

Love: Not Just a Tennis Term for the Raquettes

By Angelina Bruno

The Raquettes have been serving, swinging and running at the St. Petersburg Tennis Center since 1962, with 200 members at their peak. Currently standing around 24 women, the Raquettes are looking to expand the group again.

"We'd like to get the numbers as high as we can, because it's good for the center," says Norah Rocket, the group's treasurer. "That's one of our main goals, supporting the tennis center and also supporting women in tennis."

The Raquettes charge \$15 for membership dues, and decide how much of those dues to donate to the center for scholarships, equipment and other items the center needs. This spirit of camaraderie and support runs throughout the group, with tennis just half of the attraction of being a Raquette.

"About 20 years ago, something was happening in my life and I needed a distraction," said Nancy McIntire, secretary for the Raquettes. In the late 1990s, McIntire started taking tennis lessons in Sarasota. From there, McIntire not only got back in the swing of the game, but also into the swing of community.

"I started to meet people and play on a regular basis with a group of people, and the most important thing



Silvia Arenas, Nancy McIntire, Norah Rocket and Anita Knapp pose for a photo on Friday, April 6 at the St. Pete Tennis Center.

was not only playing, but meeting people and having friends," she said. McIntire has been playing with the Raquettes for two years.

For some of the players, tennis is no new find. McIntire picked up her first racquet (wooden of course, she says) at 13, and member Anita Knapp, now 69, has been playing

the game since she was a freshman in college. "My sister was dating a tennis pro in Tampa and introduced me to the game," Knapp said. "And it's been a love affair ever since."

While some players are more experienced than others both in life and on the court, the Raquettes welcome women of ages and skills into their group, and their Friday morning games.

Raquette member Silvia Arenas had never played tennis before joining the team two years ago. After her retirement, Arenas and her husband moved to St. Petersburg from Tallahassee. Arena's daughter bought her a membership to the Tennis Center and her bond with the Raquettes was instant.

"I found this wonderful group of ladies and it's been my life, really," said Arena. "I needed something for me to get out and be a woman and enjoy and share; I share everything with these ladies."

The Raquettes meet at the St. Petersburg Tennis Center, 650 18th Ave. S., every Friday morning and have a luncheon once a month. For more information about the group or to sign up to be a member, call Norah Rocket at 727-398-8055.

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