



THAT FIRST YEAR

(AND OTHER MISCELLANY OVER TIME)

A HISTORY

BY

ED OTJEN

FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SPECIAL THANKS

There are many who deserve a thank-you. In the event I miss some in this history, make sure you tell that person, "Thanks, I don't care what Otjen said or didn't say about you." However, there are a few that stand out in my mind as having been especially helpful in getting the following story right. They are (or were):

VICKI AND DARREL BRUESEHOFF AND SALLY OTJEN for their tireless efforts and endless worry early-on. And for their recall so many years later.

BOB WIRTH who had all the B&T's and willing shared the ones I was missing with me.

JOHN WHITE who had many pictures, magazines, standing sheets and other priceless trivia.

SHARON LOHMAR for providing me with *minutiae* by the basketful: Membership lists, Minutes, and other Secretarial files.

JIM HUNT for patiently letting me tape him for hours on end and, most importantly, for being the creative genius behind the scenes that he has always been. Without him getting the TCDA off the ground would have been extremely difficult and full of a lot more trial and error than we actually went through.

JACK FISCHER for a sharp, clear mind. Jack was the TCDA's poet laureate...a laureate, in case we've forgotten, is one who is crowned as if with a laurel wreath for excellence or achievement. Jack certainly deserved such a title and such recognition. He did some great things with the English language. This is not simply a posthumous recognition on my part. During his active years with the TCDA, Jack was a sought after observer and recorder.

Of course, and without reservation, all errors of commission and omission are mine alone. All others are held harmless.

INTRODUCTION

I realize it's not a particularly good journalistic style to write in the first person singular and refer to individuals by their first names. However, since I have been prevailed upon to write this somewhat lengthy, early history of the TCDA, I thought I might as well be comfortable and write in the first person and be as friendly as I could possibly be by using first names whenever the context was clear. I know dart players are a friendly bunch and probably won't be offended by my familiarity.

Twenty-five years...Wow!

Do you realize we have people playing darts today who were in diapers when Sally and I and Vicki and Darrel Bruesehoff got busy and hustled our collective buns off to put the organization together?...Fantastic.

Even though I have leant this effort my first hand perspective, and even though I still feel somewhat responsible, let me tell you, it is most satisfying to know the organization is still a thriving concern without me (God, ego is a terrible thing, at times). I have read every issue of the **BULL & TON** and every word of the extant Minutes of the Association through 1989...and I am impressed! What a wonderful, creative, nurturing group of people we've had the good fortune to care for us all these years.

I must admit I feel a great sense of pride when I see a TCDA member who I don't even know take a three dart out; chalk a game without fumbling with subtraction or fidgeting; put together and direct a tournament; make a decision at a Board Meeting that promotes the sport rather than fulfills some sense of self-aggrandizement or personal gain. These people are the real heroes of the TCDA...and, if you think about it, that includes each of you who have paid your dues and stood at the Oche. Let me tell you, right from the start, it was never a singular effort, by me or anyone else. There is and was a multitude of self-sacrificing individuals who are contributing or have contributed...just look at Charlie who has been active nearly the whole twenty-five years on your behalf.

This write-up contains no financial information, save a few tournament purses. On second thought, who cares. This is a history, not a P and L. Dues were paid, the Board spent, we all felt good about things.

To paraphrase (someone): Blessed are the doers, for they shall make life easier for the rest of us. You know them. Tell them thanks.

Ok, let's begin.

THE FIRST TASTE

Like most people, my wife, Sally and I just sort of, kind of, got into the sport. It was winter, 1970. I had transferred to Germany in 1969 with Control Data Corporation (CDC). CDC was working with the 7th Army in Heidelberg, West Germany and we civilian expatriates were allowed both American and Canadian PX privileges, the same as the military. That is to say, we were allowed to shop at both the American and the Canadian Post Exchanges. Not having anything else to do one Sunday afternoon, Sally and I decided to drive to the Canadian AFB in Baden-Baden to see what goodies their PX had. Wandering around aimlessly, I happened on a gigantic wall display of dart boards, equipment, and how-to-books. In the house we were renting, we had a room that was simply an extra room. It was empty. I said to Sally, "Why don't we get a dart board and some darts and use the extra room? We'll invite our friends over and have some fun during the gloomy German winters."

Sally said something earth shattering like, "Yeah, why not? By the way, do you know anything about darts?"

"Nope, what's to know?" I flippantly said.

So we bought. We learned there was quite a lot to know. We taught our friends. We nearly became obsessed. In fact, our weekend playing became so competitive and so intense, we bought a "male" and "female" trophy (neither of them had anything to do with darts) to award the respective winners each weekend.

The rule was, the winners could take this symbol of supremacy home with them and keep it until the next weekend. Things got so up-tight and so centered on those two silly trophies that friendship, camaraderie, and the pleasure usually associated with visiting friends, gave way to competition, jealousy and heavy hurt if you were the loser that week.

Fortunately, we, with a true sense of social wisdom, decided to get rid of the trophies and save the friendships. To ensure permanent riddance, we concluded the proper thing to do was to toss the damn things in the lovely Neckar River that winds its way through Heidelberg.

So, the next Saturday afternoon, with a very short ceremony (about fifteen seconds) our two car caravan stopped in the center of the Theodor Heuss bridge in downtown Heidelberg; we all jumped out; smiled at each other; threw the addictive things in the murky waters below; returned to our cars and drove away. I often wondered what the local *Polizei* would have thought, had we been apprehended for littering, if nothing else. How could we have explained this situation to our non-playing German hosts?

