

Ninety-five-year-Old Herb Schwartz of the Laguna Woods Bridge Club is all too familiar with what Alzheimer's and dementia can do to individuals and their families. He lost his wife, mother and mother-in-law to the disease.

As he moves steadily towards age 100, Schwartz attributes his mental health to bridge. As a champion for Alzheimer's awareness, he has organized several symposiums across California to educate the community on the benefits playing bridge can have on the brain.

On June 21 – the Summer solstice, the longest day of the year Schwartz and other bridge players across the country will play bridge from sunrise to sunset to raise awareness and funds for the fight against Alzheimer's. The Longest Day is the Alzheimer's Association's newest signature event, with ACBL as the premier partner.

"We piloted the event last year and participants did everything from ride their bikes to rock in rocking chairs for 16 hours straight," said Lynne Carey, Relationship Development Director for the Alzheimer's Association.

"The importance of social and mental activity on healthy aging can't be denied Playing Bridge offers the opportunity to do both simultaneously. There is so much synergy between our two organizations."

Bridge players across North America have the opportunity to participate in The Longest Day by playing a marathon of charity games at their local club while shedding light on both Alzheimer's and bridge. And, of course, there will also be extra master points.

'We're relaxing the sanctioning rules for Friday, June 21, so every club that would like to hold marathon charity bridge sessions can participate,' said CEO Robert Hartman.

"We understand that some clubs might not have space to participate, so we are also allowing clubs to operate in any location for this special day."

Additionally, all sanction fees collected from clubs participating in The Longest Day will be donated to the Alzheimer's Association. The ACBL Charity Foundation has already contributed \$50,000 in support of the Longest Day.

"Whether they are the afflicted or the caregiver, we all know someone who has been affected by Alzheimer's," Hartman said. "Playing bridge for The Longest Day is the perfect way to honor the passion, dedication and strength they display daily, while letting the world know there is a fun game that might help combat this awful disease."

Club managers, teachers and lovers of bridge are well aware of the need for positive publicity for the game. The Longest Day could very well provide that opportunity and club managers are encouraged to find clever ways their club can participate. "I'm proposing a team game against the other bridge club in Halifax at our local shopping mall," said Kathie MacNab, club manager at The Bridge Studio. "It would be good publicly for our bridge clubs and for the Nova Scotia Alzheimer Society and the Halifax Shopping Centre."

Sagamore Bridge Club manager Sylvana Zangri has already begun promoting the event to her players. After learning of the partnership in San Francisco, she wasted no time in hanging a Longest Day banner to pique the interest of her players. 'The banner alone is prompting questions and garnering excitement,'

Zangri said. 'I'm trying to recruit 200 players so we can have games being played from six o'clock in the morning until nine o'clock at night.'

The Alzheimer's Association and the ACBL are working together to provide the resources clubs will need to be successful. Each participating club will receive a kit with giveaway items for their players and tools and information for planning. They will also receive materials to promote their involvement.

Additionally, every participant will have access to social media tools that offer a variety of opportunities. Clubs will be able to follow each other if they want to. Friends and family will be able to follow and encourage participants via a nationwide community. Local Alzheimer's chapters will also be contacted to assist clubs. 'The goal is for each club to raise \$100 for every hour they play. This can be done through personal donations, getting friends to pledge a certain dollar amount for every board played, bridge class fees or even food sales, Carey said. 'The mission is to fundraise for Alzheimer's research while raising awareness about the benefits playing bridge has on brains. We're dedicated to making this a mutual success.'

The most energetic and creative Longest Day participants will be recognized in the Bridge Bulletin, possibly on the cover. For Schwartz, the big event "isn't about masterpoints or money. It's about my friends. Aging is something we will all do. It's nice to have an activity that exercises my brain and gives me the opportunity to socialize with friends and not feel so alone. Learning to play bridge is like finding the fountain of youth."