

History Of The Villages Pickleball Club



2014

The idea of a Villages Pickleball Club originated in August by Nancy Keane, a part-time Villages resident who enjoyed playing the game at her summer home in Tennessee. She arranged a meeting with the Tennis Club Board, with Mitzi Macon as the outgoing president and Mike Falarski as the incoming president, to ask if it would be possible to play pickleball on the tennis courts during afternoon hours when tennis activity was at a minimum. Lon and Betty Olson, both tennis and pickleball players, were there for moral support. The Tennis Club was reluctant to have pickleball played on their courts, so Nancy and other pickleball supporters—including Mike and Bev Poellot, Lon and Betty Olson, Don and Anne Jackson and Helen Varenkamp--arranged a number of meetings with interested parties, including the Villages G&CC general manager, to gain support for the new activity. It was finally decided to hold a demonstration to show interested Villagers how to play the game.

Mike and Bev Poellot donated some balls and paddles, and in November, the demonstration took place on Tennis Courts 1 and 2. Tape was put down to show dimensions of the pickleball courts and those who already knew how to play demonstrated the game for about 75 onlookers. The event was very successful, thanks in no small part to the help of Steve Sutton, the unofficial ambassador for pickleball for all of Santa Clara County. He gave some informal lessons and answered questions about pickleball activity in areas around The Villages.

After the demonstration, Mike Falarski and other members of the Villages Tennis Club board finally agreed to let the pickleballers have access to some of the tennis courts and organized pickleball play began for the first time in November, for 1 ½ hours every Wednesday and Saturday. The Tennis Club required that fresh tape had to be put down on the courts at the start of play every day and then removed immediately after the end of the session. It was a lot of work, but the pickleball players were a determined bunch. Eventually, play was moved permanently to Tennis Courts 5 and 6.

By the end of the year, more than two dozen Villagers were playing pickleball, a major achievement by all the initial organizers. Some consideration was given to incorporating a new pickleball club into the Villages Tennis Club, but it was finally decided that the best course of action was to establish an independent Pickleball Club, as an official Villages Club, with its own officers and club rules.

2015



As the new year began, Pickleball Club membership continued to grow, and as evidenced by these smiling faces, everyone was having a good time playing and socializing.

On January 29, Garry and Kay Gray sent a letter to Villages General Manager Darren Shaw, suggesting for the first time that the Villages should make plans for permanent pickleball courts. The letter noted that “...our numbers (of pickleball payers) have grown to approximately 50 people...” and suggested that “we recognize that planning and constructing courts will take time but it is not too early to begin the process.” The stage was set and the long, long campaign to build the courts had begun!

The first official meeting of the newly-organized Villages Pickleball Club was held on April 1, with 24 Villagers in attendance. The first order of business was the election of these officers:

President: Nancy Keane
Vice President: Garry Gray
Treasurer: Betty Olsen
Court Manager: Steve Williams
Secretary: Anahid Avakian
Court Scheduling: Mark Gregg

Annual membership dues were set at \$10.00 annually.

On April 29, a New Member Social Event, organized by Kay Gray, was held at the Tennis Viewing Area, and was well-attended.

On July 7, a new Joint Tennis Club/Pickleball Club Joint Committee was formed to address issues caused by using the tennis courts of pickleball. Tennis Club members were Phyllis Seeger, Carolee Ferguson and Delores Escobar. Representing the Pickleball Club were Steve Williams, Garry Gray and Mike Walias. The Committee decided that pickleball players could reserve Courts 5 and 6 in the morning, starting at 10:30 a.m., from May through September.

Participation in the Pickleball Club increased steadily throughout the year. By August, 81 Villagers were on the Club mailing list. The Tennis Club finally allowed pickleballers to leave tape on the courts permanently, and also authorized advanced sign-ups for courts. Mike Poellot prepared a series of conceptual design plans for various possible locations for pickleball courts within the Villages. After a review of all the possible sites, it was finally decided that the Villages Green was the best location for development of permanent courts, and fundraising efforts began for the first time.

