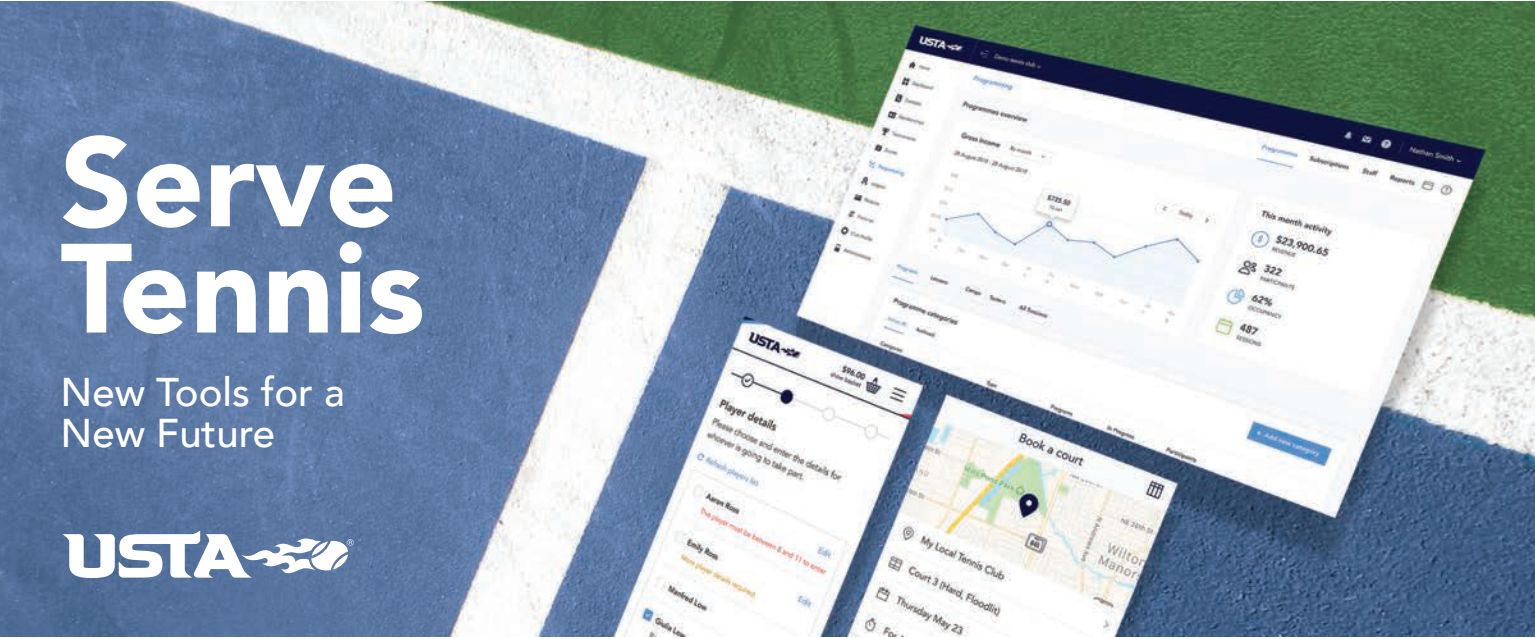


2021

EASTERN TENNIS CONFERENCE



Schedule of Events & Commemorative Yearbook



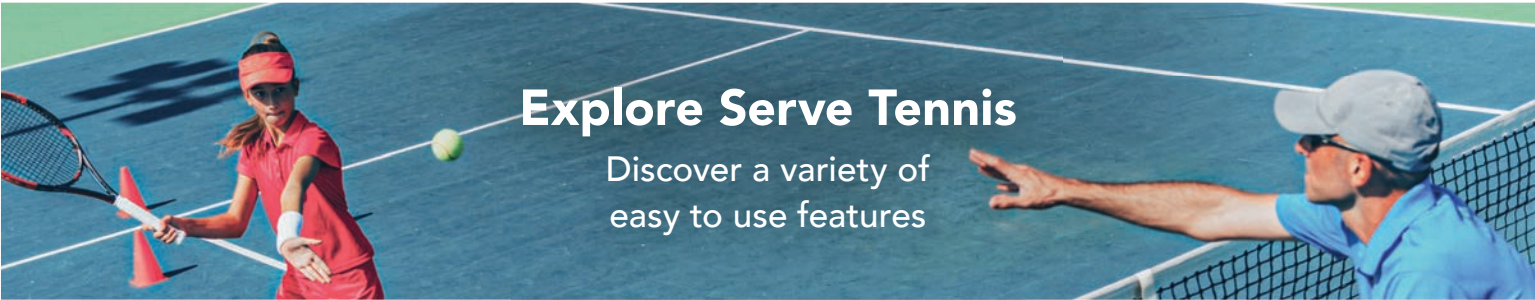
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EASTERN

To our tennis family:

When the USTA Eastern tennis community came together last winter for its annual professional development gathering, nobody could have foreseen how the world would change so drastically just one month later. We boldly discussed big ideas and strategies for bringing even more people into our tennis family; our conference goal, after all, was to convey a “clear vision for a more inclusive future.”

Of course, 2020 had alternative plans. The year presented immeasurable challenges and heartbreak. As an organization, we knew we’d need to take extraordinary steps to support our providers. We were fortunate to be able to extend \$382,124 to facilities throughout the section to help them reopen safely, and we stayed in constant communication with state and local officials as the pandemic unfolded to advocate on behalf of our tennis infrastructure. The road may still be rough in 2021, but we will continue to walk with you every step of the way.

Amid these struggles, however, we have witnessed no shortage of diligence, creativity and resilience as our community has banded together to uplift our great lifetime sport. We also witnessed packed courts over the summer and an increase in racquet sales in 2020 compared to the year prior. We can continue to build upon this.

While we cannot be together in person, our 2021 virtual conference will provide the same opportunities for collaboration and innovation, which are perhaps more urgent than ever before.

Former top doubles player and current USTA Director of Professional Tennis Operations and Player Relations Eric Butorac will kick off our event with an informative discussion about what it was like to be on the ground helping to organize the historic 2020 US Open. Former world No. 7 and 1985 Wimbledon semifinalist Kathy Rinaldi will speak about her current roles as Head of Women’s Tennis for USTA Player Development and Captain of the Billie Jean King Cup’s American team. Throughout the week, a wide variety of tennis pros, coaches, park officials, club owners, facility managers, NJTL directors and more will share the inventive ideas they successfully implemented as they faced unprecedented obstacles. We’ll talk to industry leaders and VIPs about the state of youth sports and what the future looks like. USTA representatives will review all the major (and exciting) competitive structure and technological changes in store for the year ahead. We will, for the first time, hold a special panel for USTA League players and captains, and we will host multiple on-court demonstrations you can enjoy from the safety of your living room—including one on the slice and one on the serve. We will honor some extraordinary individuals and organizations in an innovative virtual awards ceremony hosted by 1993 French Open Doubles Champion Luke Jensen. And, finally, we will discuss what support we as an organization can continue to offer. As always, our tennis community is at its strongest when we are able to work together.

We have plenty more surprises in store. We hope you’ll be able to join us for what is sure to be a fun, informative and interactive week.

Sincerely,



Amber Marino
President, USTA Eastern Board of Directors



Jenny Schnitzer
Executive Director & CEO, USTA Eastern

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Cover photo by Herb Glenn

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE & SESSIONS

MONDAY, JANUARY 25

The 2020 US Open: Lessons from a Historic Event with Eric Butorac (12:00 p.m.)

On Sunday, September 13, as a ball from his opponent sailed wide, Dominic Thiem collapsed to the ground to celebrate capturing his first-ever Grand Slam singles title in four attempts. Behind the scenes, US Open organizers also celebrated. After months of fastidious planning and coordination, they had successfully held the 2020 US Open without any major disruptions. The tournament seemed like an impossible dream in June. How did the USTA make it a reality by September? In our opening session, former pro and current USTA Director of Pro Tennis Operations and Player Relations Eric Butorac shares his own key takeaways from the planning and staging of those two weeks and recalls the adjustments team members had to make on the fly as the tournament unfolded. The lessons he learned can be applied to events of all levels.

Featured Speaker:

Eric Butorac, USTA Director of Professional Tennis Operations and Player Relations and former ATP world No. 17 in doubles

Junior Tennis Foundation Board Meeting (5:00 p.m.)

Closed Meeting

Officials Training (6:15 p.m.)

Closed Meeting

Everything You Wanted to Know About USTA Leagues (And Weren't Afraid to Ask) (7:30 p.m.)

A series of panelists will answer questions for current and prospective USTA League players. Dr. Alexis Colvin, Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery at Mount Sinai, will review the latest information on player safety and COVID-19. An official will also be on hand to answer questions about various on-court scenarios during League play, and we will recognize our League captains for their extraordinary efforts in helping to grow the program and bring more players into the sport.

Featured Speakers:

Dr. Alexis Chiang Colvin, Mount Sinai Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery and Associate Dean for Alumni Affairs and US Open Chief Medical Officer • **Dave Hanzes**, USTA Eastern Chair of Officials

TUESDAY, JANUARY 26

Adaptive & Wheelchair Tennis: Meeting the Demand and Facing Today's Challenges with Excellence (9:00 a.m.)

Panelists from USPTA, PTR, and USTA Eastern's partnering organizations and CTAs will discuss how they are responding to the increased demand for adaptive and wheelchair tennis and share on-court best practices for these programs during the COVID-19 era. Players from these organizations will also reveal their own personal stories and pay tribute to the coaches and rehabilitators who are helping them on their journey.

Featured Speakers:

Faiz Ali, Ali Adaptive Sports & Fitness Founder • **Julie Jilly**, PTR Vice President of Marketing and Special Events • **Harlon Matthews**, Henry County Parks and Recreation Therapeutic Recreation Specialist • **Mark McIntyre**, Junior Tennis Foundation Executive Director • **Lisa Pugliese-LaCroix**, USPTA and PTR Elite Certified Tennis Professional and a speech-language pathologist in the field of autism • **Karla Ruaya**, Push to Walk Neuro Exercise Trainer • **Jason Speirs**, Empire Tennis Academy Owner & Director of Tennis and Founder of Tennis Saves

2021 Tournament Pathway and New Regulations (12:00 p.m.)

This two-part session will be led by USTA Eastern staff members. In Part A, attendees will learn more about all the 2021 changes for Net Generation PlayTracker (10U), Junior Team Tennis and 12-18 Junior Competition and the ITF World Tennis Number (WTN). In Part B, USTA Eastern's officials committee will host a round of virtual trivia to help participants better understand frequently-used rules and regulations.

Featured Speaker:

Dave Hanzes, USTA Eastern Chair of Officials

Making Tennis a Walk in the Park (5:00 p.m.)

In this session, USTA Eastern staff will share information about support available to Park and Recreation Departments and other providers including marketing materials, safety guidelines, grants, equipment, training and more. We will highlight several section Park and Recreation providers and their exceptional parks programs, and we will also discuss USTA Eastern's partnership with New York State Recreation and Park Society (NYSRPS). Tennis is a fun, safe sport that can be played and enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities, and we will explain how an organization can take advantage of USTA Eastern support to deliver a program that benefits the entire community.

Featured Speakers:

Kelly Bartell, Town of Ogden Parks and Recreation Department Supervisor • **Hasan Dajani**, Ossining Community Tennis Association (OCTA) President • **Michelle Skelley**, Town of Hamburg Recreation Department Tennis Program Director • **Tom Venniro**, Town of Parma Parks and Recreation Director

PTR Meeting (6:15 p.m.)

Closed Meeting

Slice Up Your Lessons (7:30 p.m.)

In this on-court session, USPTA's John Yandell will review how you can teach the slice spin. Is Roger Federer's slice the fastest spinning shot in pro tennis? What are the classic slice spin characteristics and why has it gradually disappeared? We will explore the history of the slice in the game and talk about the transition to the modern slice in the 1990s. Why did that transition occur? What are the technical similarities and differences? These subjects have implications in teaching the shot at all levels.

Featured Speaker:

John Yandell, USPTA and Tennisplayer.net Creator and Publisher

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27

Serving a Purpose and Giving Back (9:00 a.m.)

How can the tennis community give back? This session showcases three innovative projects that integrated the

sport into efforts to support charitable causes. Guests from the American Cancer Society, Junior Tennis Foundation and CityParks Foundation will discuss the many benefits of hosting a fundraiser tournament, share details on how players, providers and organizations can get events started in their own communities and offer tips on how to organize a successful fundraiser.

Featured Speakers:

Jonathan Gamberg, CityParks Foundation Associate Director of Sports • **Mark McIntyre**, Junior Tennis Foundation Executive Director • **Marnie Perez Ochoa**, USTA Eastern Serves in Support Tournament Organizer • **Megan Stewart**, American Cancer Society Senior Community Development Manager

Games and Activities that Build Strong Technique – Powered by the PTR (12:00 p.m.)

It's never a bad time to focus on the basics. In this session we will demonstrate a variety of fun games, exercises and activities that will help your players develop strong, solid technique.

Featured Speaker:

Tito Perez, PTR and Long Island Health & Racquet Director of Tennis & Sports

Advantage Schools: How the USTA's Tennis in Schools Program Can Transform Your P.E. Class (5:00 p.m.)

Teaching tennis can be easy...and free! This session, led by P.E. teachers and school partners and for P.E. teachers and school partners, will review the benefits that USTA Eastern can offer you to teach the sport in your P.E. class or as part of an after-school program.

Featured Speakers:

Lynn Halliwell, P.E. Teacher at Fairley Elementary School in the Hannibal Central School District and 2015 Central North Zone AHPERD Elementary P.E. Teacher of Year • **Kerri Jannotte-Hinkley**, Roslyn High School Boys Varsity Tennis Coach (on Long Island) and USTA Coach of the Year recipient • **Domingo Montes**, 15-LOVE Program Director • **Jason Wass**, Lutheran Middle and High School Director of Summer Programs (on Long Island)

USPTA General Membership Open Session (6:15 p.m.)

Get in the Game with Serve Tennis (7:30 p.m.)

Step forward into the future. Serve Tennis is a flexible digital tool designed specifically for tennis that will help you manage your organization. With Serve Tennis, you can manage registration and financial transactions, oversee court bookings, promote your business with email marketing and connect with customers in one place. In this session, Matt Barnhart, USTA Senior Manager of Team Competition, will give an overview of all Serve Tennis can do for your business as well as provide a preview of what new features are coming soon to the product. We'll also hear from several providers who have begun using Serve Tennis to conduct their operations.