We all agreed, it was far better to lose the symbols than our friendships. Somehow, the absence of the trophies helped. Afterwards, we still played just as intently and we continued to enjoy the exhilaration of competing and winning; but now the game was played, we felt, with the proper perspective. It was a social activity and we played for the fun of it.

In case you missed it, the moral of this little vignette was and is that this game of ours is first and foremost fun. If you want trophies, compete in a tournament. What makes playing darts such a pleasure is the fun, flexibility, fair-play and friendship surrounding the game. If there is to be a theme to this history, let it be these four F's. It's the only game that starts with wishing your opponent well, "Have a good one" and ends with a handshake and , "Good game." My kind of sport. Yessiree!

Anyhow, we continued in this vein until Sally and I repatriated to Minneapolis in the late summer of 1971. Not many darts were played for the next six months. New job, new schools, new house...a period of settling in. Sometime in 1972, I met Vicki Bruesehoff at Control Data (CDC), Bloomington. Sally and I became fast friends with her and her husband, Darrel. We had by this time set up our dart board in our rec room. The four of us threw darts rather than play cards, watch TV or just goof around. It wasn't long before Vicki and Darrel had their own board and were as hooked as Sally and I were. We played four or five nights a week either together or by ourselves.

The germ of the idea that was to become the TCDA was born in one of our visits together. We would play darts and lament that we had no pub to play in...no nice neighborhood pub we could call our own. Wouldn't it be nice, we'd say, if we had a place to go to for a night out of darts. We dreamed of a cozy little English type pub that was friendly. A place where we could drink and play and meet new people. It remained a dream for a year or two. In the meantime, we played at home and tried to get other acquaintances interested in the game. Whenever English, Canadian or Australian CDCers would visit town, I would invite them out; Sally would cook and we'd all eat, drink and play darts into the wee hours. Fun, but we still wanted a Local we could go to and play. After all, Sally was getting a tad bit tired of my dragging home dart nuts from all over the world, who she had to feed, entertain, and clean up after. A stronger and stronger case was being made for a pub of our own.

A BREAK

As luck would have it, simple chance played a role in getting us closer to our goal. Have you ever noticed that luck and chance often play decisive parts in most of the really important things in life? I made a business trip to Washington, DC in the Spring of '74. Sally and I had lived in DC (or more accurately a Maryland suburb) prior to going to work and Europe for Control Data. One evening (league night as it turned out) I decided to visit an old bar/restaurant I used to haunt in my earlier, single days...Wakefield's, up on Dupont Circle. To say the least, I was shocked when I entered the place after all those years. The bloody place was a Darts emporium...boards in front; boards in back and boards downstairs. I arrived about 11:30 AM, so not much was going on. I ate lunch and engaged the bartender in a little conversation.

"What's with all the dart boards?", I asked.

"Oh, we're kind of home for wadda," I heard him say.

"Wadda?" He now knew he was talking to an out-of-towner.

"Washington Area Darts Association...W-A-D-A...WADA", he proclaimed rather proudly.

"No kidding!" I was impressed. "How did all this come about, anyway?"

"Well, I'm not sure I know all the details, but the guy who started it all will be in after 5:30. You might want to talk to him."

“Yeah, I would. What’s his name?”

“Paul Dieth. He’s the Executive Director and the founder of WADA.”

“OK, thanks. I’ll be back.”

“Yeah, sure. I won’t be here after five; but just ask anyone who works here...they’ll be able to point him out.”

God, was I excited. Darts in a pub! Hot damn! I had about five hours to kill. The dart boards were all closed because of the lunch crowd. I didn’t even have my darts. In those days, it would have been pretentious, if not down right silly, to carry your darts with you when traveling unless you were going somewhere in north western Pennsylvania...but I didn’t know about Coal-Crackers then, either. I thought of visiting Tricky Dick on Pennsylvania Avenue but he and I never saw things the same. And even though we were both from California, he was from Orange county and I knew it would be a waste of my time as well as his.

So I wandered about and returned to the bar at 3:00. (Anxious little devil, wasn’t I). Still nothing happening. I had a few Beefeaters on the rocks with an olive and a water back and, what usually happens under these conditions, time passed rather quickly. Shortly after the bartenders made their shift changes, I made my move. Loudly enough for the new guy behind the bar to hear me, I said, “Is Paul Dieth here yet?”

The guy at the bar on my immediate right responded, “I’m Paul Dieth. What can I do for you?”

Feeling somewhat chagrined, I introduced myself, shook hands and said, “Let me buy you a drink and then I’d like to talk to you about how you got all these boards in Wakefield’s.”

“Sure enough. I’ll have a beer. Draft, please.”

Once we started, we talked and drank and threw darts until about 3:00 AM. If I remember correctly the bars in DC closed at the time around 1:00 AM, but Paul knew the owner of Wakefield’s and we were allowed to continue play in the basement for as long as we cared to. The owner was as much of a dart nut as Paul and I.

Paul had convinced the owner that he had an opportunity to open the great Northwest to Darts. Proselytizers are the same, world over: very convincing and very tenacious. We played into the early morning hours. When Paul took a double 19 out on his knees (whether because he was grand-standing me or he could no longer stand on his own two feet, remains a mystery). At any rate, I was most impressed and said, “That’s enough for one night, mate, I’m going to my hotel.” I thanked him for his time, information, darts lesson, and his pro darts-Association arguments.