On August 6, Nancy Keane and Garry Gray met with Don Jackson and Carole Cassidy of the Evergreen Villages Foundation and agreed to start a program to accept pledges to raise money for dedicated pickleball courts.

On August 11, the first pickleball clinic was held, with Steve Williams providing instruction. It was so successful that the Club started regular weekly beginner clinics, with Mike Walias acting as organizer and teacher.

Starting in September, the Club began attending at the VG&CC New Resident Orientations, with handouts, a club signup sheet, and a laptop computer showing a continuous loop of pickleball play.

Another fun tournament was held in September, with no formal winners, just a good time for everyone.

The Club also started participating in the Villages Fall Festivals, with the same promotional materials.

2016

On January 21, Gary Gray and Don Jackson first proposed selling engraved bricks at the new pickleball courts as part of the fundraising project. The proposal was formally accepted by the Club Board of Directors on August 30.

Anahid Gregg, working closely with The Villages Rules Committee, developed the Club's initial bylaws. After several iterations, the Club's bylaws were accepted by the VG&CC Board on January 26.

At its first meeting on April 9, the Pickleball Club Board elected these officers:

President/Court Manager: Steve Williams
Past President: Nancy Keane
Vice Present/Fundraising Chair: Garry Gray
Treasurer: Betty Olsen
Public Relations/Secretary/Membership: Anahid Avakian
Tournament/Social Director: Gail Keck

In addition, these non-board Pickleball Club members volunteered to help on committees:

Tournaments/Social Events: Tony Orlando, Laurie Truman, Kay Gray, Norm Krishna, Vera Hutton

Fundraising and Membership: Norm Krishna, Don Jackson

Early in the year, Steve Williams formed a new committee with the approval of the Villages General Manager Darren Shaw to do research on the feasibility of building dedicated Pickleball courts at the Villages; employee Tom Muniz served as chairman. Initially the committee members were Steve Williams, Garry Gray and Don Jackson. Sherry Benz joined the committee a few months later.

After extensive research the committee made these recommendations:

1. The best site for dedicated courts was the Village Green area near our Villages front entrance which after considerable research by Matt Giordano was eventually found to be zoned as Open Space.
2. The club should build no less than 4 courts in the initial phase.
3. The four courts should be built with DecoTurf, a premier state-of-the-art surface product that is highly recommended for senior communities and is approved by the USA Pickleball Association. Saviano Company Inc, in San Jose, and Vintage Contractors in San Francisco are the only two tennis court builders in Northern California approved by the manufacturer to install DecoTurf. Many of the donations and pledges received for this project from Villagers were predicated on the fact that the final project will include a minimum of 4 dedicated courts with the approved DecoTurf type surface. Pickleball Club members Mike Walias, Steve Williams, Garry Gray & Don Jackson visited Addison-Penzak Jewish Community Center of Silicon Valley in Los Gatos to play on their DecoTurf court. All four players were impressed with the playability of the surface reconfirming their decision to recommend that we build our courts using the DecoTurf system.

The Board also increased annual membership dues to \$15 a year, and decided to have regular meetings on the last Thursday of every month.

On April 26, The Villages Club Board approved a \$1,500 expenditure on a “Pickleball Feasibility Study,” to be conducted by Sport Court. The study was completed in July, and the recommendation was to build four dedicated courts in the area near the security gate referred to as the “Village Green.”

On May 15, Club members participated in the Bay Area Senior Games for the first time, but did not place in the finals.

The first Summer Sizzler club tournament was held on June 26; First Place winners were John Stratakos and Mark Gregg. The second-place team was Betty Olsen and Joe Spada. On July 2, the Club had its first float in the Villages Fourth of July parade., which increased awareness of pickleball as an important Villages activity.



Our Fourth of July parade float was gaily bedecked, and volunteers played the game as they walked down the street.

Later in July, five Villages teams participate in the Jane Carey Memorial Tournament in Pleasanton, California. Participants included Bob Iacopi, Charlie Bougopoulos, Steve Williams, Gail Keck and Mark and Anahid Gregg. Mark and Anahid placed third in the mixed doubles competition.