Featured Speakers:

Matt Barnhart, USTA Senior Manager of Team Competition • **Larry Dillon**, Sports, For Life! President and Founder • **Gordon Panek**, Summer Classic Events Founder • **Kelly Rasero**, USTA Middle States Tennis Service Representative

THURSDAY, JANUARY 28

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Presentation (9:00 a.m.)

Featured Speakers: TBD

Solving the Five Critical Serve Mistakes Players Make – Powered by the USPTA (12:00 p.m.)

In this on-court session, Jeff Salzenstein of the USPTA will provide an in-depth breakdown of the five critical mistakes players make on their serves. Some of these mistakes are not very obvious, but when you understand what these five mistakes are and how to solve them, you can help your players transform their serves. This presentation will give you tangible tools to feel confident that you can help players get their serves to the next level.

Featured Speaker:

Jeff Salzenstein, USPTA as well as JRS Sports, LLC President and Founder and Tennis Evolution Founder

The State of Youth Sports (5:00 p.m.)

Distinguished panelists from elite local sport organizations—the New York Road Runners, New York City FC and New York Rangers—will discuss the current state of affairs of youth sports in New York amid COVID-19. They will share their own experiences facing common challenges presented by the pandemic and reveal best practices for youth sports moving forward. They'll also discuss the role that community engagement, technological innovation and coach and parent education play in athletics.

Featured Speakers:

Jane Benson, New York Road Runners Vice President of Youth Programs and Marketing • **Rick Nadeu**, New York Rangers Vice President of Social Impact and Fan Engagement • **Brian Walsh**, New York City Football Club Director of Youth Programs

Coach Education and the Importance of Coach Certification – Powered by the PTR (6:15 p.m.)

Moving forward, the USTA and USTA Eastern will be prioritizing trainings and educational opportunities for coaches. In this session, speakers will share best practices for coach education during the pandemic and explain why coaching certification is such a necessity for any teaching career.

Featured Speakers:

Brian Parkkonen, PTR Chief Operating Officer • **Dan Santorum**, PTR Chief Executive Officer • **Milena Stephens**, PTR Director of Development and Diversity

Going Beyond Tennis: An NJTL Panel Discussion (7:30 p.m.)

The National Junior Tennis and Learning (NJTL) network features more than 250 nonprofit youth development organizations that offer free or low-cost tennis and educational programming to over 160,000 under-resourced youth each year across the country. USTA Eastern is proud to support the efforts of chapters in our section. In this session, we will discuss the positive impact Eastern NJTLs are making in their communities despite the pandemic, and how these chapters provide opportunities for young people to grow and develop as both tennis players and productive citizens. We'll also talk about how you can get involved by starting an NJTL yourself or partnering with an existing chapter.

Featured Speakers:

Theresa Bowick, Conkey Cruisers Founder • **Chuck Hazlett**, YMCA

of Greater Rochester Urban District Athletic Director and Love-15 Program Director • **Samuel Inalegwu**, Essex Grassroots Tennis & Education Founder and CEO • **Amber Marino**, USTA Eastern Board of Directors President and 15-LOVE Executive Director • **Mara Mazza**, Kings County Tennis League Communications Director • **Anjalee Modasra**, University at Albany freshman and 15-LOVE program participant • **Dave Webley**, Kings County Tennis League Executive Director

FRIDAY, JANUARY 29

How USTA Eastern Grants Can Work For You (9:00 a.m.)

This session will provide an overview of USTA Eastern grants and other resources that can help tennis providers grow the sport and sustain their business. We will speak with several providers from around the section who have used USTA Eastern grants to develop and/or grow successful tennis programming. We will also answer any questions you might have about the application process and review our grants toolkit.

Featured Speakers:

Dennis Maher, Newburgh Enlarged City School District English Teacher and Newburgh Junior Tennis and Learning Champions Founder • **Danielle Pulliam**, Pinkerton Foundation Program Officer and USTA Eastern Board Member • **Valerie Rifkin**, HRJ Environmental Consulting Services LLC Principal

Eye on the Ball: Nurturing a Tennis Community During COVID (12:00 p.m.)

Sarah Sharpe, General Manager of SPORTIME Schenectady, Khrystina Tryboi, Director of Marketing at MatchPoint NYC and Maureen Holtz, Head of Partnerships and Community Relations at Court 16, will discuss the tactics and tools they've used to promote and grow their businesses during such a challenging time. What innovative programming have they developed? What creative methods have they employed to engage their customers? How have they communicated safety measures? Panelists will also discuss how to leverage social media, print media and television to nurture your business's brand.

Featured Speakers:

Maureen Holtz, Court 16 Head of Community Relations and Partnerships • **Sarah Sharpe**, SPORTIME Schenectady General Manager • **Khrystina Tryboi**, MatchPoint Director of Marketing

USTA Eastern Board Meeting (4:30 p.m.)

Closed Meeting

Team USA: The Bright Future of American Tennis with Kathy Rinaldi (5:00 p.m.)

USTA Player Development Head of Women's Tennis (and former world No. 7) Kathy Rinaldi reflects on her own journey in the sport and how her experiences inform her current role. This session will also discuss why it is imperative that coaches help and encourage young athletes to develop exemplary off-court conduct and sportsmanship, what it means to be a part of Team USA and how working together is key to creating the next generation of world-class American players.

Featured Speaker:

Kathy Rinaldi, USTA Player Development Head of Women's Tennis, Team USA Billie Jean King Cup Captain, 1985 Wimbledon semifinalist and former WTA world No. 7 in singles

USTA Eastern Annual Awards Ceremony (6:15 p.m.)

Live on the USTA Eastern Facebook Page

SATURDAY, JANUARY 30

Region Breakout Meetings (9:00 a.m.)

Long Island

New Jersey

Western

Region Breakout Meetings (10:00 a.m.)

Metro

Northern

Southern

Annual Meeting (12:00 p.m.)

USTA Eastern Board Meeting (1:30 p.m.)

Closed Meeting

WOMAN OF THE YEAR

ADRIENNE ALTERI



Photo: Upon graduating from high school, Alteri took over the coaching duties of her former tennis team.

Clinician and current Western Region Council member Adrienne Alteri has been named USTA Eastern's Tennis Woman of the Year for her tireless efforts to grow the game in Watertown, N.Y.

Alteri discovered tennis as a junior in high school and credits her long-lasting

love of the game to the original coach who taught her how to play. "There's always that first person [who introduces you to the sport], and they either make it or break it," Alteri says. "She made it for me, you could say."

Since then, Alteri has made it her mission to be that first person for so many others—or at the least, provide the opportunities to keep players interested and loving the sport in an area that really only sees three to four months of warm weather a year.

"The options are boundless, because it's all new," Alteri says of the work she has done over the last ten years to build a tennis community. "Nobody here had ever branched out into trying to teach tennis for fun or bring kids into it and grow it. The only indoor facility around [that has since closed] was kind of old-school. Anybody who could afford their memberships could play and that was it, and unfortunately, I think that was part of their demise."

Much of her work to grow the game has been through the North Country Tennis Association (NCTA), an organization that Alteri and other local tennis enthusiasts formed after that aforementioned tennis club shut its doors in 2011. With the closest indoor courts now about an hour's drive away (and likely even longer in the frequently snowy conditions of western New York), the NCTA endeavored to create a new facility closer to home. In 2013, the organization ended up converting a space in an unoccupied welding building owned by a volunteer's family. The NCTA paid a dollar in rent for the location, and Alteri herself oversaw the process to ensure

players followed the rules. It was a hit, but it was never built to last; the entire building was leased out four years later, and the NCTA refocused its efforts on finding something a little more permanent.

To that end, the NCTA met with the local Watertown Family YMCA to see if they might be interested in installing courts within their facilities. The two organizations had previously discussed a potential partnership early on in the NCTA's existence, but YMCA leadership at the time didn't see tennis as a worthy investment. "The only indoor facility in the area had just shut down [when we first approached them]," Alteri explains. "And so they were asking: 'How are you going to make it work if they couldn't? There wasn't the proof of interest.'"

"It's a thinking game, and I love to teach that to players."

Of course, Alteri and the NCTA gathered plenty of proof in the intervening years. Alteri went to the YMCA meeting and spoke at length about the importance of having year-round options for tennis players. She presented "names and numbers and emails" she had collected over time to its newly-installed CEO and board. After this meeting, in September 2020, the Watertown Family YMCA publicly announced plans to expand and transform a downtown Watertown building into an aquatic and community center. This expansion, they said, would include two indoor tennis courts.

Importantly, many of the names and numbers and emails that ended up making the difference didn't just come from the NCTA's welding building operation. Alteri has additionally developed and hosted a wide range of programs in the area, and a robust tennis community has blossomed in Watertown as a result. During the warmer months, Alteri organizes adult

match play multiple days a week on the courts at Watertown High School. Show up to those courts at the designated day and time and she'll find you a match and a partner, free of charge. The first year she began offering this program, she estimates she attracted about eight players. But whenever she saw someone independently hitting on the Watertown courts, she'd encourage that person to join, collect his or her email address and politely follow up. Now, close to 90 people come out over the course of the summer. Alteri will regularly utilize up to seven courts each session. And currently, with the YMCA expansion not scheduled to be completed until 2022, Alteri is running an indoor POP tennis program on the YMCA basketball courts to keep up enthusiasm for the sport during the colder months. (POP tennis is a version of the game that is played on a smaller court and with modified racquets.) The initiative has become so incredibly popular that it expanded to two nights and now has a waiting list.



Photo: Alteri received her teaching certification from the USPTA in 2015.

Alteri has also dedicated much of her time to teaching juniors and introducing the sport to the 10-and-under set. She obtained her teaching professional certification with the United States Professional Tennis Association (USPTA) in 2015 and is part of the USTA Eastern clinician team. An avid supporter of the USTA's Net Generation program, she has been instrumental in creating after school programs in the area. She teaches her own youth classes at the YMCA's basketball courts.

Of all her many roles in the sport, teaching, for Alteri, is where she finds the most joy. She knows firsthand the impact a teacher can make and is intent on maximizing that potential; after all, she discovered her own love of the game through the efforts of one extraordinary instructor (and someone, by the way, with whom she still occasionally plays doubles).

"It's a thinking game, and I love to teach that to players," she says. "Most people pick up a racquet and they think, 'Oh, I just hit the ball over the net.' But there's strategy involved! Where are you hitting it? I love getting those players who really want to learn, and you see them apply it. I have a student right now and she smiles from the minute she gets on the court until the minute she leaves. And I'll say 'Good job' and she'll say 'It's all because of you.' That's the ultimate feeling right there—when someone else gets the bug."



Photo: Alteri leads POP Tennis at the Watertown Family YMCA twice a week. The program has a waitlist.

MAN OF THE YEAR

DANIEL BURGESS

Tennis instructor, loving husband and father Daniel "Danny" Burgess posthumously receives USTA Eastern's 2020 Leslie J. FitzGibbon Tennis Man of the Year designation. Right up until his passing on September 28, 2020, Burgess exhibited



remarkable leadership and was an integral member of the Long Island tennis community.

Burgess himself learned how to play at a young age, so he understood

firsthand the enrichment the sport could provide at such a formative time. For over 30 years, he taught juniors through his organization, the Daniel Burgess Tennis Academy, in his hometown of Freeport, N.Y. During his six-year tenure as USTA Eastern Long Island Region President, he made outreach to potential young players a primary focus of his overall mission.

"It wasn't about getting them to spend money to buy new racquets or take tennis lessons," says Michael Pavlides, a longtime friend who served as Long Island Region Vice President under Burgess. "It was about playing a sport and having some fun. He was always very interested in having the board sponsor or run activities introducing kids to tennis: Kids Days and Street Fairs. He also pushed people to pursue grants—which he many times helped write—[so they could receive] financial assistance in getting tennis equipment into the hands of kids."

Burgess himself hosted a summer camp for over 30 years, including in 2020. He often allowed kids to attend free of charge if their parents couldn't afford the cost.

"He felt strongly that it was his responsibility to get kids onto the tennis court," says Jacki Binder, a friend and board member of Burgess's non-profit, Learning Institute of Tennis, Life Skills and Sportsmanship (LITLSS). "When he would see kids hanging out in the park, he would invite them to come to the court and just try. He introduced a lot of kids to tennis that way."

With LITLSS, Burgess aimed to combine tennis with educational programming, such as after-school tutoring. The organization's goal was to help kids not only develop strong forehands and backhands, but also leadership skills and self-respect. "That was Danny's philosophy," Binder says. "Use tennis as a way to help improve opportunities for people."

In addition to his extensive efforts with children, Burgess worked tirelessly to foster a spirit of community among tennis enthusiasts across Long

Island. He organized countless free clinics and was instrumental in the development of courts in the Bishop O. White Park near his home in Freeport. He also expanded the region's tennis volunteer base.

"One of the things overlooked about Danny is that he was able to get others involved," Pavlides says. "He wanted to empower [people] when they had ideas. Because of him, there are a lot of volunteers involved in the tennis community who wouldn't be otherwise."

One such person is Binder, who Burgess brought into the USTA fold in a public relations capacity. Together they worked on the creation of one of Burgess's big goals for the region: A newsletter that would help improve communication among Long Island members and organizations and also, ultimately, celebrate the community's achievements.

"The first issue [of On The Ball: News From LI] was published in February 2012," Binder recalls. "It was three pages long and Danny couldn't have been any prouder of it had it been a novel or the Nobel Prize in Literature. It has grown since its early days, both in length and subscribers, and Danny continued to be proud and excited about his 'baby' every time a new issue was published."

Innovative concepts like the newsletter were a hallmark of Burgess's leadership. Pavlides recalls that Burgess empowered him to find a way to revive the Long Island Championships, a competition in which the winningest Nassau County high school tennis team took on the winningest Suffolk County high school tennis team. The event had gone dormant after high school coaches from both counties couldn't agree on rules.

"Danny provided the backing of the USTA LI to create the Executive Cup, an unofficial match between the two champions," Pavlides says. "Because this event created a dialogue between the two counties, and because the event was successful, the officially-sanctioned Long Island Championship resumed."

Even after his tenure as President, Burgess never stopped working to bring new, diverse groups into the sport; for his efforts he was awarded USTA Eastern's Fran Osei Community Service Award in 2018. He was instrumental in securing funding for the renovation of the tennis courts at the Northport VA Medical Center so veterans could have the chance to learn how to play. He ran tennis programming for the Freeport and Merrick Police Activity Leagues. And just last year, he brought accessible tennis lessons to several local senior centers. Many participants sat in chairs and use modified equipment while Burgess fed them low-compression balls.