Paul had been convincing. I decided, “What the hell. I’m going to do it...start an Association.” At first though, I wasn’t too keen on the idea. Remember, I only wanted to know how to get a pub owner to put up a board so the four of us could throw darts in public. Paul, being the sweet talker that he was, however, got me thinking otherwise. We could “easily have both”, he had argued. That night, he gave me a tour of the DC area dart pubs; explained the team structure; format; introduced me to many enthusiastic owners, managers, team captains and players; gave me the name and address of the President of the Southern California Darts Association (SCDA). some guy named Fleetwood, who would be happy to sell me dart supplies...it was a total sell job and I was sold. I couldn’t wait to get back to the Twin Cities and tell Vicki, Darrel and Sally about this wonderful opportunity. And so it began...

GETTING STARTED

Predictably, Vicki, Darrel and Sally were as enthusiastic as I was. For six months we planned, worked, organized, recruited and spent our own money.

When we started out, we didn't have titles or even assigned tasks. We were just four friends doing things we were excited about. Each of us did what needed doing at the time. It was exhilarating. However, from a natural fall out, each of us gravitated to specific kinds of activity: Vicki concentrated on public relations, promotion and creative urges. Darrel took the initiative and became our first Jack-of-all-trades: he built backboards (big 4 x 4 pieces of 3/4" plywood, covered with a close décor-matching carpeting , hung lights, installed boards and equipment, and contributed a lot of common sense to an emotionally charged group.

Sally, was our first Secretary, recording secretary and league coordinator. Although we didn't know at the time that's what she should be called. She developed our first schedule, typed most of our correspondence and placed orders with our friends in Southern California for the all important dart equipment.

Even though I talk about the Fortuitous Four, there was actually a fifth person who deserves a large measure of thanks. This happy Englishman worked for **Control Data** and, once he heard of our efforts, immediately committed himself to the success of the fledgling organization without reservation. I think he somehow thought he'd found a little bit of home. This "Bloody Darts Player", to use his expression, of course, is John White. John acted as an advisor and held darts clinics to train and orient the original players in the finer points of the game, equipment, stance, grip, release, chalking and etiquette.. Later on, John also designed and developed the **TCDA's** first patch and became the Minneapolis stringer for the first successful, glossy-paper, national darts magazine: **The SPIDER**.

We usually met three or four or five nights a week at my house (when Vicki and I weren't out hustling pubs) to strategize, plan, develop and design.

Based on Paul's advice, we decided to establish me as the Executive Director. In all honesty, this title was a euphemism for dictator. That is to say, I (really, we) would make all the decisions and control every aspect of the development of the new Association. Paul warned, "Founding an organization or business is quite different from managing it after it's established and running. Ed, you have to make all the calls during the first year" Sage advice? Probably. Anyhoo, that's what we did.

But where to start?

Obviously, we needed a name. Since we were all agreed (thanks to Vicki's urging and logic) that a name should first-off describe exactly what the organization is about, and secondly, since we knew we were going to be part of a national phenomena, where we were located became important, as well. Finally, we chose **Twin City Darts Association** as the name...a description, really. Much like "The United States of America"

Since Vicki was the most artistic among us. She was given the job of developing a unique logo. It has since been stylized, but she's the one we all have to thank for the original Dart logo idea and its creation.

Once we had a name and a logo to identify us, we needed a frame-work for team play. It became my responsibility to develop the "Rules", define the games we would play in league, and work out a standing sheet and some kind of communication device, etc. We didn't have any by-laws until after our first elections in 1975...hey, that's not bad considering it took the Colonies and the Continental Congress about fourteen years to get a Constitution in place after issuing the Declaration of Independence in 1776.

All the time this was going on, we were all looking for players, sweet-talking anyone we knew. Vicki, John and myself worked all twelve floors of the CDC Headquarters building and some of the outlying plants. But, before we could have players we needed locations in which to play. This was the start of the tedious work. Vicki and I used our lunch hours and evenings and weekends for about eight or ten weeks: calling people, visiting restaurants and bars, trying to convince owners and managers that there was no real risks involved with throwing steel pointed objects in a bar where patrons drank...not an easy sell. You see, most Americans at the time thought a dart was thrown much like a baseball. But we persevered, educated and convinced.

Our concept was to make it as easy as possible for the pub to get involved. Our modus operandi was to find a bar, pub or restaurant we liked; eat lunch or have a drink; case the joint and if we liked what we saw, we pre-selected the area and wall in the pub that we felt was best for the player. (Even today, whenever I go to a new bar or restaurant, I think to myself, "Now that would be a great place for a dart board"...some habits are hard to break). Once we found a suitable establishment (we rejected quite a few either because of space limitations, ambience or location), we would set up a meeting with the owner or manager and sell him on the idea of sponsoring one or more teams. In addition, we would sell a package deal (at cost) that included a backboard, a dart board, three sets of house darts. These darts were nothing to write home about, they were usually the short, light, plastic dime store variety. We also set up the lighting, provided the chalk, eraser, bulletin board. All as a free installation (usually provided by Darrel and myself). We also provided the team or teams required. The only exception was Timothy O'toole's.