Also in July, the Villages Board authorized a formal Court Project Committee, chaired by Tom Muniz, as Villages Project Manager. Members of the committee included Steve Williams, Don Jackson, Garry Gray and Sherry Benz. Muniz reported in September that the courts couldn't be built there because it was zoned "open space." Fortunately, this opinion was reversed a year later (see Page 9).

On September 25, a successful Fall Cocktail Party was held at Foothill Center, organized by Gail Keck.

A Fall Fanatic Tournament was held on October 15. First place went to Nancy Keane and Mike Walias, and second place to Gail Keck and Norm Krishna.

The most significant organizational event of the year took place on October 20, when Garry Gray made a detailed presentation of the findings of the Court Project Committee at a VG&CC Board Town Hall meeting at Cribari Center, promoting the Pickleball Club and asking for the construction of dedicated pickleball courts behind Building A at the corner of Fairway Drive and Club Drive. This raised a lot of concern from residents of Village Del Lago and the site ultimately was rejected.

2017



2017's new Club officers included (L to R) Betty Olsen, Steve Williams, Garry Gray, Anahid Gregg and Gail Keck.

At the January 31 Villages Board Town Hall meeting, it was announced that an error had been made, and the Village Green area actually is zoned as “Recreational” and was suitable as a site for the dedicated pickleball courts. At its February 28 meeting, the Club Board officially declared that the Village Green would be the site of the courts, and it allocated \$20,000 for the development of construction documents.

At its first meeting of the year on April 2, The Club Board elected these officers:

President/Court Manager: Steve Williams
Vice President/Fundraising Chair: Garry Gray
Treasurer: Betty Olsen
Public Relations/Secretary/Membership/IT: Anahid Avakian Gregg
Tournament Director: Gail Keck
Social Director: Laurie Truman

Other Fundraising Committee members included Don Jackson, Dave Roberts, Norm Krishna, and Nancy Keane.

A new category of volunteers was created, called “members at large” consisting of those Villagers who were not on the board, but would attend meeting with the intent of stepping into an elected role in the future. Included in this group were Norm Krishna, Larry Martinson and Joe Spada.

A new set of revised Bylaws was approved.

At the May 21 Spring Fling Tournament, first place winners in the Novice Division were Kathi Ashby and George Ramstad, and second place went to Kay Gray and Sally Otton. First place winners in the Advanced Division were Gail Keck and Alex Shtarker. Second place went to Mike Walias and Steve Williams, and third place to Mark and Anahid Gregg.

At the May 25 Board meeting, it was announced that Club membership had grown to 102.

The second annual Summer Sizzler tournament was held on August 10, this time with a “Dink and Drink” potluck afterward. First place winners in the Novice Division were Terry Holmquist and Larry Martinson. Second place went to Betty and Lon Olsen, and third place to Sherry Benz and Dennis Cullen. In the Advanced Division, Dave Roberts and Alex Shtarker won first place, second place went to Mike Walias and Steve Williams, and third place to Mark and Anahid Gregg.

On September 14, several Club members participated in an afternoon of open play on Tennis Courts 1-4 with members of the East Valley YMCA.

The first Pickleball on the Patio was held at the Bar & Bistro, as a Club fundraiser on September 15. \$468 went to the Club treasury through food purchases and a 50-50 raffle.

The second annual Fall Fanatics Tournament on October 15 was a round robin. In the advanced division, individual winners were: First Place, Alex Shtarker, Second Place Mark Gregg Third Place Dave Hathaway. In the Intermediate Division, team winners were Gail Keck and Sally Otton, with Betty Olsen and Fran Haughton finishing second.

2018



New offices elected at the Annual Meeting included (L to R): Sherry Benz, Larry Martinson, Trish O'Neill, Garry Gray, Kathy Ashby and Betty Olsen.

