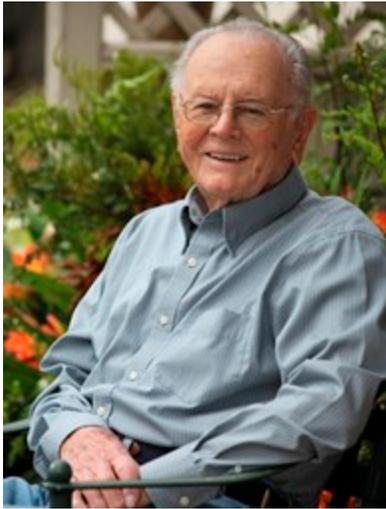


2014 USTA Northern California Tennis Hall of Fame Bob Walsh

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Bob Walsh



Bob Walsh playing tennis in his college years.

Can one man positively impact the lives of hundreds?

Ask Bob Walsh.

For more than 20 years, Walsh's volunteer activities have brought positive change to USTA NorCal and to the Napa Valley communities that, at age 88, he continues to serve as USTA NorCal Adult League Local Area Coordinator.

Walsh has been the catalyst for everything from extending league play to seniors to the construction and maintenance of tennis courts. He has been a captain, a committee chair, a fundraiser -- anything to further the game he has played, off and on, for about 70 years.

Walsh says his role model was his father, "a very honest and honorable Irishman" who was one of the first highway patrol officers in the state. Walter Marnell Walsh Sr. played tennis; so did Walsh's older brother, Walter Jr. who was No. 1 on the high school team when Walsh joined as a freshman.

"Our family was very competitive and the challenge was on," Walsh said.

Walsh retired from the corporate world in 1988 and started a part-time computer consulting business. A couple years later, USTA NorCal added senior leagues to its program. Joyce Pournaras, then the section's league coordinator, was a good friend of Walsh's and knew of his computer savvy. She asked him to modernize the recording of scores for that league and for Mixed Doubles. At the time, the tabulations still were handled pencil-and-paper.

"All the captains would mail Bob their scorecards," Pournaras said. "At the end of the season, I'd call him and he'd tell me which teams won their local league and would be coming to the senior Sectional Championships."

Walsh would become a leading advocate for senior competition and helped organize a Super Senior 65 league and pilot 70 league. Since 2008, these leagues have attracted more than 8,000 participants.

"The first couple of years we did the 65 league, very few ladies joined because they didn't want to admit they were 65," Walsh said. "They finally came in very strong and they didn't hesitate to get into the 70s league."

Walsh has served as a member or chair of numerous association committees, including Super Seniors Planning and Grievance. He is a frequent volunteer at USTA district and section championships -- so much so that when he is absent, players often ask about him. With all, he has developed a reputation for being friendly, firm and fair.

USTA National officials have taken notice. "We've invited Bob to work as staff at six national league championships as a way of thanking him for all the work he has done to grow tennis at the local level, and to recognize him for his dedication in captaining so many teams over many years," said Jeanne Lucido, USTA National League manager.

With all that, it is in his hometown of Napa and its surrounding communities that Walsh has made some of his most tangible contributions.

Walsh is USTA Local Area Coordinator for the area, which includes Napa, Sonoma, Solano and Mendocino counties. And he served as president of the Napa Valley Tennis Association for 10 years, remaining active as past president.

For the past 35 years, the association has staged the Napa Valley Tennis Classic, which in 2011 was named a tournament of the year.

Having the event so recognized "was one of my greatest honors, since it was voted by the players," Walsh said. Each year, Walsh single-handedly solicits sponsors for the back of tournament T-shirts so that players are able to take them home as souvenirs.

At the time Walsh became association president, it was presiding over eight tennis courts and an old shed with one bathroom. The courts were split into two groups of four, with a vacant weeded lot in the middle.

Walsh and his board went to work, collaborating with the parks department and school district. The weeded field became a lawn and paved patio, trees and shrubs were planted and an automatic irrigation system was installed. An old trailer was purchased for \$5 and, with an investment of \$2,000, turned into a clubhouse.

In order to resurface the courts, Walsh raised \$125,000 from USTA National, the school district, a local foundation and members. "When it was time to make the final payment, we were short \$5,000," Walsh said. "I paid that on faith." A new fundraiser, BOB -- "Bail Out Bob" -- was started. "Eventually, I got my money," he said.

The Napa Valley Tennis Association has won Community Tennis Association of the Year; Outstanding Tennis in the Parks Organization, Facility of the Year and Outstanding NTRP Tournament of the Year.

In 2004, Walsh was first recipient of the USTA NorCal Service to Leagues Award, along with awards for Service to Tennis and Service to Seniors.

Walsh's life remains firmly centered in the Napa Valley, where he lives with his wife of 67 years, Lu. The two met after military service in World War II -- Walsh in the Army Air Corps, Lu in the Navy. Their three children, three grandchildren and four great-grandchildren all live in the valley as well.

Walsh's computer consulting -- and tennis activities -- continue unabated. He has played more than 400 USTA league matches and captained 39 teams, 14 of which have gone onto championship events.

"I still try to play once a week, but only underhand because my shoulder is gone," said Walsh said.

When he received the call about the Hall of Fame, "I was sitting at the computer with our tournament director finalizing the draw on a one-day tournament," Walsh said.

"I was blown away. It is like frosting on the cake to get this kind of reward for doing something you totally enjoy. Never in my life did I think such an honor was possible."