

While walking by the Pickleball Courts, I noticed the license plate **HOUS4AL**, and was curious who “Al” was. I was told the truck belonged to Peter Conk, one of our Pickleball members.

Peter knew the Villages was a good place for retirement, and rented here in January, 2020, buying a home in March, 2022. He had given up tennis after a knee replacement in 2018. Peter saw a sandwich board about instructional drop-in Pickleball, and after giving it a try, was quickly addicted. Best of all, he hasn’t experienced any issues with his knee. He now plays 4-5 times a week, and loves it.

But there is a lot more to Peter than just his love of Pickleball! After growing up in Long Island, NY, he attended Santa Clara University, graduating in ’71. His Jesuit education gave him a strong belief in service to his fellow man. He started with Catholic Workers, and began working with the homeless. There were no shelters in Santa Clara, so he began providing people with meals and a safe haven in a large Victorian house which was also his home.

From here, he became one of the founders of Martha’s Kitchen, providing meals to those in need, and then executive director of SJ Urban Ministry; sponsored by downtown Churches to work with the mentally ill. From 1984 to 1991, Peter started three additional shelters to provide housing for the homeless. He became a house husband, getting his real estate license and raising his six children – 3 adopted and 3 step-children. Yet he never stopped his work with the homeless.

I was interested to learn with that women and senior citizens are a large percentage of the growing homeless population, not just the mentally ill and those with substance abuse issues. In 2018 he developed Hope Village, an organized encampment, as a model for a much cheaper way to provide a safe, clean place for the homeless than tiny homes and even more expensive alternatives. Now he's started Villages of Hope, a campaign to press the city to use pallet shelters and similar structure, which are much less expensive and more quickly erected than the housing currently being built. It can save tax dollars and help get more people off the street and into housing.

And who was Al? It turns out it stands for “Housing for all”, a wonderful goal to strive for!

