

**Downey, CA.** – Long Beach's Gary Jones and Orange County's Michele Lamo won the first annual Sweethearts Tournament at the Downey Elks over the Valentine's day weekend as the winners did it the hard way coming back from the loser's bracket to defeat Arizona's Terry Leahy and Linda Churchman in the finals held late Saturday evening (February 12).

The win marked the third time Jones has finished on top in the last few months, following wins in the Billy Chiles Memorial at the Huntington Beach Moose Lodge in September and the California State Amateur Doubles championship at the same venue in October. The win also marked the return of Ms. Lamo to the Southern California tournament circuit, as she had not played in some time. Rosewood Pub owner B.B. Boik was the sponsor of both of the top two teams.

Leahy and Churchman had cruised through the winner's bracket to face the Jones and Lamo team in the winner's playoff match of undefeated teams late Saturday afternoon. The Arizona team made quick work of the local team by knocking them into the finals of the loser's bracket where they squared off against Downey's Chris Brown and her first-time tournament player and partner Elks official Larry Cole of South Gate. It was a dramatic Gary Jones lag, with the score tied at 14-14, which won the game for the eventual tournament winners. Cole drew high praise from the packed crowd at the Elks in holding up his end in the loser's bracket finals. Brown and Cole finished in third place.

The Jones and Lamo win set up the rematch with Leahy and Churchman in the finals of the first Downey Elks tournament since the California Shuffleboard Hall of Fame tournament that inducted George Lucas in the late 1990's. The Jones-Lamo connection then proceeded to take two consecutive matches from the Leahy and Churchman team to win the tournament late Saturday night.

Ten teams of sweethearts participated in the event, with the fun teams of Leahy and Churchman and Gil and Linda Aragon traveling the furthest from Arizona to participate. The entry fee and sponsor money totaled \$1400 and was paid out to the tournament's top three teams. Norwalk's Garry Gareau prepared and maintained the Elks three fast shuffleboards for the tournament with the former owner of the Dixie Belle Restaurant Eileen Edes handling food coordinator duties for all in attendance. Long Beach's Bob Naretta computerized the event's sign-ups and Ms. Brown handled the team auctions, bracketing and served as the tournament director.

A unique aspect of the tournament was the handicapping system, initiated by Tournament Director Chris Brown, that didn't limit who could play based on ratings. Players in the event had ratings from zero to four with combined team ratings from three to eight. The three placing teams were rated a combined five, five and six.

The Downey Elks lodge also held a 50/50 draw over the weekend with the proceeds going to the handicapped children of Rancho Los Amigos Hospital in Downey for a sponsored trip to Disneyland. The event was a Downey Elks project and the winner was Ms. Brown and with her new found funds promptly stood the bar a round.

The "Sweethearts Weekend" continued on Sunday with round robins and karaoke. The event was a huge success with many promises by participants to return next year to the comfortable Downey Elks facility and the wonderful world of shuffleboard.

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