

Calgary School Bridge Program

On Friday, April 12, Calgary Unit 390 celebrated the successful conclusion of the 2019 school bridge program by hosting a wind-up tournament at Nellie McClung School. More than 60 students from five Calgary schools -- St. Jude, Father Whelihan, St. Philip, Nellie McClung and Captain John Palliser -- gathered to compete. Students from the visiting schools were bussed to the tournament site.

The road to the April 12th event was not simple.

Myron Achtman, Unit 390 director for Youth Education, has spearheaded the "Bridge in Schools" program and it is thanks to his tireless efforts that the project got off the ground.

In 2017, Myron Achtman contacted a friend of his who also happened to be the Chief Superintendent of the Catholic School Board. Myron asked his friend to consider introducing bridge into the school system, and he provided links to three YouTube videos that showcased how bridge was being developed in Toronto, Edmonton, and the United States.

Shortly thereafter, Myron was contacted by the principal of St. Jude School who was interested in giving bridge a try over the lunch period, once a week. He had 14 students from grades five and six ready to get started.

And so it was that Myron set up a pilot program at St. Jude. From the fall of 2017 to the spring of 2018, Myron conducted 16 bridge sessions. Since the lunch period was only 40 minutes, this amounted to about ten hours of actual instruction.

Delores Hedley offered to assist Myron as a mentor for the latter part of the program. She was very impressed by how well the students were playing, given the small amount of time they had had to learn the game.

The program at St. Jude was a big success, and the principal wanted to continue the bridge school program in 2018-19. Additionally, through word-of-mouth and referrals from Unit 390 members, specifically John Sharpe and Asha Acharya, the program expanded to four more schools.

In the fall of 2018, Unit 390 put out a notice asking for instructors and mentors to volunteer for the school bridge program and the response was positive. Teaching and mentoring assignments were made at an organizational meeting held at Myron's home.

Myron taught at St. Philip and Fr. Whelihan. Jim Berglund worked with the students at Captain John Palliser. John Finlay and Caroleigh Houghton taught at St. Jude. Margaret Nielsen took on the biggest group at Nellie McClung.

The goal was to have at least one mentor at every table in each class, in addition to the class instructor. That's a lot of volunteer mentors! Thanks to the great response from Unit 390 members, the goal was achieved at most of the classes.

The lessons continued until March 2019, with a break for the month of December. As spring approached, Caroleigh Houghton agreed to coordinate a bridge tournament for all five schools.

At the tournament, the students had the help of about 40 volunteer instructors and mentors from Calgary Unit 390. Every table had at least two volunteers supervising the play to make sure that bids were sufficient and that players were properly following suit. The dedicated support of these volunteers ensured the success of the tournament.

Murray and Marilyn Haggins volunteered their time to serve as directors for the event. They also duplicated all the boards and did an amazing job of compiling the results.

Every student received a souvenir button pin to commemorate the event.

After playing eight hands, trophies were awarded to the top three pairs. First place went to St. Jude students, second place to students from Captain John Palliser and third place to St. Philip Fine Arts School. The tournament was covered by both CTV and CBC news networks.

Once the awards had been given, students were treated to a pizza lunch, courtesy of Vijay Thankey of RE/MAX Realty Professionals, who is also the owner of the Glenmore Landing PIZZA BANK. Unit 390 supplied juice and ice cream bars.

Myron reports that the school Superintendents are keen to see the bridge program expand even further next fall, and in subsequent years. He has already been approached by several schools who want to be included in 2019-20. Of course, to make this happen, more teachers and more mentors will be essential. Anyone interested in helping with the school bridge program is invited to call Myron Achtman at (403) 295-8124 or email him at adita@shaw.ca.

Check out the following page for scenes from the tournament!



School Bridge Tournament Action



Lunch courtesy PIZZA BANK



Myron Achtman and Marilyn Haggins with trophy winners.

Photos courtesy Monique Achtman