

Tennis Club marks 50 years

Members look to next generation

By Sara Buscher
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South Burlington

SOUTH BURLINGTON — The Burlington Tennis Club, tucked away on East Terrace, may be easy to overlook — but like any family tradition, it's hard to forget.

Today, the club is still a member-owned nonprofit, with tennis and paddleball courts, a pool, clubhouse and summer tennis and swim programs for youths and adults.

John Carpenter says from the clay courts to the membership roster, few things at the club have changed over the years: Many of the original member families' names remain on the list, as their children continue the tradition of tennis matches and swim meets for their own children.

Carpenter was among those who founded the Burlington Tennis Club 50 years ago. He remembers his wife, Connie, carting a carload of children to play tennis matches at nearby camps in the summer — and adult swim meets where “the kids egged us on.”

Today, the club has a new pool, and a new clubhouse that Carpenter calls an improvement over the earliest structure on the premises.

“We had one cabin, about the size of a fishing shanty, where people would huddle when it rained,” he recalls.

He says he's been playing tennis since he could walk: His father served as tennis coach at the University of Vermont for decades.

Nearly 90 years later, Carpenter still plays twice a

week or more. This year, he and his wife will mark two milestones: the 50-year anniversary of the tennis club he helped organize, and 61 years of marriage, which the Carpenters will celebrate Saturday.

Carpenter said the club was formed to meet a need in the community, as he and other veterans back from the war married, settled down and started families.

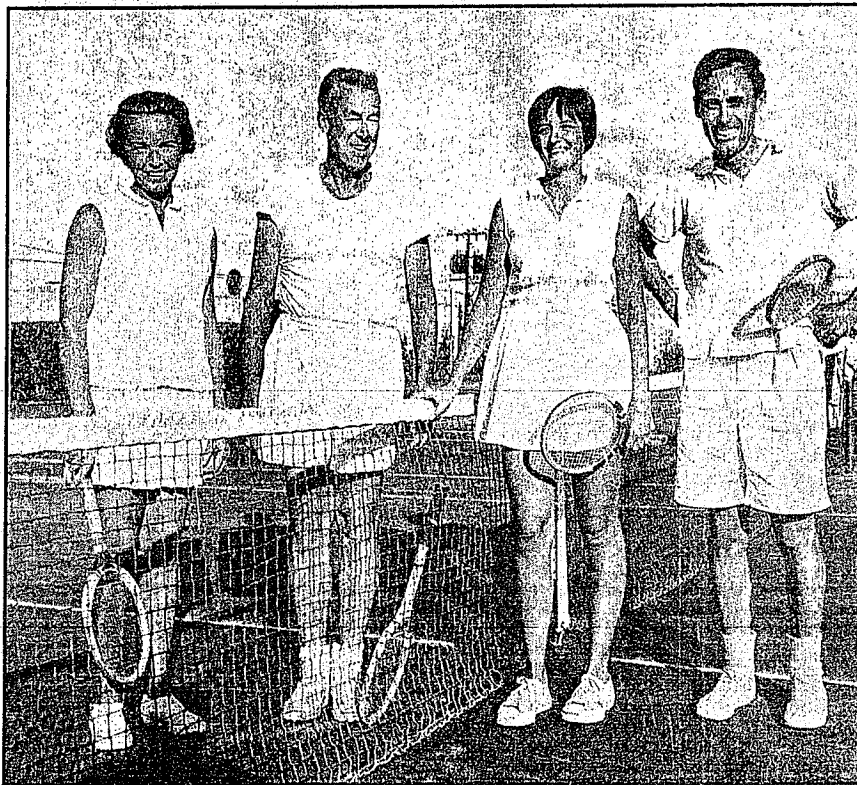
The families naturally gravitated toward each other, Carpenter said. “And when we got all these kids together — we had to figure out what to do with them.”

He and several others rallied to build a family recreation area offering tennis courts and a swimming pool, which they named the Burlington Tennis Club.

A five-acre parcel west of Williston Road and east of East Terrace in South Burlington was identified as a suitable site (a major consideration was that it be within biking distance of Burlington). Founder Dana Bray donated a portion of the land, and the club purchased the remainder for \$5,000.

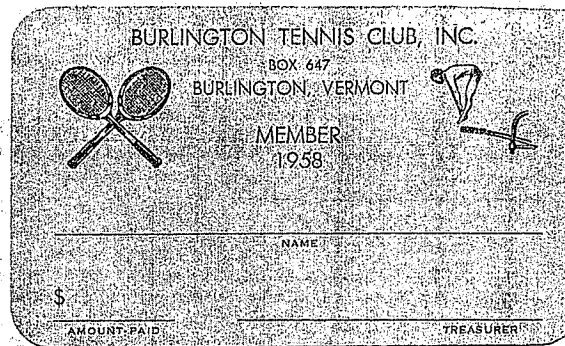
The total project budget assumed \$5,000 for the land, \$16,000 for the tennis courts, \$30,000 for the pool, and \$20,000 for construction of the clubhouse. Money to build the club was raised through the issuance of 10-year, \$100 debenture bonds to be paid back at 4.5 percent interest.

Construction of the first six clay courts began in No-



Courtesy photos

Barb Thompson, Cale Twitchell, Betsy Davis and Bert Kusserow (from left) take to the courts at the Burlington Tennis Club in this undated courtesy photo. BELOW: A club membership card from 1958.



ember 1957, and the pool was built the next spring. Yearly membership dues were \$100 per family, \$50 per single adult, and \$15 for a junior membership.

Gene Richards has served five years as club president, instead of a typical two- to three-year term, because he says he feels a responsibility to preserve the facility.

The club has been tempted by developers to sell in the past, but Richards said that wouldn't be the right thing to do.

The family environment Carpenter and others envisioned remains.

Richards said they're looking forward to building a new paddle-ball court and an addition for indoor recreational activities, to expand the club's use year-round.

Plans are also under way for a wiffleball field.

“I want to make sure it's there for the next generation,” he said. “It's very, very special.”

Carpenter has kept a history of newspaper clippings and photographs through the

years, and assembled them in a scrapbook.

“While 50 years doesn't mean that much to some, to a few people still around, it's kind of a milestone,” he said.

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