At O'toole's the regular patrons and the then owner really got into darts. They were one hellishly competitive group. I couldn't order darts and equipment fast enough from Fleetwood and the SCDA to satisfy the demand. Whenever I got a shipment in, I would leave CDC immediately after work and drive to St. Louis Park, drag everything in and place the stuff on the bar and commence selling. Mostly, I ordered Unicorn brass barrels (13 to 35 grams) with feathered flights. Years later, at an ADO meeting, Tom Fleetwood razed me about the 35 gram "bombs". "God, we thought we were gonna be stuck with them and here, out of the blue, some dummy named Otjen in Minnesota of all places was buying our whole inventory." No other Association ever ordered those big fat babies...only the TCDA. Why? I don't really know, but I suspect no one in Minneapolis at the time thought a player might throw a ton-80 or a 171 with slimmer darts.

Too, I had to teach the game, challenge the self-styled hot shots, buy drinks, drink and drive home at closing time. Ah, to be young again! In retrospect, O'toole's was fun; but taxing on the body, the mind, and the wallet. I tell people I sold the supplies at cost, but I doubt I ever broke even at any time I was in the darts distribution and sales business.

Meanwhile, the four of us were proselytizing our friends and work acquaintances and putting up hand lettered posters and signs around town to sign up players. The best eye-catcher we came up with was a billboard lead-in that read, "Can you get three in a bed?" This particular sign got a lot of grins at the U, but never led to many Members.

Our rules, and later our By-Laws, were pretty much plagiarized from those available from Southern California...with Fleetwood's permission, mind you. We did, however, work up, print and distribute our own Registration cards, membership cards, scoresheets, standing sheets and an information sheet. Yes, there was a helleva lot to learn and a helleva lot of details to be worked out.

In those days, we didn't realize we could have only four players to a side. For whatever reason, we thought we needed a minimum of eight players per team. And we wanted eight teams to start the Association, because it fit nicely with the idea of a fourteen week season. Today, sixty-four people doesn't seem like a lot, but try to find

sixty-four people to give you \$5.00 to sign up for an activity which, perforce, had to be played in places we couldn't identify; a game we could hardly explain without demonstration; only promises that the required equipment (which they had to buy) was on back order; and, no real assurance of when we would start play, and you begin to get an idea of what a trying, juggling act this whole effort was.

Fleetwood came through. John White held darts clinics. People joined. A schedule was created. Pubs committed. We did it! On Tuesday, October 17, 1974, the TCDA held its first night of league play. Now I understood a little of what the Wright brothers felt at Kitty Hawk when they got *their* thing off the ground. We had eight teams, eight players per team for a grand total of 64 paid members, not counting subs in five Pubs in the Edina/St. Louis Park area. Not until we got transferred to Northern California in 1979 did Sally and I find "our" pub. From Seventy-Five to Seventy-Nine, Sally, Vicki, Darrel and I were more like a bunch of gypsies... We had a new pub just about every Season. Even the four of us broke up to create additional teams. But, then, that's the stuff of the next chapter...

In the Fall of '74, we had one League and one Division, although we didn't call them that then; played a 5 Point format (4 doubles 301 D/D and 1 team game of 501 S/D). We threw from a distance of 8 feet.

That First Season ended January 23, 1975. The order of finish was:

1st	UGLY DUCKERS
2nd	O'TOOLE'S
3rd	ROYAL SWANS
4th	HORNY BULLS
5th	J2 / B2
6th	BULLSHOOTERS
7th	WALLBANGERS
8th	CYBER PRIX (Straight Arrows)

Right from the beginning, people wanted to know "who is best", individually. We didn't know anything at the time about tournaments. That was to come later, in the summer of '75. So, to satisfy this lust for individual recognition, we played what we called the Individual Championships. Each team was invited to send their "best" player (determined in any manner the team saw fit) to a designated pub to compete in a round robin playoff for the privilege of being designated the past Season's individual TCDA champion. The format is lost to antiquity, but we still have the record of who represented each team:

UGLY DUCKERS:	Dennis Nokleby
O'TOOLES:	Bruce Behnke
ROYAL SWANS:	Fred Roleff, Sr
HORNY BULLS:	Dennis Foley
J2 B2:	Dick Loftus
BULLSHOOTERS;	Jon Beatty
WALLBANGERS:	Chris Grajczyk
CYBER PRIX:	Bob Silloway

No money nor trophy was awarded. In fact the only recognition recorded was written up in what was called a "BETWEEN SEASONS NEWSLETTER" dated, 17 February, 1975:

"The Individual Championship (Fall Season) played at O'toole's Saturday, 15 February was simply great. Those of you who missed the action, missed some great darts. All representatives threw well. Each team can be proud. Of course, we had to end with single champ. That is none other than DENNY FOLEY." The runner-up was Fred Roleff, Sr.

One more important event (at least to me) took place before the beginning of our second season.

On the northwest corner of 66th and Lyndale Ave in south Minneapolis there used to be a Pub/Restaurant called the **HEIDELBERG**. It was one of our original pubs. East a block, at Pillsbury, is located the Hub shopping center and in that shopping center was a variety store called the **KORNER PLAZA**. It no longer exists. In its place is (or was a few years ago) the Children's Palace. The manager of the store at the time was **PAUL SWERDLICK**, an enterprising manager who immediately recognized the economic potential of selling dart supplies. Paul ate lunch at the Heidelberg and noticed the boards. He asked around to find out who was selling the equipment and was given my name. We arranged to meet for lunch and in short order (no pun intended) he made me an offer I could never have refused. He agreed to buy my entire current stock (from the back of my car) and assured me he would stock anything I had to offer and take special orders if I would advertise the Korner Plaza in our Standing sheets. Ya sure! You bettcha! Yippee! I was OUT of the darts- selling business. I gave Paul all of my contact names and addresses and to my knowledge he had the first store selling darts in the Twin Cities.