"He was very excited [to tell me about it]," Binder recalls. "And the seniors loved their weekly lessons. Danny was always trying to introduce tennis to those who otherwise might not be exposed to it."

2020 USTA Eastern Award Recipients

Lifetime Achievement Award:
Ingrid Rehwinkel

Tennis Woman of the Year Award: Adrienne Alteri

Leslie J. FitzGibbon Tennis Man of the Year Award: Daniel Burgess

Tennis Family of the Year Award: The Perry Family

Member Organization of the Year Award: Empire Tennis Academy

Courage Award (Adult):
Mary-Margaret Sohns

Courage Award (Junior):
Gavin Vander Schaaf

George Seewagen Award: Debbie Miller

Louise Cilla Award: Joan Manfredi-Carter

Clinician of the Year Award: Laramie Gavin

Virginia and Chuck Landis High School Coach of the Year Award: Mike Mitchell

Diversity & Inclusion Leadership Award: Domingo Montes

Fran Osei Community Service Award:
Bob Bynum, Greater Newark Tennis & Education

Service to People with Disabilities Award: Tennis Serving Vets

Umpire Service Award: Tina Nabinger

Corporate Service Award:
Sportime Clubs LLC

Press Service Award:
Jeff Williams, Newsday

10 & Under Award:
East Brunswick Racquet Club

Junior Team Tennis Award:
Alexander Bessarabov

Collegiate Award: Ithaca College

USTA League Award:
Susan D'Alessandro and Allan Silverstein

Long Island Region Volunteer of the Year Award: Michelle Stoerback

Metro Region Volunteer of the Year Award: Sharon Simmonds

New Jersey Region Volunteer of the Year Award: Ashley Caldwell

Northern Region Volunteer of the Year Award: Dan Blanchfield

Southern Region Volunteer of the Year Award: Johnny Benoit

Western Region Volunteer of the Year Award: Lydia Varon

FAMILY OF THE YEAR

THE PERRY FAMILY

The Perry Family of Endwell, N.Y.—John and Lynn and their children, Michael and Christina—have been named USTA Eastern's Tennis Family of the Year for serving as exceptional ambassadors of the game in their community.



Photo: John and a young Christina hit the court.

It all started with a mixed doubles group. Neither John nor Lynn picked up a racquet with any regularity growing up—"I probably played tennis a grand total of ten times," John estimates. But the married couple began playing mixed doubles together socially and found a family in the sport. They've been hitting the court ever since, for over 30 years. ("And let me tell you, it's incredible how awful you can still be after playing that long, at least in my shoes," John says with a laugh.)

As a result of their parents' enthusiasm for the game, the Perry children were introduced to tennis at a young age. Their initiation was relatively informal: John and Lynn would bring Michael and Christina to the park, put racquets in their hands and toss them a ball for a little while. When they saw that the kids were enjoying the casual lessons, the elder Perrys decided to bring them to the Binghamton Tennis Center for more formalized 10-and-under instruction.

"I've always been a believer that if something's worth doing, it's worth doing to the best of your ability," John explains.

Both Michael and Christina would go on to maximize that ability. They excelled in local tournaments as preteens and stood out on their respective high school tennis teams. Michael played at a varsity level when he was just 13 years old and eventually made the high school state championships at the National Tennis Center three times—as a sophomore, junior and senior. After graduating, he played for Division I school Gardner-Webb (in Boiling Springs, N.C.) all four years of college. (Michael recently received his M.B.A. from Clemson University in Clemson, S.C.)

Christina also competed at a varsity level very early. Her team went undefeated for a couple years and won sectionals several times, and she too advanced to the state championships. Then, during her senior year, she tore her ACL in the middle of a match, and her high school tennis career abruptly ended.

"It was a huge growing experience for her," John recalls. "What it made her do is refocus. She decided, 'I'm going to pick a college solely based on academics.' And she ended up playing Division II tennis at Le Moyne College [in Syracuse, N.Y]."

Lynn underscores the impact of her daughter's senior-year experience, noting, "Christina recently graduated with a doctorate in physical therapy. So [taking that path] goes back to tearing the ACL and [her admiration for] who was taking care of her. It's full circle for her, really."

Michael and Christina still play to this day; Michael recently played on a 5.0 USTA Leagues team that advanced to nationals. Lynn, too, continues to be active in USTA Leagues. Her 3.5 teams have advanced to sectionals on multiple occasions.

"At first I thought, 'Oh this is way too competitive,'" Lynn says. "But after the kids went to college, I started playing at the tennis center once or twice a week, so I decided to join USTA Leagues. [Binghamton Tennis Center] runs really good programs, and it's just a fun thing to do."

It's just one of the many ways Lynn stays active in the tennis community. She still bakes cookies for the senior high school tennis team every season, even though her kids have been out of school for seven years. ("I still know [some of] the moms and the coach," she notes.) And she volunteers her time to school clinics and team fundraisers.



Photo: Lynn (second from right) with her USTA Leagues team.

"The game has really grown our family—and brought us closer together."

"We have gained so many friends [through tennis], like [Binghamton Tennis Center] owners Michael and Kris Starke as well as our kids' coach for 15 years, Collin Crawford and his wife, Courtney," she says. "The game has really grown our family—and brought us closer together."

For John, one of the greatest benefits of tennis is that it has ultimately added "dimension" to his family members and strengthened their character. "I think the best thing we've done [in the tennis community] is try to be good examples," he says. "My kids never threw or smashed their racquets. [As a family] we've tried to be people that other people see as decent sportsmen. We enjoy the game, and we enjoy the people we play with."

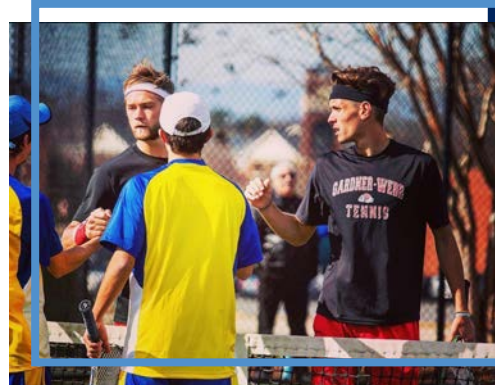


Photo: Michael (right) and a teammate from Gardner-Webb.

ORG OF THE YEAR

EMPIRE TENNIS ACADEMY



Photo: "We do take the time to make sure the kids recognize how far they've come," Speirs (with hat) says.

The Empire Tennis Academy, in Rochester N.Y., has been named USTA Eastern's 2020 Member Organization of the Year for its eclectic variety of programming and overall commitment to service within the Rochester community.

The organization—which consists of eight courts (three indoor, five outdoor) and is located on the campus of the Harley School in Rochester—has been owned and operated by Jason Speirs since 2016. It was a homecoming of sorts for Speirs. The Rochester native grew up playing tennis at the very same facility,

when it was known as the Dave Strebel Tennis Academy; then-owner Strebel became a great, lifelong mentor and was instrumental in helping Speirs gain admission to the private school that shared an address with his business. Speirs eventually left Rochester to attend Assumption University in Massachusetts, and then upon graduation moved down to New York City, where he found a job as a hitter at the Roosevelt Island Racquet Club. He spent 12 years moving up the ranks at Roosevelt, eventually ascending to its Director of Tennis. Then, just when he was starting to think about the future, he received an offer he ultimately couldn't refuse.

"I was looking at what I wanted to do next," Speirs says. "I was sort of in line to become the general manager at Roosevelt, and it was either that or go and become a club owner somewhere else in the country. I happened to be at Dave's daughter's wedding. And Dave came up and asked me if I would be interested in buying the business. I told him, 'Dave, I'm a tennis director at a New York City tennis club. I appreciate the offer, but no thanks!'"

Still, after turning Strebel down, Speirs started contemplating the possibility. If he did decide to leave Roosevelt to run a club, where else would

he better know the tennis landscape than his own hometown?

"So I came back and said, 'Dave, I think I'm in,'" he recalls.

The rest is history. Under the stewardship of Speirs, the Empire Tennis Academy and its USPTA-certified staff offer a full range of programming for players of all ages, including a competitive pathway for juniors and the 10-and-under set, as well as social events, classes, Cardio Tennis and USTA Leagues for adults. The organization places a special emphasis on attracting those who are just entering the sport or are at an intermediate level. This is partially due to its location in a school, partially due to the number of indoor courts and partially due to the incredibly quick speed of the court surfaces, which aren't ideal for elite competitors.

"One of our most popular programs is [the one for] 11 to 17-year-old entry-level kids," Speirs says. "We get a lot of teenagers who have tried the mainstream sports and it didn't work out for whatever reason, so now they're playing tennis. It's really about capturing their interest. Our competition is cell phones and iPads."

To that end, Speirs notes that the Empire curriculum particularly emphasizes fun.

"It's not the traditional six people waiting in one line to hit like two, three, four balls," he says. "We use a lot of the [USTA] Net Generation lesson plans, and we've had a high level of success. We're really trying to get a lot of kids playing tennis, and if they love it, great, here's the awe-

some competitive pathway we have. We're not trying to get the number one kid in Rochester. It's great that our advanced kids are making their presence felt in the competitive tournaments in the area, but that's not the essence of our program. We don't have that chip on our shoulder about having the best kids. We have the best kids for different reasons: Because of who they are."

Another unique aspect of Empire is its dedication to the community. Before he left New York City, Speirs had created a non-profit, Tennis Saves, to raise awareness for gastrointestinal esophageal cancer—an illness from which his father passed away in 2009. (The organization raised over \$36,000 for related charities.) When Speirs returned to Rochester, he learned that the Rochester Junior Grand Prix—a series of local junior summer tennis tournaments with very affordable registration fees—would not

be held for the first time since 1990. These tournaments were a tennis staple in Rochester, and their signature low cost was particularly significant for underserved, low-income families in the area.



Photo: Empire Tennis staff members routinely volunteer their time to events that introduce the sport to kids in the community.

Plus, "the top eight players are invited to a tournament at the end of the summer where there are four-foot trophies, and as a kid growing up you're like, 'This is the coolest thing!'" says Speirs, who, having played in the Grand Prix as a kid growing up, has firsthand knowledge of this feeling.

Speirs decided to focus Tennis Saves's philanthropic efforts toward reviving this affordable opportunity. As a result of his persistence, the new version debuted in 2017 with around 60 players, and that number has grown substantially every year. In 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, an astounding 200 kids participated in these events throughout the summer, and Speirs is now working on creating a winter counterpart. Empire staffers routinely donate time and resources to help make each tournament within the Grand Prix a great experience for all the kids involved.

"My staff actually all grew up playing in Grand Prix tournaments," he notes. "If you played even semi-competitively in Rochester, you knew about the Grand Prix. So it's personal to them as well."

But their willingness to volunteer is also just a testament to the tone Speirs sets at Empire. And that tone, no doubt, is also what has made the facility so successful.

"I'm very fortunate, and I've been given a lot of opportunities," Speirs says. "So I just want to make sure that everyone around me [also] gets good opportunities. I want my staff and the kids [we serve] to do well...and I'm interested in their personal growth. If they get complacent, I get complacent. The better they do, the better I do."

COURAGE AWARD

GAVIN VANDER SCHAAF

By Gavin Vander Schaaf



From the day I was born, I was different from other kids. I wanted to be carried at all times. For the first few years of my life, while my sisters and friends were running around, I “scooted” because my legs hurt too much to hold me. I always had very severe headaches, along with swallowing problems, double vision, dizziness, clumsiness, and pins and needles. The pain was excruciating. I always assumed that every other kid had the same pain, so I chose to push through.

When I was five years old, I was diagnosed with Chiari Malformation with basilar invagination, which meant that parts of my brain were extending into my spine. I was told that I’d need to have a brain surgery. This was when I realized that not everyone felt the way I felt, after all. I got taken out of P.E. and recess in school, which hurt almost more than the “Chiari Headaches.” (At that age, the only thing I wanted to do was play!) And so, at five years old, I got my first brain surgery.

Not long after, with Chiari Headaches still plaguing my life, and with obstructive sleep apnea joining forces with central sleep apnea, I needed another, more aggressive surgery. This time, there were complications that ended up making the Chiari Headaches worse and more frequent. They caused significant brainstem compression, multilevel disc desiccation, disc bulges, and cerebrospinal fluid leaks. Around this time, I was also diagnosed

with Celiac Disease and Lyme Disease, which caused my immune system to go to war with my own body. Because of this, I developed a severe vitamin deficiency, which caused nerve pain the doctors called peripheral neuropathy; it still lingers today. However, I never gave up, and I did everything in my power to allow for my body to heal properly.

Years later, in second grade, I woke up one morning and could not stand. Every morning for the next six months, I tried to stand, and my legs continued to betray me. I started to use a wheelchair during this time. Even years after, I would sometimes long for my wheelchair. Not because I couldn’t stand, but because my legs hurt almost too much to stand. But, I didn’t let myself use the wheelchair as a crutch; I pushed through the pain and stood. I always pushed through.

In seventh grade, I realized that I would be too old for little league baseball when the season started. I had actually been “playing” since Kindergarten, but when I went up to bat, I had a “runner,” or someone who would run the bases as me, because I couldn’t do it myself without the feeling of deep regret and excruciating pain the following morning. At that time, I didn’t think that I was ready to join the school baseball team, so I began to feel upset. But one day I came home with a flyer from the local tennis club about a tennis clinic for kids. My sister wanted me to try it because she had been working at that same club for about a year. She made a bet with me: If I tried tennis and didn’t like it, then she would play Pokémon with me. But if I liked it, I had to keep playing.

I did try. I got on the tennis court, and I never enjoyed anything more. I began playing frequently. After working hard for many months, in the spring of 2018, I made the middle school tennis team, playing 4th singles. Two years later, I made the varsity team at my school. Despite the pain that used to fill me almost every single day, which still threatens today, I persevered. Mastering the game vs managing my pain: Match score 6-0 6-0.

I always think of my relationship with tennis as a rally: My life experiences taught me to never take anything for granted, and because of this I always bring 100% of myself to the court. On the flipside, my experiences on court have taught me how to bring 100% of myself to tackle any problem and think critically in any situation. Unlike my wheelchair, I definitely use my tennis racquet as a crutch. A crutch to distract me from my pain, to take my mind off of the stressors of the day, and use my body in ways I never thought possible. Studies have actually shown that tennis generates new con-

nections in the nerves in the brain, which promotes development of the brain. Being able to move past mistakes, evaluate a situation, and problem-solve in the moment during a point translates into real-life situations I face.

