

Poker Pals are Ole-Boy Powerhouse in Clifton

By Lee Hockstader
Washington Post Staff Writer

Lee Ruck is being modest. "I don't know how many people are interested in Lee Ruck and nine other guys getting together to play 'Two-toed Pete' Thursday nights," says Ruck, a former county attorney of Fairfax.

Two-toed Pete, indeed. More than dime-ante poker is at stake when President Ruck and the nine rank-and-file members of the Clifton Gentlemen's Club gather on alternate Thursdays.

In the tiny town of Clifton, with its 68 houses and 208 residents saunged into a half-square mile in western Fairfax County, the CGC is the nearest thing to the Powers That Be the town has.



CGC members, from left, Ken Buckley, Phil Stringer, Rick Dygve, Mac Arnold, Pat Layden and Lee Ruck.

METROPOLITAN LIFE

CLIFTON GENTLEMEN'S CLUB

Closed to new entrants, the CGC includes two of the six members of the Clifton Town Council, the chairman of the town's planning commission and the chief building inspector for Fairfax County. Ruck himself is a former Town Council member. (Another member's wife sits on the Town Council. But, explains CGC Treasurer Rick Dygve, "I wouldn't say I have any control over her. Maybe the opposite.")

To a man, CGC members dismiss suggestions that they wield real power in Clifton, despite the array of officials represented. Very little public business goes on in Clifton, they insist. In fact, they say, the subject of Clifton doesn't even come up much. Proclaims Ruck with proud humility: "We have virtually no purpose as such."

Ruck underplays CGC's function. The club's undertakings are twofold: chili and philanthropy, with proceeds from the former financing the latter.

Four years ago, the group (which was not then incorporated) was host of a chili cook-off, inspired by Ruck and the late Earl Lee, a Clifton entrepreneur and owner of the Clifton general store who was the club's founding president. Both Ruck and Lee were chili lovers.

They called it a statewide competition. Seven people showed up. The winner was William M. Arnold, a CGC member who was reared in Texas and whose nickname is Waco Willie. It was not a serious endeavor.

Since then, the annual cook-off

has blossomed under Ruck's stewardship, and CGC members say that it's the biggest annual chili competition on the East Coast.

Last month, the CGC gave the Fifth Annual Virginia Chili Cook-Off at the Fairfax Fair and nearly 60 chili cookers from all over the state entered the contest. From entrance fees, sales of beer, soft drinks and souvenirs, CGC made \$6,000.

Part of the money will go to establish a second CGC-sponsored athletic scholarship at George Mason University. The first, started a year ago from last year's chili cook-off proceeds, pays a George Mason athlete's \$1,600 tuition. The goal is to endow one of the scholarships permanently.

The club has given several hundred dollars to Wolf Trap Farm Park and plans to pay for a gazebo in the Clifton town park later this year.

"The town of Clifton levies no tax and virtually all the town officials are unsalaried. The town is a volunteer effort," said Arnold, who is CGC secretary and Planning Commission chairman. "It depends on

contributions from civic organizations."

The gentlemen all tend to speak in mock deprecation of their club, and all acknowledge that the Clifton Women's Club, which has operated most of this century, is the more entrenched organization of the two.

Ruck calls treasurer Dygve "chief official recorder and keeper of whatever records we have."

Responded Dygve (who calls Ruck a "publicity buff"): "We don't have any records. We burn everything."

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