I recently had the pleasure of sitting down with Nancy Keane, and talk about how Pickleball came to The Villages. Although Nancy and husband Jim have only lived here two years, she’s had a big impact on our community. You may know Nancy from her performances in The Villages Theatre group or the Sweet Adelines. She comes from a very active background; her mother was captain of her college basketball team in

1929, (of course this was before Title XIV and they only played half- court). A self-described ‘jock’, Nancy herself played basketball in high school and college, so I wasn’t surprised she was involved in bringing Pickleball to the Villages!

Nancy’s first racquet sport was tennis, which she began playing in her mid 30’s. After moving to Saratoga in 1983, she discovered a neighbor with a Pickleball court, and hasn’t put down her paddle since. Luckily, her home in Tennessee in a Wynham resort also supports Pickleball. Wynham has indoor courts and shared outdoor tennis courts, with over 400 regular players, and are in the process of building 4 dedicated outside courts.

Once Nancy moved to The Villages, she wanted to develop a program here. She noticed some of the tennis courts were unused during the afternoon, and felt Pickleball could utilize them during slow times. Nancy met with the Tennis Board; working with presidents Mitzi Macon and Mike Falarski, as well as GM Darren Shaw, to assess interest in beginning Pickleball here, since it is the fastest growing sport in senior facilities around the country.

The original Village Pickleballers included Mike and Bev Poellot, Lon and Betty Olson, Don and Ann Jackson, and Helen Varenkamp, all familiar with this sport. After advertising in the Villager, they brought in Steve Sutton (our NorCal Pickleball ambassador) to run an introductory clinic. With minimal notice, 75 people showed for the official start of Pickleball! The Poellot’s donated all the equipment, as they had their own court before moving here. From such humble beginnings, the Pickleball Club was born.

When asked what Nancy wants to see happen next, she said her vision is for continued Pickleball growth here at the Villages. She is hoping we can have joint racquet activities, fostering a larger community for all racquet sports. Additionally, she is looking forward to dedicated Pickleball courts, allowing us to expand the program and hold tournaments with other clubs. She is thrilled the board has Pickleball on their March calendar!