One of my favorite quotes is, “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” I have really learned that wisdom through tennis. I go on court, not thinking about how much pain I’m in. Instead I feel the ball hit my strings as I drive my opponent cross-court, the pounding of my feet on the ground as I run for a drop shot, the feeling of triumph as I ace my opponent “down the T.” Underlying all of these thoughts, I am grateful. Grateful that my 100% is no longer just pushing through the pain to stand up in the morning, grateful that I can run without regret, grateful for Coach Tito Perez for allowing me to share my story, and grateful for tennis, for filling my mind with the



Photo: Vander Schaaf during one of his hospital visits.

serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

COURAGE AWARD

MARY-MARGARET SOHNS



Photo: Sohns received her heart transplant on March 3, 2019.

Mary-Margaret Sohns knew something was wrong. A marathoner accustomed to 20-mile runs at a stretch, the 38-year-old from Cooperstown, New York suddenly struggled to walk down the street without needing a break. She felt tired all the time; she sensed that her heart wasn’t beating properly, that her heart rate was too low. The first doctor she saw diagnosed her with an ear infection. As symptoms persisted, another doctor told her she might be depressed.

By the time she found a physician who actually heard her concerns and ordered an electrocardiogram (EKG) to test her heartbeat, she had taken to “praying in the middle of the night that I wouldn’t die,” she says now.

The EKG revealed that Sohns had been right and that she was in complete heart block, a condition in which the electrical signals that regulate a person’s heartbeat are obstructed and unable to do their job correctly. More tests determined that the heart block resulted from Lyme Carditis, a heart infection that occurs when bacteria from Lyme Disease—with which she was also concurrently diagnosed—enter the heart tissue. While Sohns was given antibiotics to alleviate some of her Lyme Disease-specific symptoms, the heart block turned out to be irreversible. She’d need a pacemaker to help her heart function normally—and fast. On Christmas Eve in 2013, she was rushed by ambulance from upstate New York to a clinic in Cleveland, Ohio to receive the lifesaving surgery.

The pacemaker presented its own issues, though. For one, the batteries constantly needed to be replaced because the device was working so hard to keep her heart beating. With her quality of life diminished, Sohns began seeing heart failure specialists to consider other treatments, and at one point she ended up wearing an external defibrillator for nine months. In late 2018, she suffered a particularly bad immune response from inflammation in her heart, and her health seriously declined to the point where she could barely walk. She was ultimately recommended for a heart transplant; a couple months later she got a call and received a new heart at 3 a.m. on March 3, 2019.

This, however, is only part of Sohns’ story over the last decade. Nobody would have begrudged Sohns for taking the time to focus solely on her health and family. But in the very same period, she also embarked on a new journey as a tireless tennis advocate. She has become an invaluable resource to the upstate tennis populace and has been instrumental in growing the game in three New York communities: Cooperstown, Oneonta and Utica.

As she struggled with her pacemaker, she assisted in the formation of the community tennis association (CTA) Cooperstown Tennis. Through that organization, she has conceived multiple

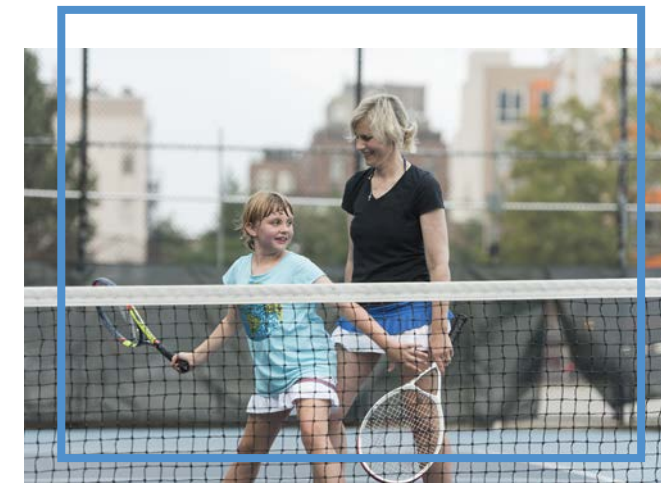


Photo: Sohns on-court with her daughter prior to her transplant.

adult recreation programs. (One of the initiatives she organized—a clinic for women—was creatively named “Wine on the Lines”. The male counterpart was called “Beer on the Bounce.”) She also helped plan a junior program that is still thriving today.

“I wanted to give back to children [in the area],” she explains. “We didn’t really have a tennis program that all kids could attend. So I did what I could to get that up and running and sustain that. It’s really been magical because you see

these little kids having fun and laughing and giggling and running around. One thing that kept me going was seeing their progress. You’re like ‘Wow, that’s amazing.’”

Later, lying in a hospital bed, she helped coordinate some of the logistics as her friend Phyllis Orlowski put together a summer tennis program for kids in Oneonta. (Despite COVID complications, Orlowski and Sohns were able to run the program again this past summer as well, providing local programming to over 100 kids and adults.)

And when her daughter began attending school about an hour away in Utica, Sohns decided to take on perhaps her biggest, most intensive endeavor. She recruited local volunteers and formed a CTA to boost the sport in that city. The CTA, called UticaWon, was founded mid-2019; the idea for it actually popped in Sohns’s head right after her transplant.

“I was writing down the types of programming that I wanted to try to do that I thought would be fun,” she says. “Obviously I was in a lot of pain, and that helped keep my mind off it.”

The CTA created a mini-boom of enthusiasm for the sport in Utica in 2019—and Sohns actually ran the first USTA-sanctioned junior tournament in the area in 25 years, just months after her surgery. This past summer, she’d go on to run some of the first post-shutdown junior tournaments in the entire section in Utica.

She’s also in the process of developing a junior program like the one she started in Cooperstown.

After everything she’s accomplished in such a short period of time—all while dealing with a massive health issue—there’s no doubt that the tennis communities in Cooperstown, Oneonta and Utica are forever

grateful for Sohns and her contributions to the game. But Sohns is equally grateful.

“[Volunteering] really gave me a distraction,” Sohns explains. “I’ve always been a fighter. That’s just my nature. But there wasn’t much I could do differently. The only thing I could try to do is mentally keep going. And so that’s what I did. I owe tennis a thank you for giving me an outlet for creativity [during this time]. And also for the opportunity to live through the activities of others when I couldn’t be active myself. That’s priceless.”

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

INGRID REHWINKEL



Ingrid was practicing against a wall at the Brookdale Community College when a woman named Trudie approached her and asked if she would consider giving lessons.

"I said, 'I'll give it a try,'" Ingrid recalls. "You tell me if you like it and I'll tell you if I like it!"

Quickly they realized they both liked it—and a life-long teaching career was born. "Trudie did so well that she beat her friends, and they asked, 'How are you beating me now?'" Ingrid remembers with a laugh. "And Trudie said, 'I'm taking lessons with Ingrid!' So she brought me many more pupils."

Using the money from these lessons, Ingrid attended acclaimed tennis instructor Dennis Van der Meer's equally-acclaimed tennis university. She impressed Van der Meer so much that he recommended Ingrid for her first formal job as a pro at New Jersey's newly-opened six-court Princeton Racquet Club. "I learned from the bottom up there, so that was really wonderful," she says. "Of course, the club was an hour-and-a-half away from me, and I had my two young kids. I'll never forget one time I came home at almost one o'clock in the morning. On the stairs was a glass of water and three cookies and a note from my son that said 'I hope you had a good day.'"

As a teaching pro, Ingrid never stopped honing and fine-tuning her craft. She trained with famed Australian Davis Cup Captain and coach Hary

Ingrid Rehwinkel, of Red Bank, N.J., receives USTA Eastern's 2020 Lifetime Achievement Award for over 50 years of steadfast dedication to the game as an instructor, coach and player.

Ingrid and her husband Siegfried began playing tennis together after the birth of their daughter in 1966, and the young couple was immediately hooked. One day,

Hopman at weeklong sessions for many years in Florida. "Mr. Hop was an incredible coach, but one always wished not to be put on his court because he constantly fed you lobs and drop-shots," Ingrid says. "You were scrambling, out of breath, and he'd say, 'If Margaret Court can fall down and still run down the ball, you have to [do] more!'"

In addition to Hopman, Ingrid also learned from a wealth of other tennis masters over her career, including Nick Bollettieri, Peter Burwash, Rick Macci and Bill Tym. One of her most "cherished" experiences, she says, was attending a three-day coaching seminar led by Arthur Ashe in Minneapolis.

Ingrid eventually went on to work at a variety of clubs in New Jersey, including the Little Silver Tennis Club, the Beacon Hill Country Club and the Seabright Lawn and Cricket Club. She even coached the Rumson-Fair Haven High School boys varsity tennis team for one season, leading them to a conference championship title in 1981. But perhaps Ingrid's most

lasting contribution to the tennis ecosystem in the state is the junior program at the New Shrewsbury Racquet Club, a program she developed about a year after the adults-only facility opened. A parent from Beacon Hill (where Ingrid taught outdoors during warm months) asked George Gil, the then-manager of

New Shrewsbury, if Ingrid could please use the indoor facilities to teach kids during the winter season. A trial period was granted.

"So I had 21 kids tip-toeing in and they all had to behave," Ingrid says. "Otherwise it was the end of the junior program!"

Luckily, the students exhibited exemplary behavior. Not only does the program still exist to this day, it is much expanded and sustains the club. Ingrid, too, has never left.

"The [first] juniors were all fantastic, and we made the program," she says. "And it's thriving today. So that's very good."

Ingrid estimates that between New Shrewsbury and the other clubs in New Jersey, she has taught thousands of children the sport over the course of her career. Her most successful charge is undoubtedly Nicole Arendt, the former WTA world No. 3 in women's doubles and 1997 Wimbledon women's doubles finalist (with Manon Bollegraf). Arendt herself

now coaches juniors for Tennis Australia; in a 2018 interview with a local Australian newspaper, she specifically credited Ingrid (and Ingrid's enthusiasm) for instilling her with a love of the sport.



Photo: Ingrid (center) recently reunited with two of her former juniors.

"I taught Nicole with three eight-year-old boys, and she was only five," Ingrid says. "She would always say to the boys who were much bigger than she was, 'Hit the ball over the net!' I will never forget this little girl saying that, because she would never miss. She didn't understand that people could hit the ball into the net. She is very special."

Ingrid, too, has proven to be quite gifted as a player on the court. In addition to her teaching career, she has competed in tournaments all over the world—everywhere from Antalya, Turkey to Poertschach, Austria to Christchurch, New Zealand. In 2019 she achieved the No. 8 singles ranking and No. 10 doubles ranking in the country for 80 & Over Women. Just this past February—before the COVID-19 pandemic put a hold on competition—she won doubles tournaments in Charlotte, S.C. and Havana, Cuba. (The sport, it turns out, is a family affair: Both Rehwinkel children played No. 1 singles for their high school teams and then went on to receive tennis scholarships to Purdue and Santa Clara, while Ingrid's grandson currently competes at Swarthmore College.)

Now 83, Ingrid is training hard every day in hopes of increasing her ranking when she ages into the 85 & Over tournaments. And she has no plans to retire from teaching tennis any time soon.

"It's a part of me," she reflects. "When I'm on court with the kids, I'm just joy-filled. I want [my students] to love it for a lifetime. Because tennis is a joy and an enrichment. It connects you with people, and it's something you share together."



THE YEAR

We take a look back at the creativity, perseverance, bravery and passion that our tennis community displayed in 2020.

20

20

THAT WAS



2020 Eastern Tennis Conference

See photos from last year's in-person event

By Scott Sode

In January 2020, months before the phrase “social distance” entered the popular lexicon, the USTA Eastern community came together at the Renaissance Westchester Hotel in White Plains, N.Y. for the Eastern Tennis Conference. Over two days, tennis leaders and professionals from all across the section convened at the annual professional development gathering to learn more about the state of competitive and community tennis, discuss new trends, network and collaborate. Heather Hawkes, USTA Senior Manager of Digital Services for Community Tennis, and Leah Friedman, USTA National Manager of Net Generation, led classroom sessions, while 14-time Grand Slam champion Arantxa Sánchez-Vicario and five-time Grand Slam champion Emilio Sánchez, as well as Midtown Athletic Club National Tennis Director Butch Staples, were on hand to run several on-court demonstrations.

We dubbed this ETC a forum to discuss “our clear vision for a more inclusive future” and began the conference with a panel discussion about all the innovative ways to open up the sport to more diverse audiences in 2020. Of course, our vision wasn’t so clear that we were able to see just how the rest of 2020 would play out. But our mission today is still the same as it was over the course of this weekend, with one slight modification: To grow the game and ensure it is a sport that everyone can enjoy...safely. Global events may delay us, but they won’t stop us. #EasternStrong

Photos by Christine Ashburn



PANELIST JEAN TELFORT, AN ARMY VETERAN AND FOUNDER OF THE TENNIS FAMILY GROUP, LAUGHS DURING THE ETC OPENING SESSION ON DIVERSITY.



ETC ATTENDEES ENJOY AN ON-COURT SESSION

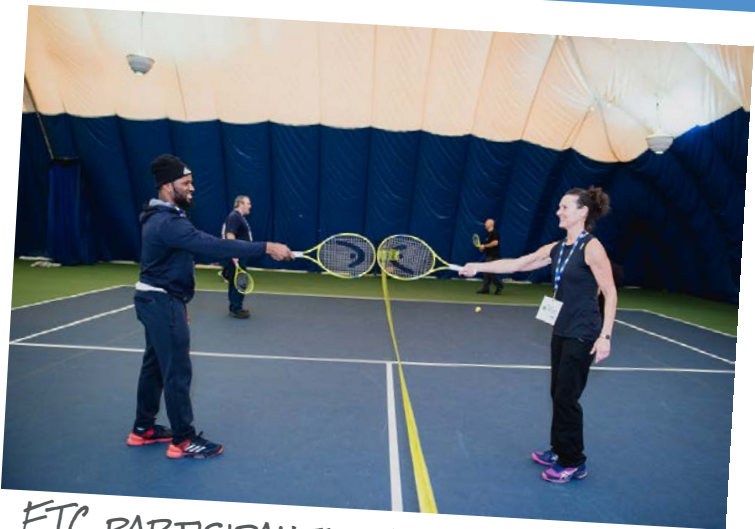


CATCH! USTA DIRECTOR OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT ELLIOTT PETTIT (RIGHT) LEADS AN ON-COURT SESSION ON FUN TENNIS ACTIVITIES FOR TEAMS.