And that, dear reader, was our first season.

To look at it today, it might seem odd that anyone in their right mind would have signed up for such a deal. But then, things couldn't have been all bad because word-of-mouth advertising caused the growth of the sport of darts in the Twin Cities to mushroom after the first season. In fact, during the hiatus between Seasons things began to happen rather rapidly. Enter Bob Casey and the boys from Standard Conveyor.

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SEASON NUMBER 2 (SPRING, 1975)

Headcount expansion in the TCDA nearly doubled each Season for the first few years. In three years we went from:

1 League	to	3 Leagues (Classic, Standard, Mixed Doubles)
1 Division	to	10 Divisions
8 Teams	to	83 Teams
64 Members and	to	650 + Members and
5 Pubs	to	27 Pubs

It was exhilarating and exciting to be part of such a phenomenon. Darts were now on the map big time in Minneapolis/St. Paul.

By the Fall of 1977, we were bragging that we had leagues and formats of play to accommodate just about anyone's competitive and/or social needs (thanks to creative thinkers like **Jim Hunt**). There was challenge enough for the national caliber player and for the person who had never thrown darts before. By 1977, we had received newspaper coverage, published our own newsletter, The Bull&Ton (Volume 1, No. 1 hit the street in October: A **Mike Rice** creation), and held our second **Overcoat Open**. How did all this and much more materialize in such a short period of time?

People. Great People!

I've mentioned the founders and some of the early contributors, now let's turn our attention to the Standard Conveyor Company of North St. Paul.

Standard Conveyor had a great bunch of competitive, fun-loving employees at the time. They included: **Bob Casey, Jack Fisher, Jim Hunt, Randy Greenlee, Bob Lee, and John Bier, Bob Mattson and Paul Skogheim**. Bob Casey heard about the fledgling TCDA somehow, somewhere that winter. He immediately informed his co-workers and fellow, closet darts enthusiasts. (They only played at work during their lunch hours.) Casey paid a visit to the Black Swan in Edina one night during darts. He and I chatted for a couple of hours and he indicated that the whole crew at Standard Conveyor wanted to join. I wanted them too, but explained he'd have to wait until the beginning of Spring Season in January to get his team on the schedule. Unhappily, Bob agreed.

Once I mentioned the exciting news about expanding into St. Paul, the whining began: "I don't want to have to travel all the way to downtown St. Paul [from Edina, for God's sake] to play darts. Jeesh!" Little did they know that someday they would have to travel much further...to North St. Paul, Shakopee, Hastings and downtown Minneapolis...and enjoy every minute of it, grouching notwithstanding.

When I was gathering data for this history, I asked a number of people to offer up their recollections of "the early days" either via the written word or by taped interviews. Jack Fischer and Jim Hunt were most helpful. One day, sometime in 1989, the three of us met at the Castle Pub, drank beer and reminisced. We spoke of many things...fools and kings. Much of what is written of this second Season is based on those tapes. In my mind, Jack was and remains the TCDA's poet laureate. Do any of you remember his tribute to fellow darter Ray Matheys? It's beautiful:

Reverie

*Between me and you this lyric is true
So don't let your mind relax.
This is only a story of a darts player's glory
It has no fiction, all facts.*

*My friends have said that Ray is dead
But this will never be.
I have no choice for I hear his voice
Three boards down from me.*

*I turn to look each cranny and nook
And gaze both near and far.
I cannot place his bearded face
Then I even check the Bar.*

*Between you and me this cannot be
So I come back to play my game.
Its foolish I'm told but lo and behold
Someone just called his name.*

*It's not too long and I hear his song
It comes on like thunder's rumble.
My eyes start to sting when I hear him sing
About something, "Hard to be Humble."*

*I begin to find I'm losing my mind
But don't give me your static
I'm not as wise as head doctor guys
But who else sez, "Automatic".*

*You could tell by his eyes that he was wise
Woefully wise plus more.
Near the end, he looked old but his years all told
Were only forty and four.*

*Alana, we miss him too, but not as much as you
You are left alone and reminiscing.
Team-mates and lovers of the "Ash-can-covers"
A spoke in the wheel is missing.*

*I will know by heart from finish to start
When my days on Earth are done.
I'm home to stay when I hear God say,
"Matheys and Fisher, board one."*

THE ENTRY OF ST. PAUL INTO THE TCDA

By the time the TCDA had its first Season under its collective belt, the guys at Standard Conveyor had been playing darts for over a year. Fischer told me, “There was only one set of dart available at that time, which were mine...ones that I brought back from England after WWII. There were about ten of us who gathered at noon and played. Our ‘paper board’, from Sears or Penneys, didn’t last long with all the pounding we gave it. Hell, we even had to hand sew the wires on so we could continue.” He also divulged how the original St. Paul team got the name, THE HOGS. “When we played at Standard Conveyor, and a player shot well, say 60+ (with one trip twenty), the rest of us would call out, ‘Hog!’ We called shooting well, ‘hogging it up’.”

