

24 Hours in Toledo

BINGO [7 - 8 P.M.]

Luck is a lady at seniors' bingo game

Originally published in *The Blade* on Sunday, May 27, 2007

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Carol Nadaud starts by passing out the bingo cards.

She'd leave them on a table for people to pick up as they come in, but that might stir up controversy. Some of the players believe in lucky cards.

"Some people come down a half-hour earlier and go through them and make sure they get their card that they always play with ..." Mrs. Nadaud explains later. "Some of them tonight, when they came in, said, 'Oh, I need one with number 13 on it. It's got to be down on the bottom on the left-hand side.'"

But not tonight. Tonight it's the luck of the draw.

As someone who's been calling bingo games at West Park Place retirement community in West Toledo for 18 years, Mrs. Nadaud, the program director, knows a thing or two about luck.

Like: some people think the light green cards are luckier than the dark green cards. Some like to sit in a certain lucky seat. And some, like Lady Mae Green, bring their luck with them.

Mrs. Green, 86, is one of the first people to grab a seat for the 7:30 p.m. game. Front and center on her table is a long, slender pouch with a bear's head, feet, and tail. It's her good luck charm, filled with coins and some mints.

She loves playing bingo, or any game really. (She still bowls and maintains a 146 average.) But bingo in particular conjures special memories of when she used to travel with her husband, who is now deceased.

"It reminds me of the good time I used to have with my husband with the motor home, stopping in different cities when we see a bingo sign, to rest," she says as the other tables begin to fill.

MULTIMEDIA

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Gladys Barz, left, of West Park Place retirement community, enjoys a game of bingo. (THE BLADE/ANDY MORRISON)

Bingo is a social experience for the people here — a chance to visit with friends, meet new people.

"I don't win too often, but that's all right. I'm down here to have a good time," says 95-year-old Rada Duckett, who sits at a table with her daughter, who is in town for a visit.

Everyone laughs and chats as they sit down with their card, which contains three bingo sheets. Each game costs a nickel, and many players line up rows of the coins on their table. The most they can lose tonight will be 85 cents.

"If we win that's great, but that's all we can lose, so we can't do so badly," says Bernice Rubin, 89.

The merriment dies down as soon as the first game is ready to begin and all eyes turn to Mrs. Nadaud.

"Good luck," she says, as a bingo machine starts to whirl and colored ping pong balls begin to bounce around a clear container. One pops to the surface.

"The first number is G-fifty-eight. Gee. Five. Eight."

All is silent expectation, except for the soft whirring of the machine and the clacking balls. Mrs. Nadaud continues

to call letters and numbers into a microphone from her seat in the front of the room, next to a player piano and big screen TV.

“The next number is O-sixty-seven. Oh. Six. Seven.”

Each call comes quickly after the next, leaving little time for the jolly senior citizens to dilly dally. The tension builds as a dozen numbers come and go. The count rises to 18.

Eventually, after what seems an eternity but is really less than three minutes, comes the call that everyone’s dreaded to hear from someone else’s mouth.

“Bingo!”

It’s Mrs. Duckett, and her victory is swiftly confirmed. The room fills with soft murmurs and the sound of players clearing their boards of bingo chips. One woman offers congratulations; another laments how close she was to her own bingo.

But Mrs. Duckett doesn’t have time to listen. She’s up and rushing around the room, a blur in a pink top, collecting nickels from the other tables, as she does for every game.

She gives them to another player Annie Weisberg, 93, who holds on to the cash until it’s time to be delivered to the winner. (In this case, Mrs. Duckett gets to pocket less than \$2.) Ten cents from each pot are set aside for the final game, which is called the cover-all. Tonight, that last pot will be sweetened by \$25 contributed by West Park Place.

It’s no National Bingo Night — the new show on ABC whose prizes have included a \$10,000 gift card and a trip for two to the NBA Finals — but that doesn’t matter to the great-grandmothers who make up much of this lively bunch (though there are a couple of guys). They joke and offer playful taunts or shouts of “It’s fixed!” At one point, when it’s time to ante up, two women break into Teresa Brewer’s “Music! Music! Music!”

“Put another nickel in,” one sings.

“In the nickelodeon,” the other finishes.

Each of the winners who follows finds some way to stand out.

There’s Gladys Barz, 83. She’d almost forgotten her lucky charm — a small pink rabbit knick knack— and had to go back upstairs to get him before the game.

Then there’s Mrs. Weisberg, who shouts “bingo” shortly before the turn of the hour. Too bad her distinction is being the first winner to have to share a jackpot.

“Always!” she laments. “Always have to have two winners. Never get a winner by myself.”

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