At the Annual Meeting on April 8, the Board elected these officers:

President: Garry Gray
Vice Presidents: Trish O'Neill and Larry Martinson
Secretary: Kathi Ashby
Treasurer: Betty Olsen
Tournament Director: Sherry Benz

The Board also appointed these Committee Chairpersons:

IT/Web: David Cook
Publicity: Kay Gray
Membership: Ginny Spencer
Social: Robyn Siebenthall and Trish O'Neill
New Courts Project: Mike Falarski
Court Operation: Frank Houghton
Player Introduction and Instruction: Mike Walias

Steve Williams will serve as Past President/Advisor and Joe Spada is a Board Member at Large.

The Board rededicated itself to building an active, vibrant Club, continue its fundraising efforts to build new courts, create a Club web side, publish the first Club Roster, continue to promote Club activities in the Villager, conduct at least two tournaments, and have at least one social event for Club members. An official Club logo was approved.

Information about the Club, and photographs of early events, had been available on a Google site since early 2016, thanks to Anahid Gregg's efforts. But the information was not easily accessed by most Villagers, and President Garry Gray put out an urgent request for someone to create a web site for the Club. David Cook volunteered to create the site, and he moved most of the information from the Google site into a more graphic and user-friendly set of web pages, at villagespickleballclub.com. He also added a slideshow of photos, an events calendar, a membership application, tournament sign-up sheets and other features, and it went on line in early April. The website went on line on May 1, and the registration procedure was used successfully for the first time in the June tournament.

By May, the Club had raised almost \$50,000 toward the construction of dedicated courts, and The Evergreen Villages Foundation had agreed to match the first \$50,000 raised by the Club. Villages High Twelve also pledged \$1,000 to EVF in support of the court project.

It was decided to purchase official Pickleball Club T shirts as a way to promote awareness of the Club and its members. Royal blue was selected as the official color, Anahid Gregg coordinated the purchase through Ignite Marketing, 46 members bought shirts, and they were delivered in June, with enough enthusiasm to start a second order later in the month.

In June, Bob Iacopi was named Club Historian, and work began on the official club history.

The annual Spring Fling Tournament was held on June 3, along with an informal potluck for participants and viewers. There were three divisions, names for varieties of flowers. First place winners in the Cosmos Division were Larry Martinson and Trish O'Neill. Second place went to Charlie Bougopoulos and Sherry Benz, and Third Place to Frank Houghton and Anna Hewitt. First place winners in the Adonis Division were Leo and Sheryl Ruth. Second place went to John Stratakos and Dennis Cullen, and Third Place to Ralph Lentz and Melinda Dobbs. First place winners in the Protea Division were Norm Krishna and Alex Shtarker. Second place went to Mark and Anahid Gregg, and third place to Mike Walias and Dave Roberts.

The second annual Pickleball on The Patio was held at the B&B on June 17, Father's Day, with Anahid Gregg as chairperson, with help from Ginny Spencer and Gail Keck.

After a two-week test of different tape colors, permanent yellow tape was installed on Courts 5 and 6 on June 18. The new tape is much more stable and has a much longer life than the old blue tape in use since 2015.



