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Members of the Puget Sound Probability and Chowder Society reunite at Frank Davenport's home in Bellevue. From left, clockwise around table, Joel Nark, 45; Conrad Nark, 13; Larry Brandt, 70; Grant Erwin, 89; and Ken McKinley, 83. The society has played a monthly poker game since 1962.

After 46 years, club folds hand

Swapping stories, sharing friendships and playing a *lot* of poker, the "Puget Sound Probability and Chowder Society" has finally called it quits.

BY HALEY EDWARDS
Seattle Times staff reporter

When Grant Erwin started his poker club in 1962, there was no such thing as a personal computer, an online accounting tool or an Excel worksheet. The eight or nine men who met monthly around kitchen tables in Seattle and Bellevue to play low-stakes poker kept track of their winnings with tokens in old baby-food jars, labeled with their names.

Over the last 46 years, the "Puget Sound Probability and Chowder Society," as it was called, has seen many of its members come and go. Some have moved to other cities. Some have passed away. Some have been divorced, had grandkids or retired. On Friday, after nearly half a century of monthly poker games, the remaining seven men of the society played their last hand.

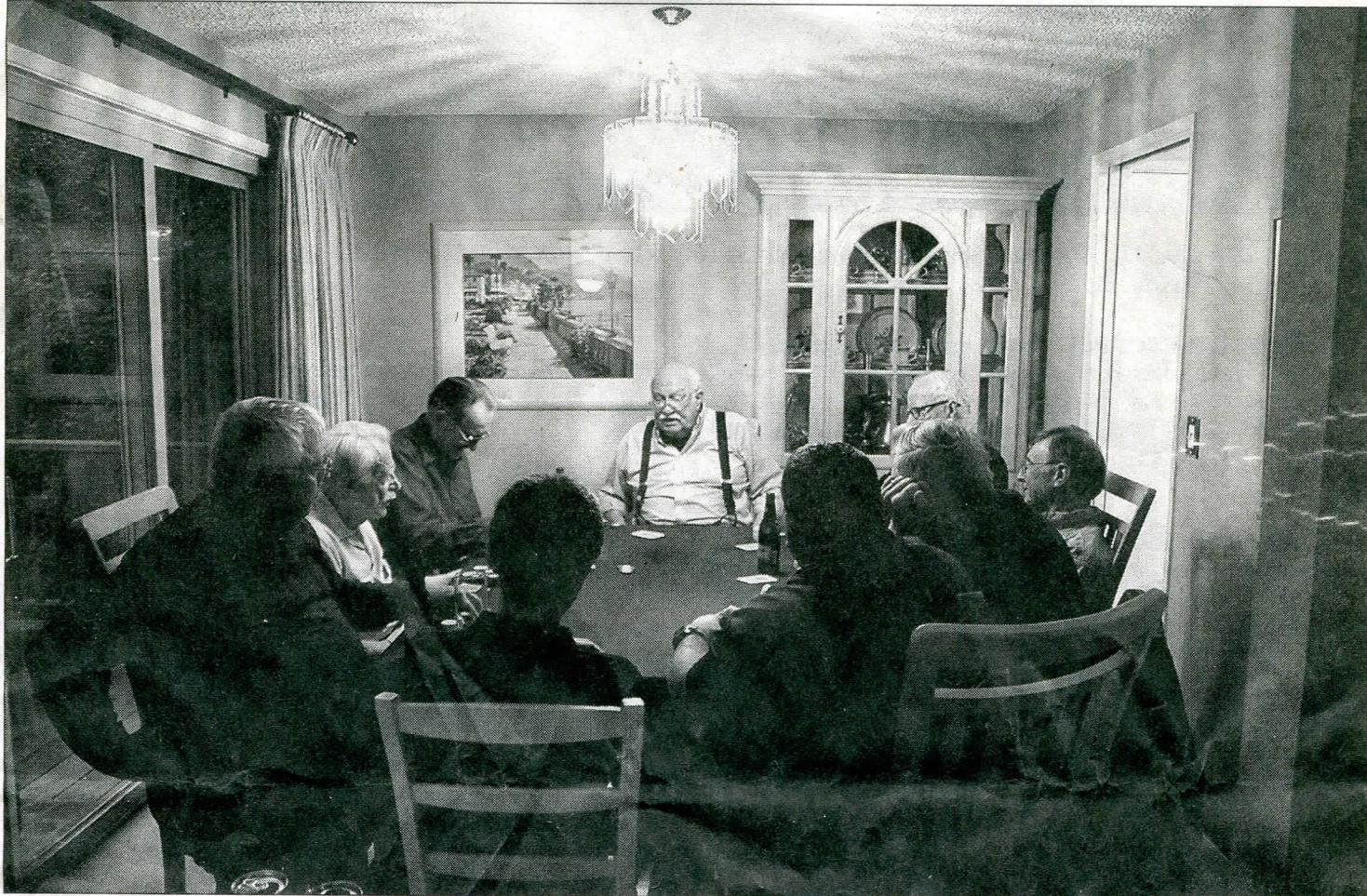
"I'm really going to miss seeing all these guys,"

Please see > **POKER, B4**



The group's logo can be seen on its custom-made poker chips.

