past three years. She says, "Three years ago the Bridge Club came back into existence. There had been a Bridge Club at TJ for many years under the sponsorship of Mrs. Mary Lou Nostas (since retired and also deceased). That group ended with her retirement in June 1998."

It was a club missed, as the current club boasts 26 members and average 20-24 weekly players. The TJ Bridge Club is open to fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth graders, and they hope to eventually expand the club to high school level so that those graduating TJ can continue playing. Hughes notes, "The club is learning the game of Bridge under the teaching of Steve Nellissen from The Bridge Table in Franklin Lakes, an organization offering lessons and tournaments. Each week there is a short lesson and then the students play bridge (usually six hands)."



Photo By Roy Caratozzolo III

Bridge Club hosted a tournament with other schools on Jan. 21.

It was Nellissen and Susan Koster (both of The Bridge Table) who arranged for Teaneck to host the tournament as part of the National School Bridge League's Dr. Martin Luther King Tournament. Teams from River Dell Middle School and West Brook Middle School came to compete and exchange strategies. Both of the traveling schools have Bridge Clubs and this was the first time the three schools met for a Bridge tournament.

For those unfamiliar with Bridge, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica: "The essential features of all bridge games are that four persons play, two against two as partners; a standard 52-card deck of playing cards is dealt out one at a time, clockwise around the table, so that each player holds 13 cards; and the object of play is to win tricks, each trick consisting of one card played by each player. Another feature is that one suit may be designated the trump suit (i.e., any card in that suit may take any card of the other suits), but the methods of designating the trump suit (or of determining that a deal will be played without trumps) differ in the various bridge games."

And in addition to the competitive benefits of the game, Bridge has many educational benefits. According to the School Bridge League, "Bridge is a game full of strategy and tactics. It's part science, part math, part logic, part reason. Bridge embodies cooperation, logic and problem solving and has even been linked to higher test scores among children. Bridge is also a partnership game. Trust, communication and patience are the essential attributes of winning at bridge."

Past tournaments

Even though TJ's Bridge Club is only three years old, it has participated in other events. Hughes mentioned that they have participated in The Bergen County School Bridge Tournament (usually in April/May) organized through the Bridge Table. The first of the tournaments was two years ago - TJ and another middle school; last year there were at least four, if not five, schools, including high school students from Glen Rock and the Bergen Academies. Last year, our team of Jason Hughes and David Pinto placed first. They were sixth graders at the time. In September 2008, TJ's club participated in the National School Bridge League's Back-to-School Tournament. Four of our students received trophies from the National School Bridge League."

As time goes on, Hughes hope to increase the Bridge Club's activities and notes that, "The school, particularly Principal Antoine Green, has been incredibly supportive of our activities."