USTA EASTERN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CEO JENNY SCHNITZER, FORMER USTA CHAIRMAN AND PRESIDENT KATZINA ADAMS AND USTA EASTERN BOARD MEMBER TITO PEREZ SMILE DURING EASTERN'S ANNUAL MEETING

JANUARY



ETC PARTICIPANTS STAND SIX FEET APART BEFORE IT WAS THE NORM



A FAMILY AFFAIR: SIBLINGS ARANTXA SÁNCHEZ-VICARIO & EMILIO SÁNCHEZ DEMONSTRATE A TENNIS DRILL FOR ETC ATTENDEES.



HEATHER HAWKES, USTA SENIOR MANAGER OF DIGITAL SERVICES FOR COMMUNITY TENNIS, UPDATES ATTENDEES ON NEW DIGITAL ADVANCES IN TENNIS



ATTENDEES CELEBRATE THE END OF ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL CONFERENCE.



Photo: Rochester students attend the 2020 New York Open.

Arthur Ashe Legacy Lives Day

Through the Conkey Cruisers NJTL, Theresa Bowick introduced the sport to 2,000 kids in just one day.

By Scott Sode

Theresa Bowick founded Conkey Cruisers—a Rochester N.Y.-based bicycling program named after the neighborhood street Conkey Avenue—to encourage more exercise in her community. The registered nurse came up with the idea for the organization while jogging around the block one morning. First, a young boy stopped her to ask if she was on parole and running from the police. Taken aback, she explained that she was just trying to stay healthy and then continued on her path; minutes later, another neighbor—an older man—accused her of being the police because “nobody exercises” here.

“In my neighborhood, we can have a jaded view of what exercise looks like,” Bowick says.

Over the years, Bowick has worked diligently to change that lens. With Conkey Cruisers, her vision was to “show something different” by organizing regular group bicycling expeditions around the area. As a result, she’s seen the community’s interest in wellness climb high. Conkey Cruisers has become so popular locally that it has now organized an amount of bike rides that collectively span more than one million miles; the group recently brought the largest-ever Black and Latino contingent to participate in Rochester’s Tour de Cure biking fundraiser for diabetes.

But Conkey Cruisers is no longer solely about bicycling. Bowick was encouraged to grow her community movement—and bring kids into the fold—by expanding her operation to other sports. Today the organization has become a full-fledged National Junior Tennis and Learning (NJTL) chapter. The reason she chose to pursue tennis? Simple: Years ago, she won free tennis lessons in a contest on the radio.

“I was really horrible at it,” she says now with a laugh. “But I had fun.”

To get started, Bowick called different local tennis providers in search of support. She also set up a meeting with USTA Eastern Tennis Service Representative Joe Steger. During their chat, Steger mentioned Arthur Ashe Kids’ Day at the US Open. Despite the fact that the Kids’ Day was just weeks away, Bowick immediately set about trying to get her burgeoning tennis group to attend. Ron Dyson—the owner of the Dyson Tennis Academy in Rochester—promised to pay for tickets if she could find a way to provide transportation for the kids. Sure enough, Bowick was able to procure grant money for trip costs and then leaned on a friend who owned a medical transport company to loan them a van for the six-hour journey to the tournament in Flushing Meadows. “Ron was actually on his way down there himself when I called him and said, ‘Remember that promise you made me?’” she says with a laugh. “He was like, ‘There’s no way you got enough money to take the kids [in that amount of time]!’ I was like, ‘Yeah, I did!’”

The last-minute outing—and all that went into making it a reality—proved to be well worth it, and confirmed Bowick’s decision to branch Conkey Cruisers into tennis.

“I was just floored,” Bowick says. “I was just looking at the children. Here they are at the US Open, learning about something that they’ve only watched on TV.”

Bowick wanted to bottle some of the joy the kids felt in Queens and bring it back to Rochester. She decided Conkey Cruisers would hold the first-ever Conkey Open. After obtaining a permit, the organization transformed Conkey Avenue into a series of tennis courts. The city planning department even stepped up to assist and filled some of the potholes in the street. The event made the local news.

“To see this street filled with people learning how to play tennis, kids having fun playing tennis—it was simply amazing.”

“So many people look at this neighborhood and think negativity,” Bowick says. “We do have issues. But there’s a lot of fertile ground to make things better. That day I looked down that street at all those tennis courts. And then the kids and their families came. To see this street filled with people learning how to play tennis, kids having fun playing tennis—it was simply amazing.”

Bowick and Conkey Cruisers have no intentions of coasting any time soon. Their most recent tennis initiative is also easily their most sweeping: the implementation of tennis in P.E. classes across the entire Rochester City School District. The massive project began after Bowick attended a professional development conference in North Carolina in November 2019. During a workshop, a USTA representative mentioned research that most kids will only touch a tennis racquet six times between kindergarten and high school graduation.

“I could not shake that thought,” Bowick says. “If it’s true that they only touch a tennis racquet six times, that means kids are missing so many opportunities. That means kids aren’t learning about potential scholarships—that’s a huge loss. So I left North Carolina with an assignment for myself: I was going to change that.”

FEBRUARY

That December, Bowick, along with Steger, Dyson and Jason Speirs, director of the Rochester-based Empire Tennis Academy, met with the district’s athletic director, Carlos Cotto Jr. They explained the benefits of the USTA’s Tennis in Schools program, which provides free resources to P.E. teachers who want to teach the sport. For a district dealing with a budget deficit, the no-cost program was “a pretty easy pitch,” according to Bowick. The timeline proved to be the bigger challenge; Bowick wanted to launch by the first week of February to honor tennis legend Arthur Ashe on the anniversary of his death. The team rolled up their sleeves and got straight to work, hosting trainings for district P.E. teachers and ensuring they were registered on the Net Generation website so they could gain access to the free resources.

Sure enough, on February 6, the district celebrated the addition of tennis to their P.E. curriculum with Arthur Ashe Legacy Lives Day. They hosted an opening ceremony celebrating the global impact of Arthur Ashe at one of the schools. (Bowick and the principal of this particular school had a close relationship after singing in church choir together, so “again, it was an easy sell,” Bowick says.) Monroe County Executive Adam Bello and Rochester Mayor Lovely Warren attended the event and proclaimed February 6 Arthur Ashe Day in the county and the city. Tennis pros then headed to other schools in the district to host tennis

“This [project] was all about community”

To add an educational component to the festivities, Bowick also hosted a rap contest in which students were encouraged to write a rap about the life and legacy of Arthur Ashe. The winners received tickets to the New York Open in Hempstead, N.Y. on Long Island. Since students formed groups to compete—and some parents traveled as well—a delegation of 23 people from Rochester ended up heading down to the tournament this past February. Bowick again coordinated the transportation. “I’m thinking, ‘Okay, I have enough money in the budget to get them to New York City,’” she says with a laugh. “I had no idea it’s not so easy to get from New York City to Long Island!” The trip proved to be just as formative and life-changing as the US Open adventure a year earlier. In addition to seeing Times Square and the black courts at Nassau Coliseum, the kids received a half-hour lesson from tennis coaching legend Nick Bollettieri.

“He really dedicated a training session to them,” Bowick says. “These kids didn’t

know all the players he had coached. But he was just so genuine and kind in teaching drills. It was so much fun, and it was so much fun to watch them see New York. Every one of those kids came back with the desire to play tennis. And they had never played tennis before February 6.”

“You see kids walk a little taller when you bring new experiences into their lives,”

Ultimately, that’s why Bowick is so passionate and works as hard as she does to grow the sport in her community.

“You see kids walk a little taller when you bring new experiences into their lives,” she says. “That’s my motivation, my compensation, my inspiration. Conkey Cruisers is a volunteer opportunity to change somebody’s life. Who wouldn’t want to do that?”

Photos courtesy Theresa Bowick and Conkey Cruisers



Photo: Bowick, a registered nurse, founded Conkey Cruisers in 2012.

clinics. Over the course of one day, 2,000 students picked up a tennis racquet. USTA Eastern provided T-shirts and trophies for all the participants.

“This [project] was all about community,” Bowick says. “Not one person could do what we were all able to pull off on February 6. It was like a Navy SEAL operation—it went so smoothly.”

USTA Eastern’s New York Open Wild Card Invitational



Photo: Shi (left) poses with New York Open Tournament Director Peter Lebedevs after claiming the Invitational.

Peak crimson. Harvard teammates Brian Shi and Ronan Jachuck blasted their way through the draw of USTA Eastern’s New York Open College Wild Card Invitational to face each other in the final, with Shi ultimately prevailing in two tight sets, 7-6, 7-6. As a result, Shi received a wild card into the New York Open, an ATP tournament held at NYCB Live, home of the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Hempstead, New York on Long Island.

Shi would end up falling in the first round of that event to world No. 59 Cameron Norrie. But before he stepped on court, he knew win or lose he’d walk away with an invaluable experience. “I’m very excited,” the Long Island native and former USTA Eastern junior said prior to his first-ever tour-level match. “Every tennis player who grinds from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. for years always dreams of being able to play on a stage this big. To know that I’ll be making my professional debut at home, it’s indescribable. It feels amazing.”

This was USTA Eastern’s second time partnering with the New York Open to provide a wild card to a college player. 21 athletes from 10 colleges—including Brown, Columbia, Cornell, North Carolina and Yale—competed in this year’s Invitational, which was held January 9-11 at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center.

“These are the types of wild card linkages that make our professional pathway stronger,” said Martin Blackman, General Manager of USTA Player Development. “[The Invitational] was a great opportunity for the best collegiate players in the Northeast to compete against each other and get better.”

Youth Progression...at Home!

After local officials announced social distancing and quarantining safety measures, USTA Eastern created the Youth Progression at Home series as a way to help 10 and Under players stay active.

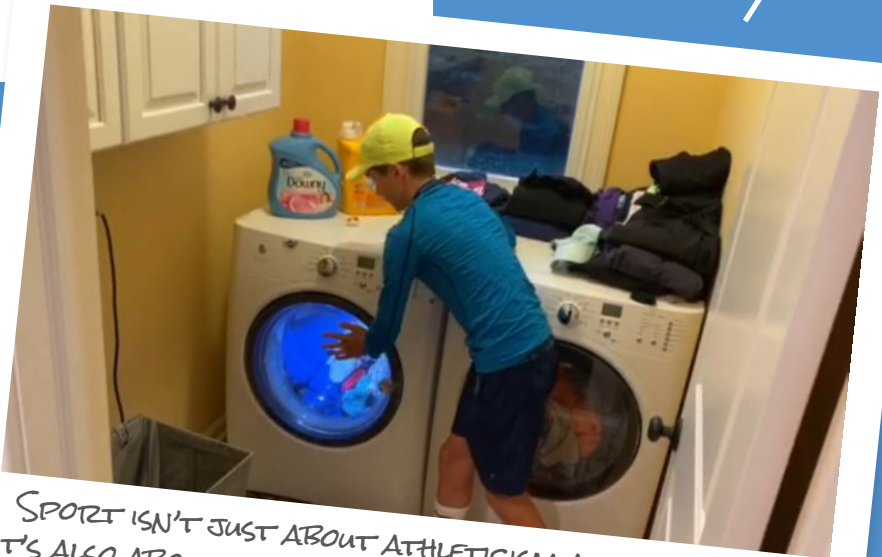
In March, USTA Eastern swiftly suspended all tournaments as local government officials implemented social distancing and quarantining measures across Connecticut, New York and New Jersey in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic. When it became clear that the suspension could last longer than a couple weeks, the organization moved quickly to create a program to help 10U players stay active from the comfort (and safety) of their own homes.

The Youth Progression at Home initiative challenged players to practice and strengthen their skill sets without going any farther than their front yards. Participants sent in a slew of videos demonstrating all the creative ways in which they were working on their athleticism, their tennis, and just as importantly, their character. One created a net out of bicycles. Another practiced his swings with balloons. Others showed how they helped their parents cook and clean.

The section also held two Youth Progression at Home webinars to keep players engaged in the sport as the suspension stretched to summer. The first webinar featured a wide-ranging (remote) Q&A roundtable with former Eastern junior and current WTA player Christina McHale, former Eastern junior and current Harvard player Brian Shi and current Eastern junior and junior Orange Bowl champion Stephanie Yakoff. The second featured WTA professional and former NCAA champion Jamie Loeb and #1 nationally-ranked 14U player Cooper Williams and peeled back the curtain on how the two athletes integrated different drills into their practices. "The Eastern section is always really tough," McHale told viewers during the first webinar. "You guys are all really lucky that you can play [there] and get really good competition."



A PARTICIPANT HITS A TENNIS BALL AGAINST A WALL.



SPORT ISN'T JUST ABOUT ATHLETICISM AND TECHNIQUE—IT'S ALSO ABOUT CHARACTER. ONE PLAYER DEMONSTRATES HOW HE HELPS HIS FAMILY WITH CHORES AROUND THE HOUSE.

MARCH



FORMER EASTERN JUNIOR MCHALE TALKS ABOUT HER EXPERIENCES PLAYING JUNIOR TENNIS DURING THE FIRST YOUTH PROGRESSION AT HOME WEBINAR.



CHECK OUT THESE WHEELS: PLAYERS BUILD A NET OUT OF BICYCLES.



FORMER EASTERN JUNIOR LOEB LET VIEWERS OF THE SECOND YOUTH PROGRESSION AT HOME WEBINAR GET AN INSIDE LOOK AT ONE OF HER PRACTICES.



Kings County Tennis League

During the COVID-19 shutdown, the Kings County Tennis League served up online tennis programming for their students.

By Scott Sode

The Kings County Tennis League (KCTL), an organization whose mission is to bring tennis to kids living in and around Brooklyn public housing, was preparing for the final two classes of its winter program when the COVID-19 virus swiftly seized the city. One by one, indoor facilities KCTL utilized to teach during the colder months shut their doors. Then the mayor ordered all students in New York City Public Schools to stay home. In the ensuing months, Brooklyn would become one of the hardest areas hit by the virus in the state.

"We had to shut down abruptly, which was very sad," says Mara Mazza, communications director for KCTL. "But our immediate concern was the wellbeing of our families and our students, and trying to figure out if there was any way we could support them."



Photo: A KCTL student prepares for a tennis lesson in the hallway of her building.

Staff, board members and volunteers quickly swung into action, taking the extraordinary step of individually calling all 269 families that had registered for a KCTL program in the last 18 months. The content of these conversations: How are you feeling? How is distance learning going? How can we help you?

"It's really important for us to remember that we are a community organization," says Rob Gerstman, a program manager for KCTL. "And as we [had these conversations] and conversed with resident presidents of the six housing developments that we serve, it

quickly became apparent that our families could use our assistance."

