



2015
HALL OF FAME
INDUCTEE
PHIL ERLENBACH

Phil Erlenbach has been involved with the game of bridge since he started playing in his sophomore year at Duke University. Phil and his wife, Barbara, managed and directed a bridge game in Brookfield, CT, for many years. He also gave lessons, taught bridge at a prison, and directed on a cruise. When Phil retired and moved to Durham, he joined the unit and was soon elected to the board. He has served as President of the board two different times, two terms as vice-president, disciplinary chair, membership chair, and has chaired tournaments.

In an interview that Liz McGuffey wrote:

“During Phil’s high school senior year at Wilbraham Academy in Wilbraham, Massachusetts, Phil applied to four universities, three in the Northeast and Duke. He had received early acceptance from all but Duke and he and his father checked out the northern school, but Phil wanted to see Duke. His mother joined them and they traveled south to tour Duke. As they registered for the campus tour, the desk clerk said Phil’s name was familiar. She excused herself and returned shortly to hand Phil his Duke acceptance letter. After the tour, Phil’s mother said, “Well, Philip, I think this is the place for you.” And the rest is history.

He graduated from Duke in 1956 and served in the Army in Germany for two years. In 1958, he married his college sweetheart, Barbara Freeman. After his discharge in 1959, he took a job with Continental Can Company and worked in Clinton, Mississippi. In 1963, he returned to the New York area where he and his wife reared two boys and one girl. They lived in Brookfield, Connecticut, in Fairfield County, near Newtown. In 1995, the couple retired to Mebane and continued to play bridge together regularly. Barbara ran a bridge game for 25 years in Connecticut, but she retired from directing when they moved south.

Phil believes that one of his greatest achievements in life is having traveled to all 50 states. He has visited over 100 national parks and monuments. Most were car trips, except to Alaska and Hawaii, with the family, fishing and camping along the way. What really hooked Phil on nature and traveling was a summer spent with an aunt in Manitoba when he was 13 years old. She was an ornithologist studying a specific wading bird in the area, the Hudsonian godwit. The train ride from Syracuse to Winnipeg was a five-day trip. After they reached their destination, they lived in tents on the tundra or cabins by the lake from May to August. He developed a close relationship with his aunt and his sense of adventure was born on this trip.

It is not hard to understand that Phil's passions outside of bridge are traveling, fishing for trout in western states and salmon in Alaska, and Duke basketball. He is also close to his three children and seven grandchildren. One son lives in Charlotte, one in Connecticut, and his daughter lives in Chapel Hill. He sees the grandchildren as often as possible, but thanks to online communication, they stay in touch regularly.

When asked about a memorable bridge hand, Phil recalled declaring a 7 spade contract. Only 2 cards remained and the contract appeared to be doomed. He played a good diamond from his hand, discarding the king of hearts in the dummy. The opponent then discarded the heart ace and Phil took the 13th trick with the heart two! "It wasn't my expertise that won the hand, it was opponent error, but I have never forgotten that hand," Phil recalled.

Thank you, Phil, for your many contributions to the game of bridge, and especially to Unit 191.