Our second Season began on 20 February, 1975. We had 148 signed players on 14 teams (as you will note, an average of 10+ per team). We played on the following Teams in the following Pubs on Thursday nights still from a distance of 8 feet (We didn’t officially go to the World Darts Federations standard of 7 feet, nine and a quarter inches until 7/24/77):

<u>Team</u>	<u>Captain</u>	<u>Pub</u>	<u>Season Location</u>	<u>finish</u>
Ugly Duckers	Ed Otjen	Black Swan	Edina	1st
The Hogs	Bob Casey	Haberdashery	St. Paul	2nd
Royal Swans	Bill Roleff	Black Swan	Edina	3rd
Horny Bulls	Denny Nesbitt	Jolly Bull	St. Paul Park	4th
J2 B2	Bill Shadle	Heidelberg	Richfield	5th
Cyber Prix	Terry McLain	O’Connel’s	St. Paul	6th
O’toole’s	Bruce Behnke	O’Toole’s	St. Paul Park	7th
Goofy’s I	Charlie Stutz	Goofy’s	Minneapolis	8th
Goofy’s II	Denny Nokleby	Goofy’s	Minneapolis	9th
Bull Shooters	Mike Rice	Jolly Bull	St. Louis Park	10th
Wallbangers	John White	O’toole’s	St. Louis Park	11th
O’Connel’s	Steve O’Connel	O’Connel’s	St. Paul	12th
Heidelberg II	Pat Keefe	Heidelberg	Richfield	13th
Haberdashery II	Hans Kapherer	Haberdashery	St. Paul	14th

In addition to this group, Ed Rymer of Hastings made contact with the TCDA after the start of the Season. He was organizing players in Hastings in hopes of starting his own association. However, he and some of his troops participated in a number of TCDA pub tournaments and he even reciprocated with a few of his own in Hastings. The “**J Bullwhip Open**” was intended to be a national invitational shoot, but it fizzled out after a year or so. Maco-B’s, Nybo’s and Friar Tuck’s all became serious darts pubs over time. Ed worked hard at organizing darts in Hastings, contemplating his own association, but he was finally persuaded to join the TCDA once he understood some of the details and the time commitment necessary to establish and run an association. With the entry of Hastings into the TCDA, travel became a major concern.

That first Spring Season was a busy one. Not only was it apparent to Sally and me and Vicki and Darrell that a lot of work remained to be done. We knew the four of us couldn’t possibly handle the diverse expansion that was taking place all over the Twin Cities and out-lying areas. Too, we started to hear rumblings that maybe we should have some officers to run the club and I ought to take a less dictatorial role and just be a permanent

Board member with the title of Executive Director. Fine with me. I could sure use the help. So, on April 18, 1975 we held the first TCDA elections. The first Board looked like this:

Ed Otjen	Executive Director (non-elected position)
Bill Shadle	President
Dan Reeck	Vice President
Bob Casey	Treasurer
Lois Link	Secretary

Not a group to let our beer get stale, we held our first Board Meeting at the Patio Lounge on W. 7th Street in St. Paul on 2 May, 1975. We had any number of things to get organized and agree on: Incorporation, our first Open Tournament (The Gopher 1001) preceded by a series of Pub and Invitational tournaments in Edina and Hastings (thanks to Ed Rymer), writing of By-Laws, and re-writing our Rules (both of which were completed by the Executive Director in August).

Taking these things one at a time, let me comment on each.

One would think that Incorporation, much like motherhood, would be supported by nearly everyone without question. Not so with our illustrious first Board. I had a lot to learn about people and organizations and, apparently, fiduciary responsibility. Some Board Members thought it was over-kill and not worth the effort, others thought it was a waste of money. I was adamant: we either incorporated as a non-profit organization or I was gone. No way was I going to jeopardize my family's financial future because of some lawsuit aimed at the TCDA and its Board of Directors. I must have been persuasive at one of the Board Meetings because the Board finally agreed and we became legitimately and formally registered with Minnesota's Secretary of State and with the IRS on 13 November. We were never sued on my watch, but I felt a lot better about promoting darts in the Twin Cities under the limited liability protection afforded by incorporation.

Right from the git-go, competition was master. A lot of us, early-on, seriously emphasized and stressed the concept of "fun" as the principle reason we were organized and why we met at least once a week to play, but the real reason was our continual search for the best. Don't let anyone kid you, the reason you play darts is to compete, to kick butt (as they say in the Nineties), and to show your peers that you are the best in town. Laughing, joking (fun) usually stops at the oche.

This desire to demonstrate to one and all that you are the best player is innate to the game and the TCDA. We had a number of "Pub" tournaments as early as the beginning of the Spring Season. We didn't know enough then to call them "open", so we either played one team against another (in addition to league play) or somebody with a vested interest would call a tournament on Saturday or Sunday. For example, on February 1st, we had a playoff at O'toole's to help defray the expenses of the local winners who were committed to traveling to Cleveland for DART EXTRAVAGANZA NUMBER FOUR 75. Denny Nokleby and Ed Rymer flew off to Cleveland and placed 30th out of some two hundred teams in the Open Doubles. We were all proud of them for doing so well...Hey! Ya gotta start somewhere.

Then again, on March 16th, 1975 the Black Swan sponsored a luck of the draw doubles tournament, directed by Lois Link. Lou Serafin (Goofy's I) and John White (Wallbangers) were the winners. This tournament was followed a week later on the 22nd at NYBO's in Hastings, directed by Ed Rymer. This was an Invitational Tournament. The TCDA lost 3-2. Again, no records were kept of who played, or how they were selected to play, or how they played. This information is lost forever.

