

It's nothing without the people

The long-term success of any club is dependent on the people.

People who are members, people who are staff and administrators, people who teach and mentor, people who volunteer their time to help the club move forward, people who care enough to attend an AGM.

It's people who have made the club what it is today. It's people's drive and enthusiasm to participate in club activities, their willingness to share their knowledge, and passion with new and future members.

It's not just a current group of people. It's an entire legacy of people both current and past. We thank them all, and we thank you all.

Membership

In July 2019, we had 585 members. This is down 15 from July 2018, and 4-years ago (2015), membership was 665.

The number of tables in play year-on-year is down too. You can multiply the table numbers x 4 to calculate the number of individuals playing.

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
7,537	7,277	7,495	7,052	7,070	6,813	7,016	6,700

Many years ago, our membership was over 1,000 and no doubt many of our current members can readily recall what those days were like.

We are not alone facing the challenge of less members - as either a bridge club, or leisure activity. Factors such as people working longer, being time poor and with much more discretionary choices as to how their leisure time is spent, including on-line options - make clubs like ours vulnerable to membership drop off. Golf clubs have had to adapt by producing a short form of the game; bowling clubs have had to sell off property; libraries are open different hours. It is a challenge that we cannot ignore.

Although the club owns these buildings and the property, and we are fortunate not to have on-going rent issues, there are steady maintenance and upkeep costs, and general running costs, none of which are going down in cost.

As membership numbers reduce, the burden of these costs across remaining members proportionally increase, and unless we can find other sources of

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income or further reduce costs, this will soon need to be offset by increasing in the annual subscriptions or table money.

However, the board is clear that we do not want to create an environment where membership fees become a barrier to belonging to this great club, and right now we intend to hold these fees and adopt a harder scrutiny on costs.

Increasing Membership

Over the past year, the Auckland Bridge Club has been very focussed in developing a pathway for beginners – from lessons, feeding through to novice sessions, that feed into various staged weekly sessions.

Our conversion rate at each step has improved but it is still not good enough to keep up with the attrition that we experience. We know it is a challenging game to learn and requires practice and perseverance. Your Board is considering a range of options to improve the conversion rate, including shorter playing sessions for beginners, more social playing sessions, and other ideas. We are seeking to meet some of the next generation of player's needs, without compromising the great club atmosphere and breadth of playing choices that currently exist.

Our vision is for our club to be the (Auckland) Bridge Centre that offers a wide range of bridge experiences from: very social players to serious experts; from new to bridge to long-time national championship level; and from a little bit of time to play to a lot of time to play.

We want to celebrate the achievements of beginners, and to that end we have a new event in the 2020 bridge programme. The July Wednesday night pairs will now be known as the **Ann Weatherston** Pairs. This event not only acknowledges the years of service Ann gave to this club but recognizes how Ann loved encouraging and welcoming beginners into club bridge and supporting these developing players. From July 2020, our July Wednesday night series, which is a night for still developing players, will award the Ann Weatherston Salver to the best intermediate/junior pair/partnership of the July tournament.

Increasing our income

It has become an increasing challenge, with falling numbers, to find sponsors and we are grateful to all those outside our community who continue to support us through cash donations, discounts and in-kind work.

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We want to particularly thank **The Taishan Building Group Ltd** who sponsor our Queens Birthday Congress with substantial prize money, and the elder care sector who support our Thursday tournament series.

Additionally, individuals volunteering of time, and donations of money and goods are critical for the club, and as a registered charity, the Auckland Bridge Club can provide receipts to offset donations.

It is appropriate at this point to acknowledge the estate of Anne Cartwright, who was a member of our club since 1984. Anne bequeathed \$10,000 to the club. One of her joys around playing at the Bridge Club was the fellowship, and friendships made at the Club. We sincerely thank Anne and her estate for this generous donation.

Please remember that members can add a donation to their annual subs and choose to donate at any time during the year. Regardless of whether it is \$50 or \$50,000 your donations are fully tax deductible.

We are continually looking for projects that might qualify for grant funding and have several applications currently in the pipeline. The lead time from application to knowing of the success for these funding applications varies. If we are successful with any of our current applications we will use the funding for improving the clubrooms including: the upgrade of the men's toilets downstairs, and both sets of toilets upstairs, and potentially re-carpeting the clubrooms.

We have had fundraising activities held successfully in the past, but these also seem to be less popular now-days with the fundraiser planned from earlier this year having to be cancelled due to insufficient interest.

We will seek to initiate further fund-raising activities during the coming year!

It is important that our biggest asset, our building, is working hard for us and we keep it rented out to: Akarana Bridge Club, Eastern Bridge Club, Youth Chess Club, and other community groups over the year to ensure it is being used to capacity.

Managing our costs

We are fortunate to employ an expert team who keep the club running day in and day out. This team meets the needs of all members, and it is opportune to thank everyone who is delivering services to our Club members.

Starting with our current team - a huge thank you to **Deborah** and **Julie** (our management team), **Emma** and **Barbara** (from the kitchen), **Patrick** and **Julie**

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(Directing) and **Douglas, Janet**, and **Julie** (again) (for lessons, beginners and novice players). They all make an amazing difference for our club.

Without volunteers, our costs would much higher, and we are very fortunate to have a large pool of people who volunteer their time, enthusiasm, knowledge and passion, and I would like a call out particularly to: **Russell Watt**, (the bar); **Angie Fitzgerald** (fund raising); **Murray Weatherston** (past-president); **Sharon Marryat** (treasurer and transition to Xero); **Owen Hayward**, **Raoul Daroux** (repairs and maintenance); **Beverly Morris** (library); **Sylvester Riddell** (scoring and technology); **Sue Burns** for years of free Star Print paper; **Peter Hensman** for organising the Monday/Wednesday standby rosters; **Pat Milliner** and **Patricia McCallig** who regularly clean the tablets; **Anne Miller** and **Kathryn Burgess** who regularly tidy up after play; as well as the many other members who volunteer their time as standbys.

We can assure you there is nothing frivolous or unconsidered in any of the spend we undertake, and we continually look for ways to streamline processes and overheads. As mentioned earlier, costs will be a focus for the board and management in 2020.

Our future success

We can all play our part in continuing to make our club (our Auckland Bridge Centre) a marvellous place to be now and in the future:

The three things I ask you to take away and think about are:

1. **Participate (when you can)** in sessions and tournaments, but also events such as our fund raisers, working bees, calls for gifts for raffles.
2. **Volunteer (when you can)** to be a standby, to share your skills, to mentor players, to be on your working committees
3. **Be part of the future** welcome, encourage and be tolerant of new players (and aging players), accept some changes may be inevitable, help in fund raising!

Thank you everyone

Mark Robertson
Anne Barrowclough
Wayne Gyde
Terry Melhuish
Sharon Marryat