WEB EXTRA
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Frank Davenport, center, hosted a final session of the Puget Sound Probability and Chowder Society. "It's about time," said long-time member Ted Nark. "Some of us can't see anymore. Some of us can't hear anymore. Some of us can't even speak anymore."

< Poker

FROM B1

CLUB FOLDS

**“Together
... we’re smart.
But individually?
We’re all a bunch
of old crackpots!”**

said Bob Gillespie, 75, who moved to Portland several years ago but traveled to Frank Davenport’s Bellevue home last weekend to participate in the finale.

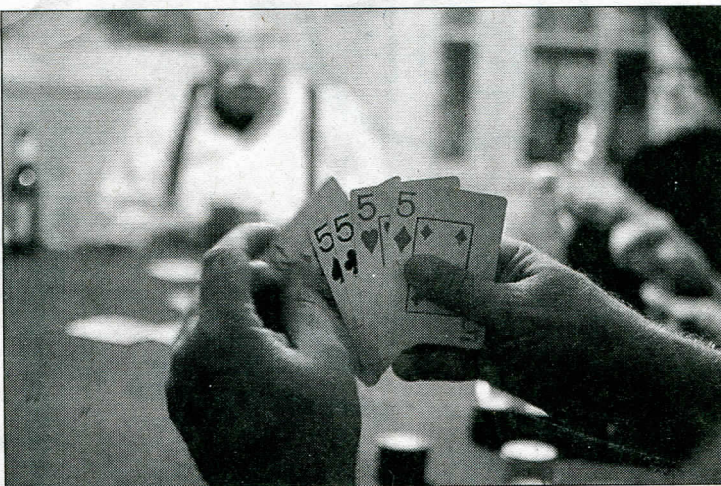
“I’ll miss hearing their stories about their lives and their families. We’ve learned so much from each other over the years,” he said.

Ted Nark, 76, also a longtime member, was less sentimental.

“It’s about time. Some of us can’t see anymore. Some of us can’t hear anymore. Some of us can’t even speak anymore,” said Nark, whistling through his S’s. He slapped the green felt table with a wrinkled brown hand and laughed. The other members smiled and grunted, their labored breathing keeping time with the sputtering thwack of cards being shuffled.

“Together, sure, we’re smart. But individually? We’re all a bunch of old crackpots!” Nark said.

After decades of poker playing, the Society has left these men with good stories, good friendships and — thanks to a few smart investments of the



Joel Nark holds four 5’s during a game of Mississippi Anaconda, also known as Pass the Trash. Nark won the hand.

group’s collective winnings — a little extra dough.

Winnings add up

You see, the men kept track of more than just bragging rights in those baby-food jars. For the first 40 years that the Society was around, most of the members never took home their winnings. Instead, at the end of each night, they entrusted their cash — usually no more than 10 or 20 bucks — to Erwin, the now-89-year-old patriarch of the club, who would then invest the money in stocks.

Erwin kept track of how many shares each man owned in which company by the tokens each man had in his respective baby-food jar.

“If a man won \$100 over the course of three months, he’d own proportionately more shares of a company than the man who’d won only \$50,” explained Joel Nark, Ted Nark’s

son, who has been playing with the society since the 1980s.

Over the years, the wealth in those baby-food jars started adding up. By the turn of the millennium, the men had, collectively, over \$100,000 in different stocks.

Ted Nark said his portion of the earnings probably paid for Joel’s college education. Gillespie said he spent most of his winnings buying his wife jewelry. Ken McKinley, 83, said he can’t remember what he did with his portion of the cash, but he jokes that Friday night poker is the only thing that ever made him a rich man.

A few years ago, Erwin, the amateur investor for the group, was remarried to an attorney. When she found out that her new husband was investing tens of thousands of dollars for friends, without any legal certification, she made him divest the stocks.

“I guess what they were doing was technically illegal,” said Joel Nark, who works as a Seattle policeman.

Swapping good stories

So the society got rid of their stocks, but they kept on playing. Now, instead of talking about stock prices, the men swap good stories. And after all those years together, these men have a few good adventures under their belts.

Just ask them about the time in the late ’60s when Larry Brandt, who’s now 70, brought a few bottles of his homemade citrus champagne to the society one Friday night and got almost everyone rip-roaring drunk.

“That champagne always got me in trouble,” Brandt said. “Oh, boy. It was potent.”

Or ask them about time they played the whole game with an ace still in the box, or the time Nark’s kid, Joel Nark, took his kid, Conrad Nark, to play with them. Conrad, who was only 10 years old at the time, pulled 4 kings and ran the table. Grandpa Nark was proud. (And, rumor has it, Conrad, who’s now 13, is still running the table with the local kids down at the pool in West Seattle.)

As for the future of the Puget Sound Probability and Chowder Society, Davenport, 74, hopes to organize a reunion next year.

And maybe, just maybe, Larry will bring a few bottles of his moonshine champagne. For old time’s sake.

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