The second end-of-Season Team Playoff with representatives from each team, was held at the end of the Spring Season at the Jolly Bull in St Louis park (actually a room in a bowling alley). The eventual winner was Jim Hunt with 2nd through 4th being earned, respectively, by Fred Roleff, Sr., Denny Nokleby and Dan Reeck. Now here I must confess my most embarrassing *faux pas* of the Season (of course, Jim Hunt will never let me forget it either). This was a double elimination tournament. Jim had not lost and Fred had lost one and played his way through the loser's bracket. When Fred won the first match of the last round against Jim, I, excited about our local boy beating the dreaded St. Paul competitor I suppose, leaped up and declared Fred the winner. With everybody yelling congratulations...curious how the power of suggestion works...Jim was trying to make himself heard. "Dammit! I've only lost one match. We're tied!" Of course, he was right. Jim went on to beat Fred in the next game for Season honors. For shame, Edward, for shame. After twenty-five years, maybe we can forget the whole thing, eh, Jim?

These "tournaments" metamorphosed into the very first TCDA sponsored open, **The Gopher 1001**. It was held on the second floor of the Haberdashery on the southwest corner of 6th and Wabasha in St. Paul. Bob Casey was the tournament director.

The Haberdashery had just tossed the Hogs out on their ears at the end of the season (May 23rd) because, to quote Jack Fischer again, "We were accused of pilfering. We were set up next to the liquor room in the basement. We only lasted that one season. And were kicked out, so to speak. We were accused of stealing their liquor, plus other beverages. Later we were told that their manager was the culprit and we were invited to return. By that time, we had "found" Schweitz'. We never did return."

At any rate, the **1001** was allowed to proceed, thanks to the sweet talking of Bob Casey and, I suppose, the fact that we would be on the second floor, and not the basement, near the booze. The Tournament boasted three events, with four winners:

Men's Singles Bill Roleff
Women's Singles Sally Otjen
Open Doubles Denny Foley and Denny Nokleby

No one recalls the number of entries nor the prize-money payouts, but the competition was fierce and the accolades thunderous. Everybody loved the idea of a TCDA sponsored tournament open to all. The stage had been set for the idea of the first **Overcoat Open**. The **American Darts Organization** (ADO) wasn't formed until October. By March, '76 we had made contact with Tom Fleetwood and the ADO and conducted our first national ADO sanctioned open tournament. The name of the tournament, the **Overcoat Open**, was the brain-child of Vicki Bruesehoff. The name was selected because of the intended pun and the fact that we were always going to conduct it in the dead of winter. After this first year, January became our month of choice. However, other voices eventually were heard and the last two Overcoats were held in May.

The **'76 Overcoat** was a great success even though it nearly collapsed of rumor. At the time, there were a lot of reports of other "national" tournaments ending up being rip-offs and not paying out their advertised purses. Often, the tournament director would abscond with the collected funds. There was a bad taste nationally about big, advertised tournaments. Cleveland, Southern California and Dallas being three notable exceptions. This is one reason the ADO was formed. So, since we were silly enough to put on a tournament in the dead of winter, not many folks showed up...locals or out-of-towners. Rumor started to spread that we would not pay out the \$3000 as advertised. Hearing this rumbling and grumbling, I took the microphone and announced that the TCDA would honor its commitment. All prize money would be paid. I knew the TCDA didn't have the money to cover a major shortage, but I was damned if people were going to go away from our tournament and bad

mouth us as welchers. I had made up my mind to provide any shortage from my personal bank account. Anything to protect the reputation of our fledgling organization. As it turned out, we only lost a few bucks on the tournament, maybe we even made a few bucks, I really don't remember. I do know that the event was covered by the **SPIDER**, at the time, THE darts magazine in the US. They lauded the TCDA on a well-run, honest event. Also, our neighbors (from Chicago), our major out-of-town supporters also told the folks back home that we had done right in the face of adversity. I often wondered what Sally would have said if she had known at the time how I intended to cover my pro-offered largess. Shees!!

Even though Chicago took most of the prize money back to the Windy City, we got our share in the years to come and also at the Windy City Opens in future years. The event was held at the Registry Hotel in Bloomington. We had our first TV coverage (WCCO) during this tournament...(about 30 seconds on the Ten O'clock News, as I recall.)

Another significant effort during this period was the development of By-Laws (which were needed for Incorporation). I kept telling the Board that this was their responsibility and they kept putting it off. Finally in frustration and desperation, I agreed to write the bloody things...again with a goodly amount of help from the SCDA. Using their By-Laws as a guide, I modified them to fit our situation and needs. Incorporation soon followed.

Our original rules, as written by me in the Summer of '74, were radically modified in the summer of '75. Much had taken place since we began. We now had multiple Divisions, Multiple formats of play, and, of course, any number of conflicts and different rule interpretations that had to be resolved. Our set of Rules grew exponentially: from 8 1/4 pages to an astounding 23 pages in a few quick years...for a while there it seemed we were re-writing them every time we turned around. Like the guy said, "Passing a rule is a piece of cake; getting equity is a never ending task." But we kept trying.

The guy responsible for many of these Rule changes, clarifications, and expansions was **Jim Hunt**. Now, before you start throwing rocks at Jimmy, you gotta realize that he, almost single handedly, did more to define TCDA play as it is performed then and today than any other one person. Jim made so many improvements, it's hard to know where to start to say, "Thanks, big guy, for all you did."

Jim redefined a team as four (not eight) people. He developed most of our formats of play and the score sheets to go with them. He initiated Mixed Doubles play. He, with an able assist from Jack Fischer, developed the "Tips for Chalkers". He is also primarily responsible for developing "Minnesota Cricket"...I only opened the beer on my back porch that summer afternoon in Apple Valley and encouraged his thinking as best I could. He also developed (with a little help from **Dan Norlin**) the "Masters" play, rules, format and schedule that some of you may remember. Believe me, the guy is a most organized genius and we are all indebted to him.

