

# Bridge a wonderful path to life-long friendship says Jann

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She may not be a magician, but every week for the past 34 years, Jann McNeil has sat around a perfectly square table, 13 cards fanned in her hands, dazzling as she tries to win tricks.

For 20 years she had been club president for the Bega Valley Bridge Club, 29 years as a committee member advocating for the pastime and team sport.

During a ceremony and lunch on Friday, April 5, she was awarded life membership.

The event, at which 40 guests attended along with mayor Russell Fitzpatrick, marked the 35th anniversary of the bridge club's formation.

But it was Jann who was celebrated for her long and distinguished contribution, meritorious service, dedicated support and outstanding achievements as a player, mentor and administrator.

"I don't know if I'm newsworthy, but bridge is. It's difficult and it takes a desire to want to play bridge to actually get through the learning phase.

'Well, you're always learning, you can't ever say 'I can play bridge' because every hand's different," Jann said.

Jan said the trick-taking card game required trust in your partner, logic, concentration, and an understanding of how to be selfless when achieving a goal, promoting cards or working in defence, but most of all it was still a really enjoyable game.

"It's really like riding a bike or driving a car, there's really things you don't have to think about except when you're brand new, and it gets easier in that way, but figuring out how to get the best out of the cards you're dealt, together with your partners, is the tricky thing.

"It's a community of friends who, over the years, have got to care for each other very much.

"We all love being together and encouraging new players, and we have seen a change in people, not through bridge but their own circumstances they're not that happy, but when they're at bridge they can forget about their personal problems."

During her thirties, Jann remembered how her grandmother was a very sharp lover of the game, and her friend Margaret's mother was the same, which resulted in lessons of rubber bridge, a form of contract bridge, using an old-fashioned method.

"We used to go to each other's houses and have lovely afternoon teas, a real social event," she said.

Originally part of a combined club with Tura Beach and Merimbula Bridge Clubs, before the two clubs purchased their own bridge rooms, Jann said Bega Valley Bridge Club was a smaller group that decided to move to the Green Shed in Tathra and meet Monday and Friday, weekly.

"I love it and I love all the people, I'm genuinely fond of them all, they're good friends and we enjoy being together," she said.

"You can hear the happy chatter when we all arrive and start paying our money and working out where we're going to sit.

"It's like herding cats to get going," she said with a laugh.