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Court Cents.....just my 2 bits worth  
by Nancy Morgan

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### Taking Time to Celebrate

What began as an opportunity for a group of women to get together for some friendly, competitive tennis play at the St. Petersburg Tennis Center emerged into one of the oldest – if not *the* oldest – tennis groups in the area. Last month, the Racquettes celebrated their 50th year of existence!



2013 Racquettes with their celebration shirts – courtesy of Racquettes

Following a round of their usual Friday tennis play, a group of about 50 gathered to enjoy a luncheon prepared by A Fresh Connection Catering, a local catering company owned by Lisa Prather of Gulfport.



Serving lunch

Among those celebrating the Racquettes' milestone was Audrey Stimpert, the oldest member at age 93. In the early 1980's, Stimpert converted from golf player to tennis enthusiast when she found the clay courts at the St. Petersburg Tennis Center more inviting than the golf greens.

Also attending was Millie Steckman, a winter resident from Gettysburg, PA, and a Racquettes member since the early 1980s.

*"I have just really enjoyed my association with everyone at the St. Petersburg Tennis Center," said Steckman, 87, "and all of our special projects to help others. I help cook for the players during our men's tournaments, help gather gift certificates for center giveaways and generally just try to make everyone feel welcome when they come here."*

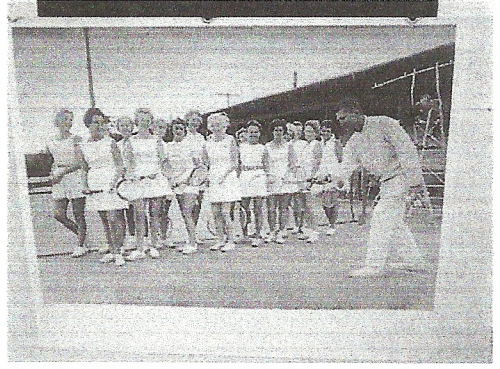
The Racquettes was the brainchild of the late Hazel Cook, who mailed postcards to women in the area asking if they would be interested in coming to SPTC for Friday morning play. The response was magnificent, and at one point the membership ballooned to nearly 200. Membership was so coveted that potential members had to be sponsored by a current member to even be considered.

*"It was during that heyday that I came to the tennis center and didn't know anyone, much less know anyone to sponsor me," said Anita Knapp, current president of the Racquettes. "I'll never forget that Joan Malone, one of the regular players there – and who didn't know me at all – said she'd sponsor me. I've been a member ever since and have never forgotten how welcomed I felt from that very first day."*



Ruby & Tom  
Johnson  
~ ~ ~  
Jack Bailey  
~ ~ ~  
Sally & Bob Brierley

According to Knapp, the Racquettes do more than play tennis and enjoy luncheons – they are dedicated to promoting tennis, supporting the St. Petersburg Tennis Center and assisting promising young junior players at the center. Knapp is assisted by vice-president Ruth Zebkar and treasurer Nora Rockett, who are serving three-year terms.



Teaching professional Dan Sullivan instructing some of the Racquettes

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Jackie Keller, general manager of the St. Petersburg Tennis Center, believes the Racquettes provide rock-solid support of the center.

*"The Racquettes are a pioneering group of women who are consistently here every Friday to encourage new players to join their group," said Keller. "They are great volunteers for any event we have had, they contribute to our children's programs by offering scholarships to summer camp kids and I believe they are one of the reasons the Foundation (Tennis Foundation of St. Petersburg) became a success."*

(About 10 years ago, the then city-run center nearly closed when participation was reduced while costs increased. A group of interested residents and tennis enthusiasts developed the Tennis Foundation of St. Petersburg to save the center.)

Some members played tennis in their youth or young adulthood, but Nora Rockett started tennis later in life than most. Tennis came her way after she retired from a 30-plus career with the CIA that included 15 years working in Europe as a diplomat.

"I wondered what I would do when I retired," said Rockett. "I decided tennis would help me physically and bridge would help me mentally. Through tennis I have found a lot of friends. The Racquettes are a changing group as we all have gotten older and it may not be the vibrant group it was in its heyday. Still, the friendships remain intact."

The Racquettes finished off their celebration with an exquisite cake that depicted the logo designed for their milestone achievement.

Dixie & John  
Francy

~~~~~  
Tarpon Tennis

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***Congratulations, ladies!***

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