I'm not sure anymore, but he may have been the person to come up with the idea of splitting up teams after the Spring '75 Season in order to properly expand the TCDA. Whether the idea was Jim's or not is not terribly important. What was important was that the Board asked each team to break up and to captain as many new teams as possible by filling in with new members. This was a gut-wrenching ordeal, but, as it turned out, a brilliant stroke for the TCDA

Sally and I were part of that gut-wrenching. We volunteered to move from Edina to St. Paul...from the Black Swan to Schweitz' on Payne Avenue. What a great experience that was for both of us. Neither Sally nor I had never experienced what many people understood intimately. We quickly learned what was meant by the term,

“neighborhood pub”. We were continually made aware of the deep camaraderie, mutual support, complex relationships and constant humor and good cheer taking place nightly. These people really cared for each other and were integral parts of their mutual lives. Schweitz’!! What a great, exhilarating pub. I think the Schweitz family was into their third generation as proprietors. It was my guess that some of the patrons were also generational.

Our new team was called the “Payne Killers”. Our teammates were Nick Schweitz, Bill Spiess, Bill Conlin, and “Muff”. In December, **Pat (Bliss) Johnson** joined our group. We had more than the required four players because of travel and job related commitments some of us had. Steve, Sr. and his brother, Dick, (the second generation) ran the place at the time.

The “Hogs” were another team that volunteered to split. Jim Hunt and Jack Fischer both captained teams out of Schweitz’ as well. Jim’s troops were the “Innocent Lambs” and included Bob Casey, Bob Mattson , Steve Schweitz, Jr., *et al.* Jack’s group was called “Schweitz’ Shanghais”, with Mike Klatt, Andy Blaho, Bob Lee and Randy Greenlee. A year or so later Jack finally got to throw out of what was to become **his** “favorite” darts bar, The Castle Pub. Apparently we were all looking for our own pub all along. Jack talked endlessly about his good times there. According to Jack, Bob Lee and Tom Schroeder “found” or discovered the Castle in the summer of 1976.

While taping Jack and Jim in 1989 (the 15th anniversary) at the Castle Pub, Jack recalled an anecdote that’s kinda cute.

“I’ll never forget the time at Standard Conveyor when Randy Greenlee sat behind me at a drawing board. Making casual conversation, he said, “Fischer, where are you throwing darts nowadays?” (This was *circa* 1978.)

I said, “Castle Pub.”

“Where’s that?”

“In North St. Paul.”

“What’s the guy’s name that owns the place?”

I says, “Leroy Florhaug.”

He says, “What do you call him that for?”

“That’s his name, for Christ’s sake!”

“Oh...”

Obviously, Randy got a little far afield with Leroy’s surname and his old Haberdashery team name. We all laughed. Jim then followed with his own reminiscence:

“Before Leroy put up this current stuff”, pointing around at the dartboards and their backboards, “he used to hang his dart boards right on the bare walls...and around the double One...the place where we all ended up, right? He’d have to patch the damned holes ‘cause people started to complain that they were losing their darts...The holes got so big that the darts would disappear and fall down inside the wall.” More laughter.

Leroy and Barb (and let's not forget **Carmen and Mike Lamminen**) worked wonders at the Castle and kept a lot of interest alive in North St. Paul with their endless Friday night and Saturday afternoon tournaments. Later they created their own annual tournament, **The Drawbridge Open**. Leroy would have as many as 22 boards up for a tournament...upstairs, downstairs, and in the back room. Sometimes, I remember, when it rained, the roof leaked through the upstairs ceiling, often dripping on your head as you lined up a shot, but without a doubt it was the most popular darts pub in the Twin Cities, ever. Thanks, Leroy. Thanks Barb. Your legions of darters thank you for all you have done.

Lordy, Lordy...What fun we had! I'm not sure I would (or more precisely, could) ever do it again. Old age brings with it a certain amount of trepidation and anxiety. Fortunately, however, we didn't have time to think about such things in the early Seventies. There's much more to this story and many more people that need to be thanked and praised, but I promised the Board that I'd keep this first year history to a maximum of 16 pages, which I have already exceeded.

With that then, and with your forbearance, I'll close by quoting myself from the Final Standing Sheet from the Spring '75 Season. Some of the words are still applicable:

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

"In my opinion we had a great second season. We're still growing at a rapid rate, and consequently, everything we've done hasn't been perfect. Our plan is to be one of the best Associations in the U.S.—We need everyone's help to reach this goal.

We have a lot of work to do this summer: revise our rules, write our By-Laws, Expand our membership to (at least) 360 people, expand to 32 teams, establish Leagues, get involved with other associations, and plan our first U.S. Open.

In 1975, we elected our first officers, moved the dart sales out of my car, Expanded to 14 teams, and 165 paid members, scheduled our first money tournament, and witnessed the development of a helleva lot of good darts players. We're on our way!

One last comment—Competition can lead to frayed nerves, irritability, and plain old cantankerousness. I would ask each of you to control these urges as much as possible, The game is a challenge, but first and last it should be FUN. [There's that word again.] Good sportsmanship and camaraderie are the cornerstones of our activity—let's exercise it. Hey, and thanks for your support and enthusiasm this, our first year." Make that twenty-five.

Keep your arrows straight and may the Dart God smile on you,

Ed Otjen
Henderson, NV
September, 1999