

Travel arrangements

Everyone I know has made travel arrangements over the Internet. Well, if they haven't, they're not admitting it. It shouldn't be that hard. After all, these airlines and travel agencies want my money, don't they?

The first time I tried to find out about flights from here to the Third World country where my daughter works, I spent three hours on the computer and never found a discount travel site that knew where we wanted to go. They had the three letter symbol for the airport, but came up

blank on getting us from here to there.

After spending three more evenings on South Africa – we have to fly there first – I gave up on a discount. Then I remembered our frequent flyer miles. We've never used them, so I called the number on our last statement. I pushed the required numbers, spoke to the computer three different times and got the recording that said, "All calls are important to us, but all lines are currently busy. Please call back."

Maybe they aren't as interested in helping us if we are spending miles and not money. The last call took 23 minutes, but I

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Loose Ends
Susan Nienow

finally talked to someone halfway around the world.

Yes, our miles would work for part of the trip. The agent gave it a trial run for possible routes – D.C. to Frankfurt to Johannesburg to where our daughter lives. Coming home, we were to go through Singapore. I asked him to repeat it four times. "You mean that city on the other side of the earth?"

Then I got a lesson in politics, geography or semantics. It is a "state," not a city. Nevermind. "How long does the return trip take?" I asked.

"Four days," he said.

"I think we can do without the side trip to the Singapore airport. Thank you." And I hung up.

I do have a little bit of information, now. There are no daily flights from Johannesburg to where my daughter lives. But, there are flights. I just can't find out which airline or which day or days of the week. A friend suggested the phone. The last time I tried the phone, we ended up going through Singapore.

I waited until morning when I was rested and fortified by my bowl of cereal and two cups of coffee before I called a travel agent someone had recommended. The company is in Iowa or maybe it's Idaho. She got through to the airline miles people right away and laughed when I asked if it is really necessary to go through Singapore. I think I love this lady.

Both social and duplicate are contract bridge, which is a method of bidding, explained Dick Uhrig, bridge instructor at the Shepherd's Center of Chesterfield. However, duplicate bridge is set up so all partners play the same hands, and each hand is scored separately. No points are given for games or partial scores.

Competitive bridge players may accumulate Life Master points by winning or placing in American Bridge Association sanctioned bridge games or tournaments in which the top players receive points or fractions of points on black, silver, red or gold levels. Master points are an indication of the competitive level reached by that player.

Uhrig is a member of the American Bridge Association and plays social bridge at Grace Lutheran Church in a program sponsored by the Chester YMCA. They have nine or 10 tables. He has about 50 master points, but his son is a life master.

Accumulating master points can be expensive, observed Uhrig. The entrance fee may run up to \$10 and when there are 20 pairs, only the top two or three get a fraction of a point for each win.

For Uhrig, the benefits aren't quantitative. "Bridge keeps you within a group that has similar interests – like one of the family." At the Shepherd's Center, he teaches bridge classes for a \$25 annual fee.

Opie Lindsay started playing bridge his freshman year in college and because it was for money, he learned quickly. His teacher was Dr. William Reynolds, Easley Blackwood's partner. Blackwood is the author of a convention or bid that has retained his name.

"I like playing simplistic bridge [without artificial bids], because when I play for money, it is as much about reading people as reading the cards," said Lindsay, who met his wife while cutting a college class one day. She asked if anyone played bridge and he said, "Yes, damn well."

He added, "I can play with anybody and win with anybody." But, Lindsay doesn't play for money anymore because he says, "No one wants to do that." Even so, he takes any opportunity to play.

Bridge is played most often as a social game in homes or in community centers or

Looking for a game?

For the nearest bridge game, call:

Bensley Community Center
Joyce Wenberg, 275-5842

Chester YMCA
Dick Uhrig, 748-4729

Lifelong Learning Institute
378-2527

Parks and Recreation Department
751-4135

Shepherd's Center of Chesterfield
706-9198

churches. Despite many different types of rules, players manage to enjoy both the game and each other.

Esther Seminaire organizes 20 teams for marathon bridge through the Brandermill Woman's Club where players set up their own games twice a month. Running scores are kept, and the top winners collect prizes at the end of the year. Gloria Irvin organizes the duplicate games for the club. Signups are in the fall, and the year lasts through May. Irvin plays twice a week at Brandermill Woods, once at St. Marks, and has a regular Sunday foursome.

John Mejeur is the assistant director of the HCA Bridge Group, which plays on Fridays at CJW Medical Center's Johnston Willis campus or Mt. Pisgah United Methodist Church. Previously known as the H2U group, it started about 15 years ago and despite several name changes, still attracts enough players for more than 10 tables. He also plays at St. Marks and the Buckingham Woods community building each week.

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