



Arkansas NLM Regional/Open Sectional a Success

By Laura Batey, Tournament Chair



Bentonville players (from left): Kam Harrell, Joe Warren, Jeff Lacaze and Diane Warren

The Unit 247 NLM Regional/Open Sectional featured record-breaking attendance. Held in Bentonville AR in August, the event drew 328 tables, up 33% from pre-pandemic numbers. How did we manage 133% participation from what we thought were great numbers in 2019 at a time when tournaments are hoping for 50%?

1. Relocated the event site to Bentonville, a city with more name recognition and tourist attractions.

2. Maintained a tournament website for all pertinent information for the event, surrounding area and pre-registration: Bentonvillebridge-tourney.com.



Registration desk volunteers (from left): Diane Warren, Sharon Judson and Becky Minke.

3. Formed a partnership with Visit Bentonville the local tourism bureau.

4. Started a Facebook page, Bentonville Bridge.

5. Invited players from the surrounding states via consistent emails with updated information and reasons to join our event.

6. Kicked off the event with a two-session workshop led by Jerry Helms.

7. Offered a charity component to the event with a special charity game, raffle and silent auction raising \$1,500.00 for the NWA Food Bank.

8. Added a third day of Gold Rush Pairs.



Tournament chair Laura Batey (center) and volunteer charity coordinator Sandy Gromatka (right) present charity proceeds to the Northwest Ark Foodbank representative, Kim Daniels.

9. Offered partnership matchups via our website and partnership chair prior to the tournament start date.

10. Built a reputation for fabulous hospitality. The tournament committee worked hard to make certain that each participant felt welcome and safe during both the workshop and the tournament.

Based on pre-registration numbers, we knew we were going to have a solid turnout. We had an overflow room pre-planned and set prior to the tournament start. On Thursday and Friday, we had the overflow room completely utilized with only one table to spare. The post-tournament responses were very positive from all the players and tournament directors. In addition to the red, silver and gold points awarded, we presented “trophies” to the top two pairs in

Gold Rush and open events. The winners of the Swiss teams were also presented trophies.



Laura Batey (far right) presents trophies to the winners of the three-day Gold Rush Pairs, Ernie Grant and Deborah Dawes.

The players loved being back with their bridge family and enjoyed being tourists in Bentonville. We heard only positive comments regarding Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, The Walmart Museum, Museum of Native American History, Compton Gardens and all the fine dining available. One of our local television stations came out and gave us news coverage, and a “Visit Bentonville” podcast was recorded with Jerry Helms during our event. Both media events will be featured on our website for next year’s tournament. The committee is already working to make next year even more special. Be sure to mark your calendar now and save the date for July 26–29, in Bentonville AR. 📅