As a result of these discussions, and thanks to some generous donations, KCTL launched the KCTL Cares initiative in early April. KCTL Executive Director Dave Webley coordinated with the resident presidents to personally deliver groceries and other supplies to families in all six of the developments.

"We were really excited to kickstart KCTL Cares," Gerstman says. "We wanted to let our families know that we were there for them, that we could help them out and [bring them] the important items they needed."

The initiative was ongoing throughout the pandemic and the staff continued surveying individuals to further assess their needs; they also distributed multiple books (courtesy of neighborhood non-profit Brooklyn Book Bodega) to every child in their programs.

Once KCTL Cares launched, the organization then began brainstorming how they could keep their tennis-loving pupils active and engaged from home.

"Our winter session ends in March, and then we usually have about a month before we begin what we call our Upswing program, which is for our most advanced students," Gerstman explains. "It didn't take long for our executive director to guide us and say, 'Well, we're not going outside for that, so let's plan this virtually. What would that look like? How are we going to do this?'"

Gerstman and his co-program manager Adam Joyce immediately set about sorting through all the logistics. They researched what digital platform would work best and developed two separate lesson plans: one for the Upswing cohort and one for their larger Saturday morning programming. (KCTL's Saturday morning sessions, a hallmark of their mission, is a much larger program and doesn't generally begin until the summer, but the team decided to push up the start date to help serve more kids.) Each lesson, they decided, would be built around a theme (i.e.: "We're all in this together") and contain both tennis/fitness and off-court educational elements. KCTL staffers sent registrants a Target gift card so their families could purchase balloons to temporarily serve as a DIY stand-in for racquets. (Joyce was actually inspired to use balloons by an activity he saw on the USTA's Net Generation website.)

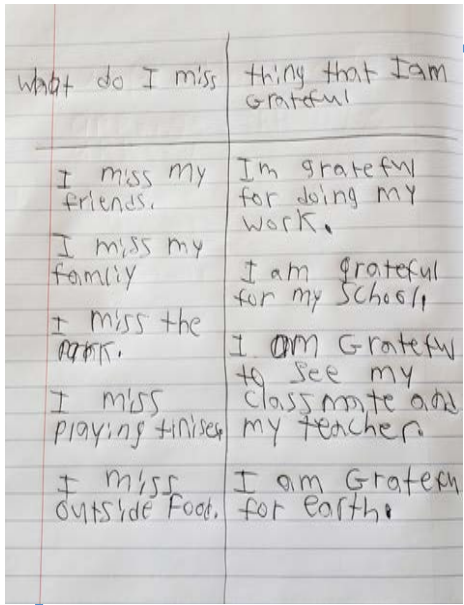


Photo: Activity: A KCTL student completes an "off-court" assignment.

"And then we practiced, practiced, practiced [teaching the sessions]," Gerstman says. "Between my OCD and Adam's intelligence, we really made sure that everything was ready to go. But we also understood that we needed to be flexible. And [we kept in mind] our goals [for the classes]. That we will teach tennis, fitness and off-court learning, but most importantly that we will bring our KCTL community together to build relationships and have fun. That's the key to everything that we're doing."

"...it's actually more about getting the kids to interact with one another and talk with us and get out their feelings. Kids are craving interaction."

The early returns suggested they succeeded—and then some. Attendance in each Saturday class consistently grew, and enrollment in the Upswing program went up 50% over last spring, when the sessions were obviously held outdoors.

"We were giving these kids an opportunity to share, [and it was an opportunity for us] to reinforce that no matter how they are feeling, it's all valid," Gerstman says of what he thinks made the new format so successful. "At the same time, we were allowing them to escape, play tennis, get fit, do jumping jacks, do shadow strokes, play with a balloon."

APRIL

It's really important that kids can just be kids in a time like this. That helps them to get through things."

Seeing that their programming was clearly filling a need, KCTL staffers again worked with resident presidents to bring even more kids from the developments into the fold. As a result, the virtual Saturday program ended up including students who had never set foot on a court before and learned about the sport through their computer for the first time.

"The classes are not all about tennis," Mazza explains. "Obviously we want them to exercise and practice the skills that they've built over the years, but it's actually more about getting the kids to interact with one another and talk with us and get out their feelings. Kids are craving interaction. I think even we were surprised by how much the kids are really excited to talk to us and talk about what their days are like. That's been the true gift."

Gerstman agrees.

"The truth is that I had my doubts about virtual programming, but the classes more than exceeded my expectations," he says. "Our KCTL community remained vibrant and together. These sessions were never going to be the same as our time with students on the court, but the teaching moment for these kids is that when life gives you lemons, you make lemonade. And so that's what I hope we can impart along the way. You have to adjust, you have to be flexible, you have to be spontaneous and smart about what you do, and you have to make decisions in the best interest of your communities."

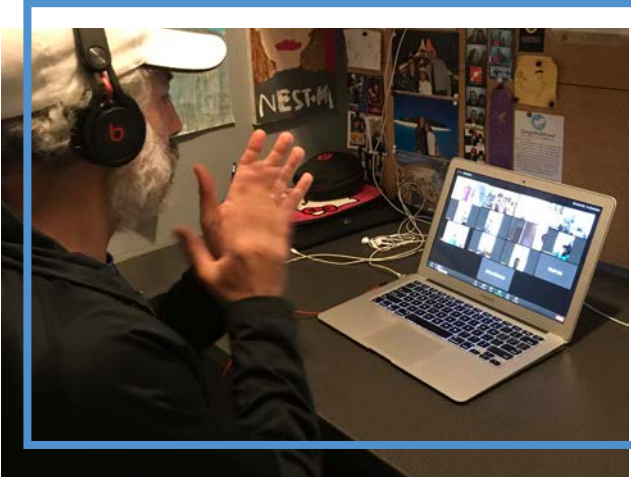


Photo: Gerstman conducts a Saturday morning session over Zoom.

And then, at the same time, you can continue to have fun and build relationships. That's really what we're focusing on."

Photos courtesy Kings County Tennis League

USTA Eastern Wins Player Development Section of the Year

During a very dark time for the sport, USTA Eastern received some bright news: In May, the section was officially named the 2019 Team USA Player Development Section of the Year as part of the annual Team USA Coaching Awards. And USTA Eastern was in good company. Other recipients included Corey Gauff (father to rising star Coco), who was named Developmental Coach of the Year, and Jay Berger, the head men's coach for Team USA at the 2012 and 2016 Olympics, who was named Legendary Coach.

In 2019, USTA Eastern's Competitive Department (led by Julie Bliss Beal) continued their work in developing one of the strongest junior pipelines in the nation. USTA Eastern's Eliot Spizzirri captured the boys' doubles title (with partner Tyler Zink) at the US Open, while fellow section junior Alexa Noel made the Wimbledon girls' singles final. Cannon Kingsley, another Eastern player, reached the quarterfinals in boys' singles (and the finals in boys' doubles) at the Australian Open, and then went on to make the semifinals in boys' singles at the US Open later in the year. In addition to Kingsley, Noel and Spizzirri, 11 other USTA Eastern athletes participated in the 2019 US Open: Kristie Ahn, Robin Anderson, Ronald Hohmann, Elvina Kalieva, Jamie Loeb, Tara Malik, Christina McHale, Noah Rubin, Hibah Shaikh, Madison Sieg and Valencia Xu. Beyond Grand Slams, fifteen Eastern juniors scored top results at national championships in 2019, with eleven capturing gold ball tournaments, including Stephanie Yakoff, who won the Junior Orange Bowl and also reached the Easter Bowl semifinals and Clay Court Finals in the girls 14 & under division.

"The Eastern Section always has a steady stream of players performing throughout the whole pathway, from top juniors nationally to the international level, and this showed in 2019," said Johnny Parkes, who at the time of the announcement served as USTA's Senior Manager, Player ID and Development. "The section exudes professionalism, dedication and commitment as they provide supplemental training and competitive opportunities for players, coaches and parents."



Photo: Beal (center) with competitive department staffers Ali Goldman and Gustavo Loza.

From the Baseline to the Front Line

Members of the USTA Eastern community reveal their experiences treating patients with COVID-19.

By Scott Sode

The COVID-19 pandemic has produced much uncertainty across the country, but one thing it has unequivocally reaffirmed is our respect and adoration for the many officials and health care providers dedicating their lives to keeping others safe. In our series From the Baseline to the Front Line, we honored members of the USTA Eastern community who also happen to belong to that heroic group. Below are excerpts of our conversations with doctors, nurses, volunteers and more as the crisis was reaching its peak in New York and New Jersey. **Editor's Note: These interviews were conducted in March, April and May.*

ality is that there are a lot of younger people in the hospital. And it's very painful to watch because I have kids around that age. 20-year-olds, 30-year-olds. I don't know why that's happening. But this is what it is.

"...The reality is that there are a lot of younger people in the hospital. And it's very painful to watch because I have kids around that age."

How can people help out?

YAKOFF: People just have to follow the rules. Kids are home, and they have to stay home. Honestly, it's a very difficult age to deal with this. They'd rather see friends and play outside. My husband and I were teenagers during Chernobyl in Ukraine, and we were not allowed to be outside for a long period of time then. It was hard at that age not to see your friends. But with COVID-19, people can be asymptomatic the first couple days. You don't know if someone your kid is hanging around is going to become positive in two weeks from that time. When they tell us to stay home, they say that because they know that this is the only way to stop [spread].

Your daughter Stephanie recently won Junior Orange Bowl and then came in third place at USTA National Winter Championships. How is she handling the break from the game?

YAKOFF: Yesterday my daughter was baking. She was making brownies. She never bakes. I don't bake. But she never had time.

When these kids are competing, they're either playing or going to school. She told me one of her [tennis] friends was doing the dishes, and I was like "Ooh, great idea!" [Laughs]. They are all learning things that maybe they wouldn't have learned due to the lifestyle. But when they get back on the court, they'll be hungrier than ever to play. Steffi has been injured many times and has come back stronger than ever. Because she wanted to play. It's just in their blood. Right now, though, the tennis stuff is locked in the closet. Hopefully it will come out soon, but the priority is to take care of everybody, that's it.—Interview conducted by Kristen Semple

JASON PASION (Hospital volunteer on Long Island)

Most people from USTA Eastern know you as the Head Tennis Coach at Hofstra University. What is your background in medicine?

PASION: [Growing up] medicine never crossed my mind. My mom was a nurse, and I had family members who were doctors. But I always wanted to follow in the footsteps of my dad, who worked on Wall Street. As soon as I went to college, I started taking business courses, and the first course I took was Business Statistics. I hated it in the first five minutes. [Laughs]. So I switched my major to pre-med. I was actually all set to go to medical school in the Philippines when my dad was diagnosed with cancer. I decided to hang back to help take care of him. I ended up becoming an Emergency Medical Service (EMS) worker



during that time. I spent a couple days working [as an EMT at Ground Zero] immediately after 9/11. Following that [experience], I decided to go to PA school to become a physician assistant. I graduated in 2007 and was working in family medicine for a bit before I realized that tennis was really my first love and went into coaching full time. So medicine really went on the backburner—until now.

How did you come to the decision to go back and volunteer during the COVID-19 pandemic?

PASION: First, we learned at Hofstra that they were ending our spring season. And then I was hearing on the news that there's a shortage of health care workers, so it got me really thinking: "I've got this degree and I can do something with it, and this is probably where I'm needed the most right now." I still keep in touch with a lot of my classmates from PA school, and they all work at hospitals and private practices. So I reached out to a few people that I went to school with and decided that I would volunteer at a few hospitals.

"We're seeing people suffer. They're in a lot of pain, and there's only so much we can do. Mentally, it's something I've never had to experience. It's really a dangerous disease."

What can you tell us about volunteering during this crisis? What should people know?

PASION: It definitely is chaotic—that's probably the best way to describe it. Not only are you dealing with things that you would normally deal with at a hospital, like someone coming in with a scrape or a bruise, but you're also dealing with patients who may or may not have COVID-19. It's overwhelming for health care workers. It takes an emotional toll. We're seeing people suffer. They're in a lot of pain, and there's only so much we can do. Mentally, it's something I've never had to experience. It's really a dangerous disease.

MAY

You were an EMS worker on 9/11 and at Ground Zero within hours of the towers falling. You spent nearly three straight days at the site. Did you learn anything from working during that unfolding tragedy that you have kept in mind while dealing with tough situations in these hospitals?



PASION: It's a little different. I had a great brotherhood [with other EMS workers] during 9/11, and they helped keep me in check mentally. [But] there were really no patients on 9/11. Unfortunately, we knew that these people were already deceased. We were doing more search and recovery, helping the firefighters. Now [with the pandemic] you're seeing people suffer and in pain. And all these patients are looking up to you.

DR. SIMON GORWARA (Chairman of the Division of Cardiology at Vassar Brothers Medical Center in Poughkeepsie, N.Y.)

What can you tell us about your experience on the front lines of this pandemic?

DR. GORWARA: The tragedy of [the situation] is obviously at the forefront. I was on vacation the week this hit, so when I first went back to the hospital, there was a little trepidation. What am I entering? Areas that used to be my hangouts—like the cardiac catheterization lab holding area—have been converted into COVID-positive units. So basically what you have is an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) that's five times the size of a normal ICU, spread around different parts of the hospital. The patients in there are all pretty sick and on ventilators. Many are on dialysis. I've volunteered to work in the ICU. Before training in cardiology, I trained in critical care and I maintained my board certification, so that has kind of allowed me to step into that role a little easier. But I'm in and out of the COVID ICU for maybe an hour, two hours tops. The nurses, the respiratory therapists, the patient care technicians are really the ones staying at the bedside on the front lines. They're managing these very sick patients, pulling 12-hour shifts. Aside from maybe a break or two, they're in there for hours and hours in uncomfortable personal protective equipment, adapting to the new environment, coordinating care with multiple

providers and fighting for every patient. It's hot, they're wearing double masks, double gloves, gowns and caps and obviously not having much normal human interaction.

You recently wrote a positive Facebook post about your colleagues that went viral, receiving over 600 likes and 300 shares. Why do you think it resonated?

DR. GORWARA: What really strikes me is the camaraderie one feels working in the hospital, the pride we're all taking in our work. It's brought out another side to us—a side that I know we've always had, but that is more evident when faced with this type of disaster. I've been in the health care profession a long time and I haven't seen this much "working together towards a common goal and against a common enemy" as much as I've seen it in the past few weeks. From the people who are cleaning the rooms to the pharmacy staff, to the nurses, physicians, patient care techs and the administrators who are planning for this and arranging for extra ventilators and new ICUs. We're quickly adapting regulations, policies are getting created quickly and efficiently. The whole team approach is something at which to marvel. We're really coming together as a single unit. There's very little complaining about the things that one normally complains about while working in a hospital. I hear everyone grateful and thankful for their teammates and colleagues. Perhaps it was the expression of this optimism and hope in my post that struck a chord with so many and led to all those shares and likes.

