



# Superteacher

**Patty Tucker named Honorary Member of the Year.**

BY **SUE MUNDAY**

Photos by Carrie Clark | Sweetertan Photography

most wonderful gift you can give to anyone is bridge. When one of my students finally gets something – when they have that ‘Eureka!’ moment – I feel joyous. I teach for joy.”

## Learn Bridge in a Day?

Anderson’s submission salutes Learn Bridge in a Day? (LBIAD) as “a model program for introducing bridge to those who have had no previous experience with it.”

Tucker, who lives in Atlanta, describes this five-hour dip into the shallow end of the game as a seminar designed

for new players or for returning players who want to refresh their understanding of bridge.

The idea for LBIAD originated with her students, according to Tucker, whose 35 years of teaching experience runs the gamut from small groups of adults in private homes to kids in summer-camp settings.

“I had lots of my adult students telling me that they wanted their spouses or college kids to learn, but that they didn’t have time. I said to myself, ‘If I can teach the kids bridge in eight hours in a summer camp, why can’t I teach adults in a short time?’”

Tucker and Melissa Bernhardt partnered to form Whirlwind Bridge, the company that develops the student workbook and presentation materials and produces LBIAD seminars.

Since the 2013 Summer NABC in Atlanta, the LBIAD seminar has become a tournament staple. The ACBL Educational Foundation helped fund 17 district-hosted workshops in 2014 and

2015. More than 1450 potential bridge recruits attended these sessions.

Many units contract directly with Whirlwind Bridge to bring this marketing and member-building opportunity to their areas. Palo Alto Unit 503 set a record when its 2015 program drew 172 students.

All told, nearly 4700 people of all ages and walks of life have been introduced or reintroduced to bridge through LBIAD.

## LBIAD spinoffs

The numbers through the door don’t tell the whole story, however. Retention matters. Maybe six months, a year following an LBIAD seminar, Tucker emails teachers in the vicinity of an event she led and combs through unit rosters looking for familiar names.

“My personal retention rate is in the 75% range,” she says. “Other areas report anywhere in the 40–60% range. It’s all in the follow-up.”

Tucker urges her students at the end of class to stick with it. “You won’t be able to play well,” I tell them, “but you’ll be able to play.”

Tucker recounts how, at a Spring NABC, she ran into a woman who had taken LBIAD at the previous Fall NABC.

“You told me I knew enough to play at the end of the class,” the former student said. “So I just kept on playing. I’ve got 20 points now!”

Tucker adds, “It was obvious she’s having a great time!”

In addition to funding, it takes considerable volunteer energy to stage a successful LBIAD. Tucker encourages clubs and districts staging an LBIAD workshop to make the most of this

**W**ith her multiple identities and many powers, she’s like a superhero: teacher, coach, co-founder of Atlanta Junior Bridge, architect of the Youth NABC, Emerald-going-on-Grand Life Master, creator of Learn Bridge in a Day? and president of the American Bridge Teachers’ Association. Patty Tucker picked up a new persona when the Board of Directors named her ACBL’s 2016 Honorary Member of the Year – an accolade reserved only for the finest ambassadors of the game.

“The future of bridge and the ACBL is primarily in the hands of those who teach it, and one of our best teachers is Patty Tucker,” says District 14 Director Sharon Anderson, who nominated the well-regarded teacher and champion of youth bridge on behalf of the ACBL Educational Foundation.

When she regained her powers of speech following the shock of learning of the honor, Tucker summed up why she does what she does: “I think the

investment by making sure there are beginning classes and 0–5 games in place. That crucial next step is, in fact, what’s motivating the development of LBIAD II.

There’s only so much Patty to go around. Eventually there needed to be more teachers trained to use the LBIAD model, and so Whirlwind Bridge came out with an instructor accreditation program. Currently 128 teachers have become accredited to teach LBIAD.

## A sense of belonging

There is no doubt that Tucker passionately loves the game. What’s also clear, however, is how much the ACBL’s 2011 Goodwill Member of the Year cherishes being part of the larger bridge family.

“I learned to play bridge when I was 11,” Tucker says. “I loved it from the moment I touched the cards.” But she found very few kids playing bridge.

What she found at the Huntsville AL club, however, were adult players who “helped me, nurtured me, worked with me, played with me and made me feel like I belonged at the bridge table.

“The players at the club never made me feel like I didn’t belong,” she says. “They talked to me like I was a real person. The sense of belonging was huge!”

It is that sense of belonging that

Tucker sought to capture when she co-founded Atlanta Junior Bridge (AJB) in 2006, but with a twist: “I wanted kids to have other youngsters to play with and become friends with.”

Launched at the beginning of 2006, AJB was initially a joint effort by Tucker and Atlanta-based teachers Carolyn Eckert, Evelyn Gilliard and Karen Christian. Funding came from the ACBL Educational Foundation, District 7, Unit 114, the Duplicate Association of Atlanta and a number of local players.

Between May and August 2006, AJB taught 153 kids in classes and the summer camp program. Tucker says that 96 of those kids are still attending class or playing in games.

“We teach about 200 kids every year,” she says.

In 2008, Tucker rolled out the first Youth NABC. She hit up the usual sources for funding: District 7, Unit 114, Duplicate Bridge of Atlanta and local youth bridge supporters who had watched the success of AJB. “I reached out to Baron Barclay and Phil Gordon for scholarship money for the pairs event and the sportsmanship award. Local players helped. It was a huge group effort.”

What started as a three-day, kids-only event in conjunction with a sectional has morphed into a regular

adjunct of the Summer NABC that attracts young players from all over the world.

“Where do you have the most fun when you play bridge? When do you meet the most people?” Tucker asks rhetorically. “Right! At NABCs. I wanted the same thing for the kids: for them to meet kids from all over the world and make friendships through bridge.”

## Next?

It’s easy enough to see where Tucker got the name for her company: She is a human whirlwind. She teaches 16 bridge classes a week; she writes topic-specific booklets and student workbooks; she teaches LBIAD at the three annual NABCs and all over the country as invited; she works with the Georgia Tech Bridge Club and helps coach the collegiate team; and, and, and! Fortunately, her husband, Kevin Collins, is also a bridge player, so he understands the madness.

Tucker is brimming with new ideas and believes it is critical to adapt the old ways of delivering bridge instruction to the modern learner.

“I think, in general, that we – bridge players and teachers and bridge organizations – are too set in our ways,” she says. “We want people to come to us and learn bridge the way we’ve taught it for a hundred years.”

She considers how technology has changed the learning landscape: online sites, webinars, apps, social media, YouTube and more.

“I still think that the rapport between a teacher and student in a face-to-face setting is important,” Tucker says. “But people nowadays want to learn in short bites of information that they can take with them on their tablets and smartphones. With the creation of Learn Bridge in a Day? I tried to start recognizing that shift in learning.”

There’s one other power that Tucker, like every superhero, possesses, and that’s the ability to inspire others. ■



Tucker offers bidding tips to Georgia Tech students Charles Wang, Richard Buellesbach, Santhosh Karnik and Andy Xu.