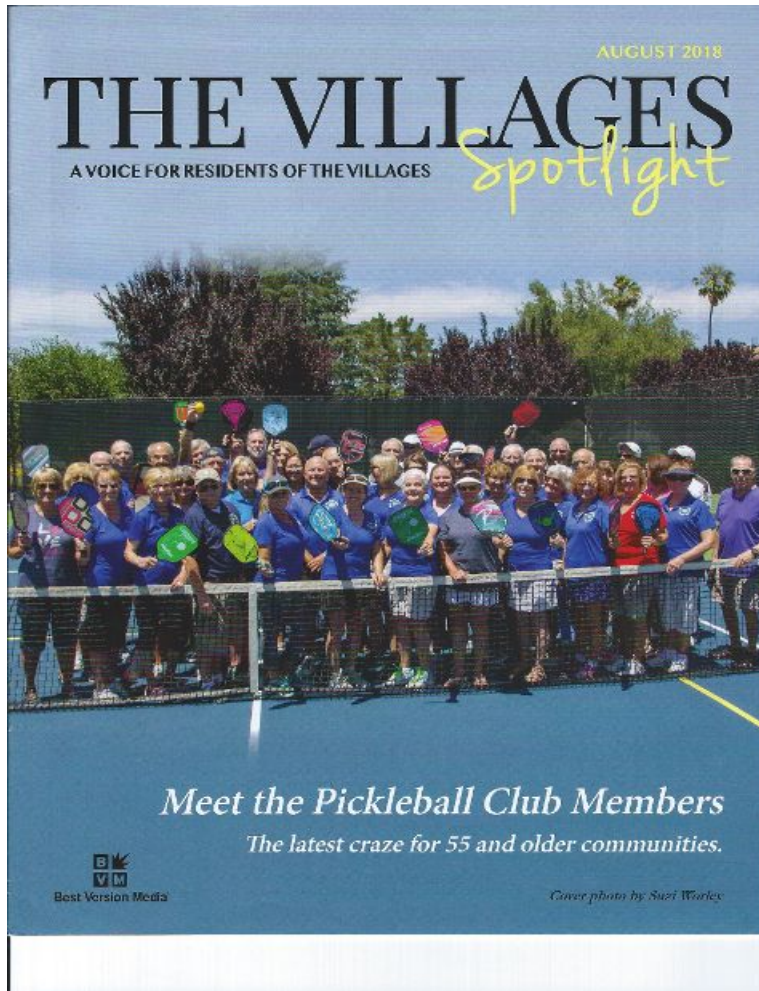
Left: The “Pickle Up’ new players await their first lessons from volunteer instructors (right) Larry Martinson, Mark Gregg and Trish O’Neill

In an effort to attract new members, the Club sponsored “Pickle Up” in July, and it was a great success. Vice President Trish O’Neill organized the event, and over a three-week period, she and a group of volunteer instructors taught the basics to more than 40 aspiring Picklers, and more than 30 eventually joined the Club. The big turnout and inevitable wait times to play only re-emphasized the need for dedicated pickleball courts.



In the tournament's first game, Pickleball Club member Charlie Bougopoulos makes the first throw while members of both the Bocce and Pickleball clubs look on.

On Sunday, August 5, members of the Club participated in a “just for fun” bocce tournament with the Villages Bocce Club. More than 40 Villages from both clubs played for three hours and enjoyed food and drink provided by the Bocce Club. No entry fees, no prizes, but everyone had a lot of fun.



The Club received some nice publicity when it was the cover story on the August issue of THE VILLAGES SPOTLIGHT. There was a cover photo of a big group of pickleball players, and a long article about the club activities, with even more photos.

On Sunday, October 7, the Club joined forces with the Evergreen Villages Foundation for a “Just For Fun” golf tournament and barbecue at Gazebo Park. We sponsored the silent auction and raffle and proceeds went to help finance the pickleball courts. Gwen, Jon and Mark Bindon and David Cook won the 18-hole flight and former Pickleball Club President Nancy Keane won the 9-hole flight with partners Jim Keane, Reine Fedor and Mike Poellot. Anahid Gregg was ring leader for the Club’s part of the event, and EVF volunteers pitched in to make the event a big success for everyone.

By October, Club membership totaled about 165. A series of articles was scheduled in the The Villager to highlight personal histories of individual players.

The annual Fall tournament was held on October 27 and 28, with Betty Olsen as director. Saturday was dedicated to social play, with rotating teams, and no scores reported. Sunday was the official competitive tournament. Flight One winners were Anahid and Mark Gregg, with Debbie and Danny Kirwan winning the consolation round. Flight Two winners were Sherry Benz and Terry Holmquist, with Kathi Ashby and Joe Militello winning the consolation round.

Vera Hutton and Bob Schuck won the novice round robin tournament, with Ralph Lentzer and Melinda Dobbs coming in second.



