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## Bridge becomes lawyer's passion

Attorney recruits younger players to the card game he started to play in 1991

**M**y name is John and I'm an addict. A bridge addict. My will has been taken over by a card game.

It began in 1991. I had just made partner at a big law firm when I decided it was time to do something besides billing hours.

Then I saw a newspaper announcement advertising bridge at a local club.

With an image of housewives sitting around a kitchen table on weekday afternoons filling my head, I arrived one winter evening at the Bridge Studio, a local club in a Lake Shore Drive high-rise.

The announcement said this was a duplicate bridge club. I quickly learned that while duplicate bridge involves the same general rules as home — or “party” — bridge, the differences are vast. In duplicate, the cards are placed in a metal board and not reshuffled.

Instead, the same hands get replayed throughout the game. Think of the north-south pairs remaining stationary and the east-west pairs moving up to the next table after each round.

The boards are then passed down in the opposite direction. Everyone plays every board, but no one plays a pair or a board twice. The luck of the deal is now gone. If you're dealt a bad hand, so are the other players sitting your way and playing your cards.

It's now your skill at playing the cards that matters.

When the elevator door opened, the club owner and game director greeted me.

“Welcome. You'll play with Phil tonight,” he said, pointing to me and gesturing to the man who I had come in with.

“But I don't know how to play the game,” I admitted.

“You'll learn,” he said.

The director was right. I sweated a lot that night and misplayed many cards, but I survived and was hooked.

No other game compared to bridge — the subtlety of hand evaluations, the bidding systems and conventions, the card counting and signaling. It was both beautifully simple and utterly complex.

I took lessons, read books by the experts and played and played, and six years later, in 1998, I became a life master in duplicate bridge. Coincidentally, that's the same amount of time it took me to make partner.

I remember when I got my last fraction of a gold point at a regional tournament in Madison, Wis., which I needed to make “life master.” I was thrilled. They call it “life master” because it's difficult to get those points, theoretically taking a lifetime.

If you win a club game, you might earn a fraction of a black point. To make life master, you need 300 points (more now) of various colors, some of which can



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only be earned at special tournaments.

Each of the three, 10-day national tournaments hosted annually by the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL) involves about 14,000 tables of players. Chicago will host its next national tournament in 2015.

Now a life master, it was time to get further involved, so I ran for and was elected to board membership in the Chicago Contract Bridge Association (CCBA). Bridge governance is complicated.

The national governing body, the ACBL, has created 25 districts. Each district is divided into units, and the units run local tournaments, engage directors to oversee the games, create

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newsletters and support the bridge community.

Our local District 13 consists of three units: the CCBA covering the greater-Chicago area, another unit covering southern Wisconsin and a third unit covering northern Wisconsin and Michigan's upper peninsula.

Over the next 10 years, I rose up through the ranks to become CCBA board president in 2006. I had two main goals: I wanted to bring younger players to the game and also to make all players feel welcome at club games and tournaments.

I later joined the District 13 board and now serve as its president, an office I will hold until 2015.

I also became an ACBL-accredited bridge teacher about 10 years ago.

I donate bridge lessons as silent auction items at charity events, bringing in income for the charity and introducing new players to the game.

My bridge addiction shows no signs of letting up. The experience has been more than I hoped for. I've met interesting people, made key business contacts and gotten clients from the table.

I'm amazed I ever had that image of ladies playing in the kitchen. There is no typical bridge player. The game is the great equalizer.

No matter who you are or what your circumstances may be, all that matters at the bridge table is your skill in bidding and playing the hand.

For information on lessons, clubs, the ACBL, District 13 and the CCBA, check out [acbl.org](http://acbl.org), [acbl-district13.org](http://acbl-district13.org) and [bridgeinchicago.com](http://bridgeinchicago.com).