

Confessions of a Life Webmaster

October 6, 2013

I was fortunate to be around the Bridge Center of Buffalo for many years before I was offered the prestigious position of Webmaster. I say “prestigious” because it is an ideal



position. I have held high positions in numerous community organizations. I've dealt with many emotional issues, attended boring meetings, been bombarded with constant complaints while holding little ultimate power to change anything. The Webmaster works alone, attends no meetings and receives complaints anonymously. And, did I mention, there is enormous power? If anything on the website bothers me, I change it. Sue me! Or maybe you want to cut my salary...go ahead, make my day!

And, thanks to my time hanging around the BCB and surfing the website, I was bothered. I didn't mention **that** when they asked me to be Webmaster. I accepted as soon as they assured me there were no board meetings. I did give fair warning as to some of the impending changes. Nobody seemed to take much notice as I expected.

Let me say one quick word about the website itself. I have been told it was authored by a high school student working for slave wages back in BCB prehistory (2004). We got a bargain. It makes good use of the technology available at that time, providing great capability for the money. I have no desire to criticize the original design nor do I intend to rewrite it using “modern” techniques. (Nine years is eternity in this business.) I quickly decided to work within the existing framework enhancing where possible.

1. Calendar Page

The calendar was my immediate concern. It was sparse and drab. There were entries for special games only leaving blank any day conforming to the usual schedule. So a Sunday was blank because the Club was closed but a Wednesday was blank because the normal morning and evening games were held. It was a calendar serving only the veteran players who already knew the schedule. A wandering bridge aficionado passing through would leave unaware of our full schedule. I made a simple rule...if there is a game, there is a calendar entry...if it's blank, no game.

Also the calendar was drab and colorless. The problems could be easily traced to the cumbersome process required to make entries. I converted to a more efficient method making it easier to add text especially with color even small graphics.

There was a serendipitous result from this effort. We formerly produced a separate calendar for the printed handout distributed in the club. With the upgraded online calendar, I can simply grab the image from the screen, pasting it into a flyer. The daunting monthly task of creating a printed flyer with calendar now takes a couple of minutes freeing one of our Board members to do more productive work.

Just an aside...A link to the monthly flyer is on our "Links" page. Our players can print this page reducing the demand for distribution in the club. An inexpensive ink jet printer will recreate the vivid colors. Black and white print outs may not be suitable for framing, losing the impact of color, but still serve the function.

2. Results Page

I often hovered near the Director's desk as games came to a conclusion. I watched the procedure of transferring the game file with hand record file to our Internet Service Provider so results would be available online. Our poor Director was required to transfer and rename two files, the game file and the hand record file, ultimately overwriting week old results.

Much of this process was unnecessary. The game files are generated by ACBLScore, a comprehensive computer program handling every aspect of the game including the generation of an internet ready file with name identifying the game date and time. A computer can easily determine the day of week from this file name. The hand record files can be easily placed online. In fact, it is easier to put them online than on the Director's computer. I just cut out the middleman.

Now the Director simply transfers the game file to the internet. A code is automatically attached to the game file identifying the hand record file. Everything is handled automatically.

The old Results page displayed a single week of games. Our new format displays games by date with the last sixteen, typically two weeks, shown. I can increase or reduce that number if desired. Both PDF and HTML hand record files are available on the site. You can print one at home if you miss getting it in the club.

One additional note about results...I object to the practice of many tournaments and clubs whereby only the event winners in each bracket are listed online. This may be appropriate for Team events (Knock Outs and Swiss) but there is so much educational value in full game files for Pair events. Look below the final scores to find a complete record of your result on each hand compared to the rest of the field. This information coupled with the Hand Record helps you recreate the hand, understand your successes and failures.

3. Background Color

You may have noticed a slight change in background color on our website if you're really observant. I found the old pure white background to be a bit harsh on the eyes. I changed it to off-white, Light Goldenrod Yellow to be precise. I find it easier to stare at. Many of the text pages remain with white backgrounds.

4. Member Roster

Updating the member roster during the year was overly cumbersome, near impossible. I have upgraded that process to make it much easier. We will now be able to include new members at any time. We're thinking of other information to include; any suggestions are welcome. If you are not aware, Unit 116 maintains a free online directory as well as a printed directory available at nominal charge. A link to the Unit site is available on our "Links" page. We don't need to duplicate efforts by including addresses and phone numbers.

5. Links

I'm trying to include links to sites I find useful. Some of them are legacy entries. They were on the page when I took over so I've left them in case some members use them. I've added some I think will be useful. I have placed links to our monthly flyer on top. You can use it in place of the calendar page. Print your own copy or go paperless, save a tree. Links to upcoming tournaments are on the bottom. I try to include local tournaments plus those within driving distance such as Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Erie, Syracuse, Rochester, Niagara Falls, Toronto and Hamilton. Of course I'm biased toward the tournaments I frequent. Power corrupts. Suggestions here are encouraged.

6. Forums

I would like to include inputs from our members on this page. Ask a question or tell us about something you've learned. I inserted a few entries to get it started such as this page you're reading but I'm soliciting appropriate inputs from our membership. Write about your experiences at the BCB, good or bad. Constructive criticism is always useful. Attach your submittals to an email addressed to

Webmaster@BridgeCenterofBuffalo.com.

I can handle just about any format so I'll try to include it.

That's it for now. There were a few minor changes to keep things current. I'm working on a Summary Generator so you can run out early but still get your summary at home. Share your concerns with us.

Your Webmaster