Flight One winners Anahid and Mark Gregg



Flight Two winners Terry Holmquist and Sherry Benz



Novice Winners Bob Schuck and Vera Hutton

2019

The Club's first holiday dinner was held on January 26, organized by Trish O'Neill and Robyn Siebenthal with a lot of help from David Cook. Sheryl Ruth provided the table decorations, and music was provided by Vista Point. 117 members attended. Club President Garry Gray summed up the year's achievements, most importantly raising more than \$450,000 to build the new courts and doubled the size of the club to almost 200 members.



Party attendees included Garry Gray, Gregg and Lynn Stewart. Kay Gray and Joe Spada

The Spring tournament was held on April 7. Sherry Benz organized the event, and Robyn Siebenthal put together drinks and snacks for the players. Forty Villagers competed on four teams, with everyone playing men's doubles, women's doubles and mixed doubles. The Yellow team, captained by Mike Walias, was the champion. Undefeated players were Mark Gregg, Bob Shuck, Greg Stewart and Fred Mathis.



Tournament organizer Sherry Benz
and Social Chairperson Robyn Siebenthal



Friendly competitors in a men's doubles match were Alex Shtarker and Ray Mausling on one side and David Hathaway and Rick McKee on the other.

The annual meeting was held on April 7 at Foothill Center. Retiring President Garry Gray reviewed out 2018 events, and incoming President Larry Martinson outlined plans for 2019, which includes continued efforts to get the dedicated courts built, increase the Club's exposure through the club's web site and articles in the Villager, and an ongoing program of tournaments and social events.



New 2019 Pickleball Club officers and chairpersons include (top row) New Courts Manager Garry Gray, President Larry Martinson, Vide President Bill Pomeranz, Court Operations Manger Frank Houghton, IT/Web Manger David Cook; (bottom row) Club Activities and Fund Raising Manager Anahid Gregg, Membership Chairperson Ginny Spencer, Social chairperson Robyn Siebenthal, and Publicity Chairperson Linda Eige. Not pictured are Secretary Kathy Ashby, Treasurer Betty Olson, PickleUp Manager Joe Spada and Tournament Director Sheryl Ruth.

After Club representatives met with the City of San Jose in May, it was determined that we needed another sound study. So the second test was conducted on May 30, and we passed with flying colors, providing more ammunition to our continuing efforts to get dedicated courts.

On July 2, two ambassadors from the USA Pickleball Association were invited to make a presentation to the Villages SIRS 114 luncheon at the Clubhouse. After making an audio-visual presentation describing the USAPA's goals and promoting the health benefit of the game, Mike and Princess Leong invited the group to the pickleball courts where they gave a brief

demonstration of the rules to SIRS members and played a few games to help encourage new players to try the game.

In July, the Club board sent out an email reminding members that after August, all players must use only paddles on the Approved Pickleball Paddle list that is on the Club's web site, <http://villagespickleball.org/approved-pickleball-paddles/>. The Club purchased eight approved paddles earlier in the year for members to try. During the June sound test, the Monarch Mercenary and the Monarch Dragon Slayer were the quietest. The same email also reminded players to use only pickleballs provided by the club, and to refrain from walking off with any of the balls in our equipment storage bin.



That's Julie Walias behind the wheel, Kathi Ashby in the passenger seat and Anahid Gregg holding the Torch of Liberty

The Club was well represented in the The Villages 4th of July parade. The decorated golf cart was driven by Julie Walias with Anahid Gregg posing as an elegant Statue Of Liberty, and we were awarded an Honorable Mention by the spectators. There was also a walking parade of Pickleball fans that included Mike Walias and Mark Gregg playing pickleball while walking the parade route.

In July, the Club held its second very successful PickUp program. More than 20 volunteers under the direction of Joe Spada patiently tutored about 25 pickleball newbies in everything from the rules to advanced play. Several of the new players continued to play in the club's regularly scheduled events.



2019 PickleUp participants get their first briefing before their first of six lessons.

In early August, Club member Jim Valenti used his woodworking skills to make a “Waiting List” paddle holder for players to use when there were more players than available courts. The wood holder was installed on the fence facing Court 6.

In August, Club members Sheryl Ruth and Trish O'Neill played in the Silicon Valley Championships in Sunnyvale. They didn't win any prizes but represented the Villages Club well against tough competition.