What can people do to help?

DR. GORWARA: I think people can help by staying positive. We need more recognition that we're all in this together, more reflecting on what

we can all do differently when life does return to some semblance of normalcy. And it will. We'll be back, going out to restaurants and parties. We'll play tennis. And maybe it will come back better when it does come back. It's like if you've ever been injured and aren't able to play tennis for a while, and then you're able to play again after a few months. When that has happened to me, I've come back with a true joy for the sport. I was just happy to be hitting balls. It didn't matter that I missed that backhand. It didn't matter that I lost a match I could've won. Of course, that feeling normally doesn't last long, unfortunately. [Laughs]. You do go back to berating yourself. But when you're away from the game, you realize how foolish that is.

MICHAEL LAMPA (Supervising pharmacist working at a cancer center and a hospital in Huntington, N.Y.)



What has your personal experience been like as a pharmacist on the front lines of this pandemic?

LAMPA: Right now I'm working at a cancer center. We have some of the sickest patients in the population, so with COVID-19 we have to be really careful in how we approach treating them. We're [working with a few patients] via telehealth and have postponed some treatments for others. Those who really need treatment [still] come in, but we screen them for any symptoms prior. They are obviously very sick, and they're also receiving chemotherapy which puts them in an immunocompromised state. So not only are they really susceptible to catching the virus, they would also have a higher mortality rate if God forbid they do get it. From a pharmacy standpoint, we've had to really make sure that we have the drug supply

available for these patients, that they are receiving their necessary treatment in a timely manner and that there are no drug shortages.

How have you had to adapt as the crisis has continued?

LAMPA: It's a new situation for everyone. We haven't ever approached something like this. [At the hospital], there are constantly-updating guidelines on how we treat COVID-19 patients.

It's been very challenging. We're also incorporating new study drugs, new investigational drugs, anything that we can find that could prove effective. At the cancer center, we all have to wear masks, PPE, gloves any time we're in a healthcare setting. We're standing six feet apart, and we've implemented virtual meetings to reduce exposure. Sometimes we'll say, "Well later on in the future, we'll go back to normal". But then we kind of question ourselves, like "What will be the new normal?"

This has no doubt been a stressful situation over the last few months. Have there been any silver linings?

LAMPA: At the hospital they usually play the song "Here Comes the Sun" by the Beatles when someone who tested positive is discharged. Whenever that song comes on, it means a lot. You have nurses, doctors, pharmacists, physical therapists, lab techs, so many people from different departments putting their lives on the line to treat these patients. When someone who had COVID-19 is treated successfully and discharged, and you hear that song playing, and you have people clapping [as the patient leaves], [the job] doesn't get more rewarding than that. It reminds you why you're in health care.

Before becoming a pharmacist, tennis was a massive part of your life. When did you first pick up a racquet?

LAMPA: I picked up a racquet when I was five years old. My brothers played tennis. They are about ten years older than I am. I was just following in their footsteps. I'd follow them to the park. One day I decided to join them and it just took off—I fell in love with the sport. And then from 1999 to 2009 I played as a junior in the Eastern section. I played Eastern tournaments almost every weekend. It was honestly a lot of fun. The Eastern section did such a good job organizing these events, and they really produce tough and talented tennis players—some of the best tennis players in the country. People would say [the best players come from] Florida or Southern California, maybe Texas, but you can never count out the Eastern section. It was really fun to go through those ten years. I made so many friends playing a game that I love. It really helped me develop as a person.

CIDRIC TRINIDAD (Nurse with NYU Langone Orthopedic Hospital (NYULOH) and the Visiting Nurse Service of New York (VNSNY) in East Elmhurst, Queens)



"I think I get a lot of mental toughness from tennis. You have to be on point throughout. If you lose in the first round of a tournament, you're done!"

What can you tell us about your experience on the front lines of this pandemic?

TRINIDAD: I work two jobs. I work [as a recovery nurse] at NYULOH and as a homecare nurse with VNSNY. [At NYULOH], we usually care for patients recovering from orthopedic surgeries [like hip replacements]. But the main NYU Langone campus was all full during the pandemic, so our hospital treated COVID-19 patients as well. It's really, really hard working in the hospital because you see these patients who are having shortness of breath, who are alone, who are physically and emotionally very weak. As a nurse you're there to take care of them, give them antibiotics and fluids. And of course, you have to provide moral support. No families are allowed to visit. Some of these patients are there by themselves for two or three weeks. When I see patients, I make sure they know they're not alone. I say, "The doctors and I are your family here—anything you

want, let us know." But it's very difficult. We had two very important coworkers—one nurse practitioner and nurse educator—who passed away due to complications from the virus.

You've also been making home visits to COVID-19 patients who have been discharged from the hospital. What has that been like?

TRINIDAD: The work is fulfilling, but it is scary. However, I wear PPE so I know I will be okay—I pray to God that I will be okay. One patient I see [at home] is 87 years old. His wife passed away a week before he [was discharged]. There are seven family members living with him in this multi-generational house—all of them are COVID-19 positive. They didn't really know what to do in terms of how to treat their grandfather, my patient. They're very happy that I can teach them breathing [exercises], signs and symptoms [to monitor] to know if they should go to the hospital. I've also helped reinforce how they can prevent transmission in their community.

How are you staying mentally tough during a very prolonged, stressful situation?

TRINIDAD: Well, I love my job. I know this is a time that I can really help the community, my patients and their family members. I want to be a role model to my colleagues, and I want to motivate people and inspire people. My mental strength really comes from that. I also think I get a lot of mental toughness from tennis. When you play in a tournament, if you lose the first round, you're done. Even if [a match] is only an hour or two, you have to be on point throughout. You could be leading 6-1 in the first set and 4-0 in the second, but once your opponent gets to 4-2, you can see a shift in momentum [if you let up].

PETER REYES (Physical Therapist and Director of Rehabilitation at the Cypress Garden Center in Flushing, Queens)

What can you tell us about your experience on the front lines of this pandemic?

REYES: I work in a nursing facility with some rehabilitation and long-term care residents. In early March, things started to get a little bit surreal. We closed the facility to all visitors and nonessential staff—it was basically a skeleton crew. And despite that drastic measure, people started getting sick or fearful of coming to work. Suddenly we were met with staffing challenges for many reasons. I had to have the therapists I supervise, who are trained in

doing rehabilitation and exercises, modify and adjust their approaches to effectively care for the patients and residents. Then, my therapists were getting sick as well and I was thinking, "What is going on?" Not only was I taking care of my acutely ill patients, but I was also looking out for the welfare of my staff. After work, I would swing by their apartments and bring food, medicine and just generally check up on them.

"My five-day work week turned into a six-day work week, and then into a seven-day work week...It was very stressful. But I thought, if I feel this way, imagine how these patients feel."

What was it like to deal with a potential COVID-19 cluster so early on?

REYES: We had a limited amount of PPE [personal protective equipment] and we needed to be creative with the equipment we had at our disposal. We also had a very limited understanding about the virus, so we had to educate ourselves. We followed the CDC and the Department of Health. But their guidelines changed every minute. First they'd tell us to do this, and then they'd tell us to do something different. Even the government agencies were trying to figure it out. [Because of the staffing shortage], I had to convert myself from being a Director of Rehab to a front line staffer. I'd feed my patients, try to get them out of bed. As a physical therapist, I know that I can help by mobilizing them—the more a patient sits in a chair or lies in a bed, the more likely they are to get sicker. My five-day work week turned into a six-day work week, and then into a seven-day work week. I'd start a shift at 6 a.m. and wouldn't get home until after 9 p.m.



It was really the peak of the pandemic, and it was very stressful. But I thought, if I feel this way, imagine how these patients feel. They are "confined" in a facility [just like everybody] battling loneliness and devoid of social interaction from the outside. [That's why] I incorporated FaceTiming their family as part of their plan of care. I wanted them to know that even if they felt disconnected from the world, we were still there for them. My passion is rehabilitation, especially with the geriatric population. I'm very fortunate to serve these patients. Some were living their last days, and they needed a better quality of life.

New York was undoubtedly hit the hardest by the pandemic, but there is a sense that the city is—for now—past the worst of it. Cases, while still high, have trended down, and some areas are starting to reopen. Have you felt that trajectory yourself over the last few months?

REYES: It has gotten better, definitely. I would say it was very stressful from March to about mid-May. But we're still shut down to all visitors. We're still not letting our guard down. Even the rehabilitation gym is not accessible to the patients. We have to be creative with our programs and therapy interventions. Flushing at one point was a really big hotspot. We don't want to go back—we've done so much to get to where we are.

How did you stay mentally and physically active during such a stressful situation?

REYES: There were some weekends where I would get home earlier, and the playground where I live in Sunnyside, Queens was still open. I'd go and hit a tennis ball against a wall. It was 50 degrees but I'll take it! I would bundle up and hit as much as I could. It made me feel a lot better. I also did some shadow swinging in my living room while on Zoom with friends. I'd be like "How's my stroke, has it gotten worse?" [Laughs]. That also helped. I'd also go to sleep with the Tennis Channel on. Just the sound of the tennis ball going back and forth...that was a lullaby to me during those times.

You're clearly a massive tennis fan—how did you first get into the sport?

REYES: I didn't really pick up a racquet until 2008. But it's become my passion—outside of being a physical therapist. I liked it so much that a few months after [starting private lessons], I bought my own tennis ball machine. I would go to a park at 4 a.m. There are no lights on a tennis court at 4 a.m., but there are enough street lights to see. I would hit with my tennis ball machine until 6 a.m. when the courts opened. This was obviously not allowed. [Laughs]. That's how crazy I am about tennis.

Woodstock Tennis Club Scholarship

Members of the Woodstock Tennis Club organized a fundraising initiative to share their love of tennis with kids in underserved communities.

By Scott Sode

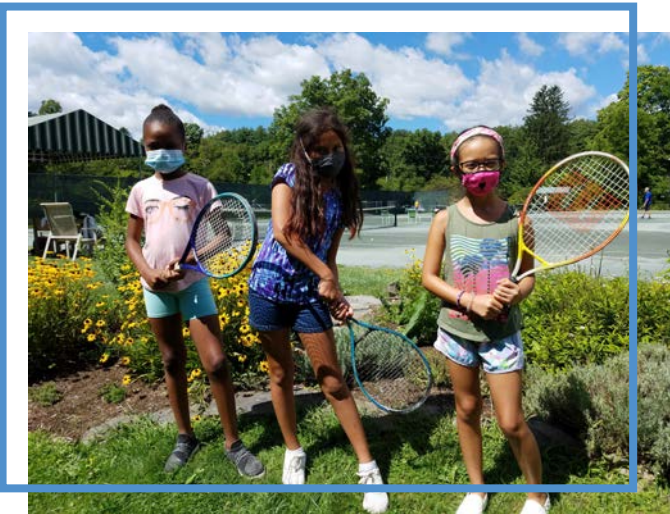


Photo: Kids who received a scholarship to Woodstock Tennis Club's summer junior program show off their form.

This past June, Woodstock Tennis Club members Vivienne Hodges and Dana Patton were having a socially-distanced lunch together, talking about the state of the world. The pandemic, which had particularly devastated New York in the months prior, was only starting to recede at the local level. Just days earlier, George Floyd's death at the hands of police officers had been captured on cameras, leading to protests that engulfed cities across the country. "It was just one of those times where you couldn't help but ask yourself: What can we do?" Patton says. "We're kind of in a little bubble up here in Woodstock, but there must be something."

During their discussion, Patton suggested creating scholarships to Woodstock's summer tennis camp for local underserved youth in the area. Hodges' "eyes lit up," recalls Patton. Quickly, Hodges proposed the idea to her fellow board members at the club.

"The board loved it," Hodges says. "So we let the membership know through one of our weekly newsletters. Members of the club were so generous, so spontaneously generous. They required no pushing at all. Very quickly the checks came pouring in. We raised over \$2,000 in just a few days. And very, very shortly we had had enough money for eight kids to come to Woodstock's junior camp."

Fundraising was easy, but the pandemic—and the tail-end of a months-long quarantine—made the next part harder. For nearly a month, Hodges and Patton contacted a host of local non-profit organizations, church leaders and summer camp programs in pursuit of local kids who might be interested in

learning to play, all to no avail. "[At that time], nobody had kids," Patton recalls. "They were all home. [Due to the pandemic] none of these camps and programs were [active]."

Hodges and Patton found some recipients through friends of friends in the community, but they still had more scholarships to extend. Eventually, they learned that one of Woodstock Tennis Club's own members, Ev Mann, was running the sole active summer camp in nearby Kingston. (Mann worked with local government officials through the non-profit Center 4 Creative Education to safely hold the camp at a recreation center.)

Mann invited Hodges and Patton to visit and do a short tennis demo for the campers. Quickly, they found plenty of interest.

"A lot of the kids were excited," Patton says. "Immediately, they were signing up, writing their names down. Then the problem became contacting the parents! Because of COVID-19 protocols [at the camp], parents didn't come in. We had no contact with them. They'd drive up, pick up the kids and leave. So that was the next hurdle. But by hook or by crook we finally found kids to participate [in the program]."

Hodges and Patton even went one step further: When one of the potential campers indicated she might not be able to attend because of transportation issues, the pair took turns driving her back and forth each day.

"That turned out to be the most extended personal connection I had with [a participant]," Hodges says. "It was really quite special because you talk to her in the car each day, and you get to know her and her family."

The camp, which was held over the course of one week, was led by Woodstock Tennis Club's head tennis pro Jesse Chalfin. His top objective? Getting the kids to love the sport.

"The number one thing is that they have fun. Obviously safety [as well]. But we want them to have fun."

"The main thing I try to instill in my coaches is to remember that although we do want to improve these kids' tennis skills and their games, it's still summer camp," Chalfin says. "The number one thing is that they have fun. Obviously safety [as well]. But we want them to have fun. If they can have a great time and remember that tennis was really fun—and learn a few things here and there—then we have more than done our job."



Photo: The scholarship program was the brainchild of Woodstock Tennis Club members Dana Patton (left) and Vivienne Hodges.

Considering the joy of several of the scholarship campers at the end of the week, he and his staff more than succeeded.

"Three of the girls were showing me their strokes," Patton recalls. "They were telling me how you do it. They were demonstrating: Low to high. They were just so excited. One of the girls wanted to immediately teach her cousin what she had learned. They felt like little pros after just a week of camp."

