



The Friendly Bridge Story

Friendly Bridge was started in 2001.

Our goal was simple. Let's make bridge friendly and fun.

Bob MacCleave started coming to the Bridge Center in 83.

He noticed Bridge players' rudeness toward newbies, all too easy to see.

He met Linda at the Bridge Center, and they married in 85.

Bob told her that he didn't think bridge would survive

If the players were not encouraged to be respectful and kind.

And that if we could start a club that would keep that in mind,

We would see improved attitude and attendance in the game.

Then he read in the Bulletin that Edith McMullin felt the same.

She developed Easybridge with the idea that bridge could lift your mood,

And she focused on learning bridge with fellowship, fun, and food.

So Easybridge was Bob's dream, but here's the bottom line:

We would never have succeeded without Mike Fine.

Mike thought in twenty years bridge might not live,

So he asked for contributions to buy Edith's books, and folks were happy to give.

Even the Bridge Center, run by Bob and Mimi

Gave us the use of the Bridge Center for several months for free.

Mike bought the books, and we taught and directed, and our folks played

For free, but soon we charged a little, and the Bridge Center was paid.

The team for Sundays was Bob and Linda and Tuesdays, Jim and Ed.

We told Edith's jokes, taught, and directed, and the players had fun and were fed.

As you might know, we started early in September

And I know that we will always remember

What happened to our country the following week.

We were scared and in shock, and things looked bleak,

But we knew the only thing we could do
Was to continue the classes, and only a few
Did not return, so we united in our resilience and it seemed fairly sure
That learning to play bridge would be a distraction, not a cure,
But the camaraderie and caring that developed with those who stayed
Created a strong connection, and the foundation was laid.
Soon we discussed Edith's approach, and a decision we were all reaching,
Should we be focusing less on jokes and food and more on teaching?
We knew that we wanted to do more than deal cards and feed them
We wanted to find a way to include more bridge learning and lead them
To be motivated to learn better bridge than Easybridge provided and learn a lot more
And we agreed that teaching them the game of bridge was what we were there for.
We wanted to stop pretending that bridge was easy and to tell them out loud
That bridge is a hard game, and that mastering it will make you feel proud.
So soon Ed developed a program with material and a way for us to hook
The folks on the game, so Linda edited, added pictures and printed the green book.
We changed our title from easy to friendly, our perfect name
To describe our goal of including kindness with the teaching of this not-so-easy game.
The players, teachers, and directors developed a permanent connection,
And learning to play bridge with respect and kindness became our direction.
Remember when folks achieved life master that Friendly Bridge would host for you
A celebration that included a special poem and friends who would toast, boast, or roast you?
Remember the time when Hurricane Isabel hit
And most were without power, but the Bridge Center was lit,
So we gathered here and played for free with no masterpoint awards
And took home candy and candles for playing rewards?
And who can forget the friendships, bridge parties, and New Year's Eves
That we started celebrating at the home of the MacCleave's?
So here we are celebrating year twenty-five,
And thanks to you, bridge in Richmond is very much alive.
We started with a team and a dream, and only Ed and Linda are left from the original five,
And we are optimistic that the future of bridge is healthy and alive
Because of the people who have joined the team and are committed to help and stay.
And our name Friendly Bridge has now extended to the unit called the RBA.
I would like to express a special thanks to those who have left or passed away,
The players, the helpers, the founders who in our memories forever and will stay.
So Bob MacCleave, Jim Goodwin, Mike Fine, here's to you.
We did it, your dream that bridge would flourish in Richmond came true.

Linda MacCleave
September 25, 2026