

2010 Hall of Fame Jean Harris



At 92 years of age Carmel resident Jean Harris knows something about longevity, and apparently it is connected to tennis.

Her daughter, Judi Leavelle-King, says, "She's such an inspiration for all players; it's amazing that at her age she just keeps going and playing despite any injuries. She is an incredible role model."

The mother of five and grandmother and great-grandmother to many more, Jean started playing tennis at 12-years-old when her family spent the summer in Prescott, Arizona, "We had a cabin there and the young people would put chalk marks on the ground and chicken wire fence on the ends of the court," Jean explains, "We would play tennis in the morning, go swimming in the afternoon and then ballroom dancing at night. We didn't have tennis lessons or anything, we would pick up the game as we had seen it or heard about it and just play."

Like many, Jean attributes her love for tennis to the interesting people that the sport draws, "During high school and junior college I would play around ten tournaments a year, so I met a lot of very nice and interesting people. I liked playing tennis in high school; my parents wanted me to take glee club rather than PE so it was nice to have tennis in my life."

After college Jean didn't start playing tournaments again until she was 60 and became one of the top ranked doubles players in Northern California, having won tournaments all around the world and on all surfaces. Her success includes having won 19 Gold Balls and 18 Silver. In 2002 along with doubles-partner Dodo Cheney, Jean won the 85 on all four surfaces – hard, clay, grass and indoors – a Gold Slam, for which they were honored at the US Open.

Dodo Cheney, who at age 20 was the first American to win the women's singles title at the Australian Championships, says of Jean, "She was my doubles partner in the 85's; we played well together and won a Gold Slam. She's a wonderful friend and partner, a pleasure to play with, and a real sweet, decent person with a wonderful character."

Jean is also the recipient of the 1979 Sportsmanship Award from the Northern California Tennis Association. In 2002 she received the Betty Gray Washington Sportsmanship Award from the National Senior Women's Tennis Association, which is based on a player's on-court conduct, friendliness and overall contribution to women's tennis. And she is also a certified umpire and has volunteered her services for over ten years.

Her daughter says, "Our mom has been a role model to everybody throughout her life, both on and off the courts. Our family is so very proud of her and we know that she is admired by the many people whom she has met all over the country throughout her life. She is truly amazing."

The things that Jean loved about tennis as a teenager is what keeps her going on the court today, "It's the people that you meet in the tennis facilities. It is a great sport, good exercise. Some of my best friends have been tennis players that I have met at the clubs where I've belonged over the years." Jean still plays socially at Carmel Valley Ranch and competes in the USTA Nationals, 90s. A true inspiration!