The “Battle For The Paddle” Tournament was held on September 21. Sheryl Ruth and Robyn Siebenthall organized the event, with the priceless help of Betty Olsen. The tournament was divided into 2 divisions. A Division winners were Sherry Benz and Peggy Seidel, and runners-up were Joyce Kludt and Robyn Siebenthall, Consolation champions were Debbie and Danny Kirwan, and runners up were Kathy Ashby and Anna Hewitt. B Division winners were Glenn

Seidel and Betty Olsen, Runners-up were Mike and Judy Falarski. Consolation champions were Bob Shuck and Fred Schmae and runners-up were Phil and Linda Frocht.



Left: "Battle of The Paddle" A Division Winners Peggy Seidel and Sherry Benz. Right: B Division winners Betty Olson and Glenn Seidel

The annual fall tournament was held on October 27-28. Thirty players had a wonderful time playing, socializing--and eating. The mixer was held on Saturday. Everyone played half-hour slots and because this was more of a social event than an actual competition, scores were not reported. Competition got more serious on Sunday. Novice players competed in a round robin format on Courts 5 and 6. The first place team was Bob Shuck and Vera Hutton, with Ralph Lentzner and Melinda Dobbs coming in second. Intermediate and advance players competed on Courts 1-4. The flight one winners were Anahid and Mark Gregg with Debbie and Danny Kirwan winning the consolation round. Gail Keck, Anna Hewitt, Kevin Prest and Norm Krishna were finalists. Flight two winners were Sherry Benz and Terry Holmquist with Kathi Ashby and Joe Militello winning the consolation round. Larry and Julie Henig along with Bob Flesher and Kamini Patwari were finalists. This great tournament was made possible by the work of several individuals. Betty Olsen was a great tournament director. Sherry Benz obtained wonderful prizes. Sheryl Ruth and her committee comprised of Robyn Siebenthal and Anna Hewitt provided nibbles and drinks. Frank Houghton and his court crew made sure all of the courts were in tip top shape and ready to play. David Cook spent a lot of time with the IT support.

A great time was had by all at the Pickleball Prohibition Speakeasy & Casino Night on October 31, organized with the joint efforts of the Villages Pickleball Club and the Evergreen Village Foundation. The Villages Cotton Club(house) was packed with more than 175 guests, many costumed in 1920's glamour. Flappers, stars and gangsters danced the night away. Bankrolls were cashed in for chips at "Pickle's Place" and there were rumors of bootleg cocktails. The gaming tables were standing room only for the

entire evening, and was the dance floor. Leo Ruth and Connie Hendrickson provided vocals. Many, many volunteers made this all possible—decorations from the McCarthys and Hallocks, artwork by Anahid Gregg, who also tracked the registration. Joining Leo and Diana Hallock as Masters of Ceremonies were Maxine Amundsen and Larry Martinson. Keystone Kops who raided the place with Jack McCarthy, Noel Lanctot and Hal Hallock. All the donated raffle prizes were claimed, a rarity!



Kim Silverman and Ginny Spencer were among the many partygoers who dressed in period costumes.



Leo Ruth and Connie Hendrickson provided vocals, to the music of Ed Knott, with Bonnie Jones looking on.



The dance floor was crowded all night.



The gaming tables got a lot of action from ell-dressed gamblers.

On November 20, our proposal to build dedicated pickleball courts was presented at a public hearing of the San Jose City Planning Department at City Hall. About 50 Pickleball Club members and friends showed up in support of our proposal. Garry Gray gave a very eloquent speech about the Club history and our exhaustive efforts to have dedicated courts built at The Villages, and because our plan was solid and there were no serious objections, the Commission approved our request. Next steps are for Mowat to develop a detailed cost estimate to be taken to the Club Board. With Club Board approval, then a membership vote will be scheduled. Then a builder will be hired and construction can begin.



About 50 Pickleball Club members and friends showed up at San Jose City Hall to support our plan for building dedicated courts

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