

“Profiles in Courage” The beginnings of Pickleball in the Villages by Terry Holmquist

Nothing happens by magic, the existence of the pickleball club and the dedicated courts entailed a lot of hard work by many people. This is going to be a series of articles profiling those that helped make it happen and continue to keep things going.

We start with Nancy Keane who moved to Olivas in December of 2013 and started working on getting pickleball in the Villages. At that time most of us had never heard of pickle ball, including the outgoing and incoming presidents of the Tennis Club.

Nancy started playing in 1983 because her neighbor in Saratoga had a court and invited all the neighbors to play. Nancy spent her summers in Tennessee where pickleball was very popular. So, when she moved to the Villages she wanted to continue playing. Nancy noticed that tennis courts 5 and 6 were often empty and wondered if there was any chance they could be used for pickleball.

Now the work began. We all know what it takes to pass a bill in congress, this was no easier. First one has to demonstrate what is pickleball, it's value and what is needed. Nancy arranged for the Ambassadors of pickle ball to have a demonstration and a few lessons. This took getting permission from the activities office. Much to everyone's surprise 75 people showed up with great interest.

Everyone was getting excited but we still needed a place to play: Negotiations began with the tennis club. Luckily, a couple of tennis players had also been exposed to pickleball so they were willing to be advocates for the cause. The tennis club agreed to using courts 1-3, 2 days a week in the afternoon for 1.5 hours. Pickleball and tennis courts are not equal dimensions: Therefore, the first pickleball players had to put down tape and remove it after every pickleball session.

The First club board was established on April 1st, 2015 with Nancy Keane as President, Garry Gray as Vice-President, Betty Olsen as Treasurer, Anahid Gregg as secretary, Steve Williams as court manager and Mark Gregg as court scheduler. The club started with 20 members and now has grown to 518 members.

As Nancy says “I planted the seeds and others watered them.” We all are reaping the joy of Nancy's perseverance. When you see a lady with a slight Tennessee twang and are having fun on the courts remember to say “Thanks”.



Original Members of the Pickleball Club, Nancy is holding the paddle.