And one of the participants loved it so much—and showed so much promise—that Chalfin thought she could benefit from more time in the program. She had initially noted on her registration form that she didn't have much experience in the sport, so Chalfin placed her

in a group with other entry-level players during the first week. A naturally gifted athlete, she was "blowing everyone away," he recalls, and thought she might enjoy a greater challenge.

JUNE

Thanks to more generosity from a Woodstock Club member, Chalfin was able to procure her more time on the court.

"She got so much out of it. Her dad called me and said this was the best experience of her summer."

"I was standing with Vivienne, telling her I really wanted to get [this camper] in for a second week," Chalfin recalls. "Vivienne remembered one of our members had said to her that if you need more scholarship money just let him know. He happened to be right by us! So Vivienne [went up to him] and said,

'Hey, by the way, did you still want to?' and he was like 'Yeah! 100 percent! How much?'"

The extra week proved to be formative, as Chalfin placed her with a more challenging group of juniors. "That's what I always wanted as a tennis player," Chalfin explains. "I always wanted to be on the court with people who were better than me. She got so much out of it. Her dad called me and said, 'This was literally the best experience of her summer.'"

It was so great, in fact, that she's continued training and practicing independently. A basketball player for her high school in the winter, she plans to go out for the tennis team in the spring.

Overall, Hodges, Patton and Chalfin consider the scholarship program a huge success, and they hope to repeat that success—and potentially build upon it—next summer.

"We had so many ups and downs doing it," Patton says. "But I felt like a dog with a bone. We were not going to give up. And we learned a lot. I think we can use those lessons for next year."

Chalfin agrees.

"We call tennis a lifetime sport, and it can sound a little corny when you hear it so many times," he says with a smile. "But it really is true. It starts when you're six or seven years old and you're just given that opportunity. That was the coolest thing that I could have learned having these kids in the camp: We gave them that opportunity. Even if they just walked away with a good memory from it... that was important to me."

Photos courtesy Woodstock Tennis Club

SOUTHERN REGION

League Captain Spotlight: Valerie Duval

League Captains are the largest group of volunteers in the USTA. Among the countless other responsibilities in their regular lives, these dedicated individuals clock long hours handling the logistics: Recruiting players, distributing materials, relaying rules for matches and recording results. With our feature League Captain Spotlight, we'll learn a little more about these tireless tennis advocates: Why they love tennis, what their earliest tennis memory is and what items they always keep in their tennis bags.

What items do you always keep in your tennis bag?

DUVAL: Oddly enough this has evolved from when I started playing in 2001 and needed no extra body support but at a "certain age" these become an absolute necessity: Arm braces, knee braces, thigh wraps, ankle straps, calf wraps, wrist wraps! Yikes! But we keep playing on!

What's your earliest tennis memory (watching or playing)?

DUVAL: When I was in college in Tampa, there was a match between John Newcombe and

Rod Laver that I went to and fell in love with the sport as a spectator. Only later, after retirement, did I have the luxury of trying to learn the game! I'm still trying!

How would you describe your playing style?

DUVAL: Hmmm! That's a tough one. Unorthodox and scrappy!

What's the craziest thing you've ever seen happen on a tennis court?

DUVAL: In my early competition days I was in a local Florida tournament and hit this amazing short shot with some spin. I turned my back to the net as I was sure I had won the point. I heard spectators go "Uh oh". I turned around and my opponent had returned the ball for a winner and the spectators mouths were gaping open!

What did you miss most about tennis during the suspension?

DUVAL: I missed the spirit of team play amongst my own teammates. The first time on the courts was with great trepidation as this was



all unknown territory, but it soon felt almost like old times.

What do you love most about the game?

DUVAL: I absolutely love competitive team tennis! I also love being around women who are strong, powerful, wise and inclusive. Anything is possible when we come together and bring our own life experiences to the team.

Growing the Game in Chestnut Ridge

JULY

Two tennis players formed a community tennis association (CTA) to promote the sport in their local park.

By Scott Sode

In 2015, Gordon Panek had just helped secure funding for wind screens and benches at the Chestnut Ridge Park Tennis Courts in Orchard Park, New York when Tim Sands, a fellow tennis player, approached him about creating a local tournament together.

“Once Tim brought me the idea, the wheels in my head really started spinning—[the area] was a perfect set-up [for a tournament],” Panek recalls. “Twelve courts in a beautiful park, ample parking, grassy areas for easy viewing, [now with] wind screens, benches, picnic tables.”

The pair immediately rolled up their sleeves to deliver their vision, and the Championships at the Ridge Tournament was born.

“There is no sugar coating,” Panek says. “It was a lot of the work and time from the beginning: Getting approvals from the Erie County Parks Department, calling and writing letters to sponsors, ordering t-shirts and trophies, buying food, lining up the grillers, setting up canopies, advertising.”

Undoubtedly, the hard work has paid off. Just like the Chestnut trees for which the park is named, the tournament has blossomed; over the last five years, the event, funded almost entirely by sponsorships and low entrant fees, typically draws a massive 170 partic-

ipants to Chestnut Ridge each summer. In 2019, Panek and Sands formed a non-profit, Summer Classic Events Inc., to not only continue running the tournament but also—they hoped—to expand their burgeoning tennis programming operation.

“Our goal is to make it the mecca for tennis play in the Western New York area.”

With the help of USTA Eastern staff members Lynn Buffamonti and Joe Steger, Summer Classic Events successfully obtained Community Tennis Association (CTA) status at the beginning of 2020, which afforded the organization access to more resources, most notably, says Panek, affordable insurance. This summer—as New Yorkers emerged from a months-long pandemic-induced quarantine itching for physical activity—Summer Classic Events safely hosted a multitude of programming in Chestnut Ridge for the first time: Everything from clinics for the 10-and-under set to supervised middle school and high school match play to flexible format leagues, the latter of which attracted around

70 players. The organization also held their 2020 tournament in August.

“Our Summer Classic Tennis Tournament actually was the largest draw we’ve had in our six years of running it,” Panek says. “192 participants, 274 entry slots and 164 matches. We managed around some weather delays but completed it in the six days we ran the tournament. The tournament is a growing-in-popularity end of summer event for the area, but I’m sure the lack of other sports opportunities this summer and the delayed USTA league season may have helped with the larger draw size.”

Interest in the sport is growing so much in the area, in fact, that, despite the organization’s moniker, one season won’t suffice. In the fall, Summer Classic Events held a mixed doubles tournament, a one-day afternoon round robin event for middle and high schoolers and a separate 10-and-under clinic. The organization is also on the cusp of securing funding to light at least four of the courts, so matches can continue past sunset.

“Going forward to 2021 we will certainly be expanding on what went well this past summer and building on it,” Panek says. “Chestnut Ridge Park is just the perfect, inviting setting for tennis. Our goal is to make it the mecca for tennis play in the Western New York area.”



Photo: Budding artists from the 15-LOVE organization pose on top of their completed canvas.

15-LOVE’s 10 BLOCKS Art Project

Students in Albany’s 15-LOVE organization showed off their artistic skills on a tennis court.

By Scott Sode

Social distancing guidelines amid the COVID-19 pandemic gave kids in the 15-LOVE National Junior Tennis & Learning (NJTL) program the opportunity to get creative—literally.

On August 19, the non-profit—which serves up tennis and educational programming to about 5000 children in the Albany area—turned a tennis court into a canvas with its 10 BLOCKS initiative. The project allowed a select group of 15-LOVE participants and their families to create a piece of chalk art within one of the ten boxes that form a full tennis court: the two service boxes and doubles alleys, as well as the space between the baseline and service line—called no-man’s land—on both sides of the net. Each individual piece needed to address themes of equality and multiculturalism, and the project ultimately resulted in one large colorful patchwork creation that drone footage captured from above.

“Much of the idea came out of social distancing requirements unique to this summer,” says Ryan Artis, a 15-LOVE alum who developed and spearheaded the initiative. “The project inherently separated everybody into their ‘block’. At the same time, it got the kids working collectively on-court. We also wanted to give them a creative outlet tied to tennis which could touch on today’s important social [issues].”

The kids (and their families) found different ways to explore the designated 10 BLOCKS themes in their artwork. Pieces addressed everything from religious equality to equal pay. One drawing celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month. One utilized a quote from Black activist Marcus Garvey and another illustrated US Open Champions Steffi Graf, Naomi Osaka and Serena Williams to emphasize unity among women.

“Trying new ideas never involves failure, you either succeed, or you learn.”

“What stuck out the most to me is that the kids were really given complete freedom on this project,” says Amber Marino, 15-LOVE’s executive director. “We just asked them to think about racial justice, equality and diversity. I helped a few kids measure out and plan their space, [but] I spent much of my time cleaning out the water buckets for the ‘erasers.’ This was really all their work. Sometimes the topics specific kids chose made my heart smile—for instance, it was a boy who decided to draw about

equal pay for equal work, with his mom coloring alongside him...it was [all] just so powerful.”

Artis agrees with that sentiment and admits to being blown away by the finished product. “The originality of the pieces to convey particular messages, in many cases incorporating tennis, was excellent,” he says. “Also, we are not an art program and never did an art project like this. What shocked me is how multi-talented kids are, since I only know many of them based on their interest in tennis. Maybe it’s because I can’t draw a straight line, but the quality of what these kids created was far beyond what I expected.”

Both Artis and Marino hope to grow the 10 BLOCKS project in the future.

“I learned that there’s always more we can do to further our mission of reaching out to inner-city kids,” Artis says. “Trying new ideas never involves failure, you either succeed, or you learn. I’d like to expand 10 BLOCKS to more kids, either through expanding to multiple cities in the Capital Region or beyond, or including two or more courts at a time. We’ll definitely do this again next year, if not sooner.”

Photo courtesy 15-LOVE



Photo: Panek (left) and Sands at the Championships at the Ridge Tournament.

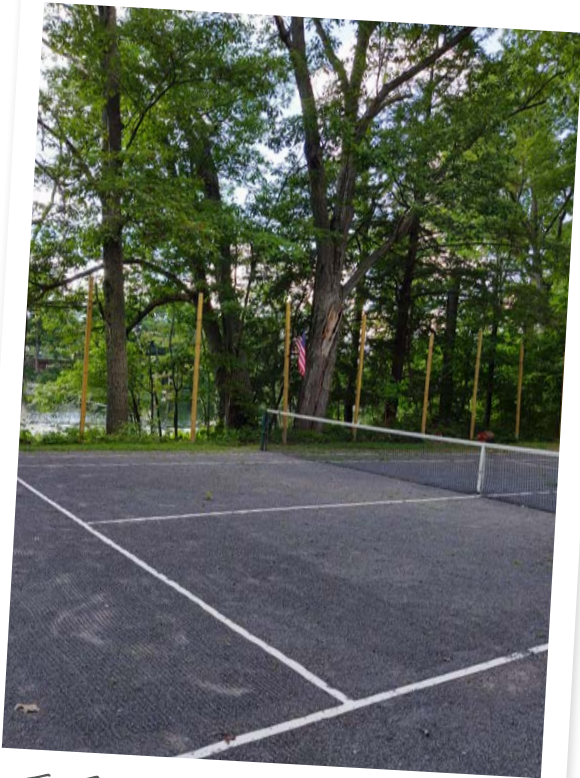
Tennis Court Road Tour

Some of the most scenic tennis courts are right here in the Eastern section.

By Kristen Semple



THE JOHN V. LINDSAY EAST RIVER PARK TENNIS COURTS ARE LOCATED IN LOWER MANHATTAN UNDERNEATH THE WILLIAMSBURG BRIDGE. USTA EASTERN HAS HELD ITS ADULT RECREATIONAL TOURNAMENT, BATTLE OF THE BOROUGH, AT THIS LOCATION.



THE TULLY LAKE HIDDEN TENNIS COURT, IN TULLY, N.Y., ONCE BELONGED TO A HOTEL THAT BURNED DOWN IN 1914. THE COURT SAT DORMANT FOR MANY YEARS UNTIL A GROUP OF VOLUNTEERS REVIVED IT FOR PLAY IN 2010. THE DRUMMINS TENNIS CLUB IN SYRACUSE, N.Y. DONATED AN OLD NET TO HELP WITH THEIR EFFORTS.



THE SYRACUSE, N.Y.-BASED SEDGWICK FARM TENNIS CLUB OPENED IN 1897. THE CLAY COURTS ON WHICH MEMBERS PLAY TODAY DEBUTED IN 1908. DURING WORLD WAR II, FIVE COURTS WERE CONVERTED TO GRASS; THEY'VE SINCE BEEN RESTORED TO THEIR RED CLAY BEAUTY.

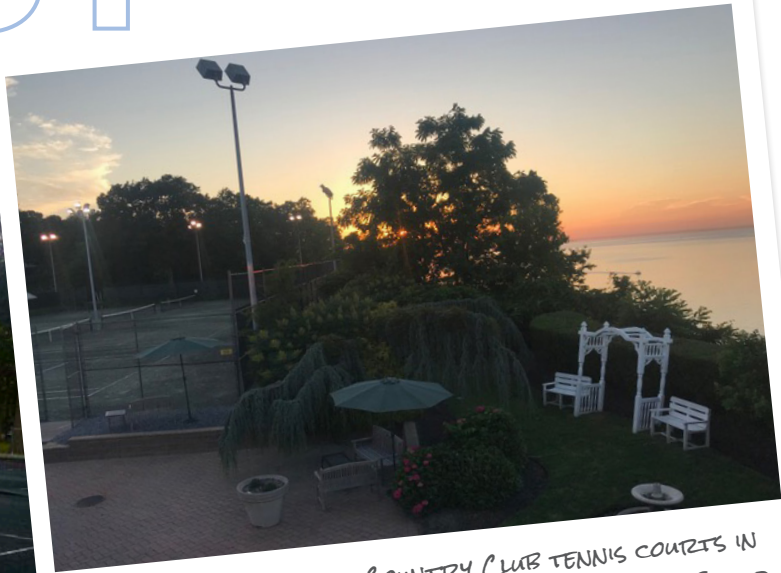


THE BRIGHTON AVENUE TENNIS COURTS IN PERTH AMBOY, N.J. ARE FREE AND ACCESSIBLE TO ALL.

AUGUST



THE SARATOGA SPA STATE PARK COURTS IN SARATOGA, N.Y. USED TO BE HARD COURTS. A DEDICATED NON-PROFIT, THE FRIENDS OF SARATOGA SPA STATE PARK, RECENTLY RAISED MONEY TO CONVERT THEM TO HAR-TRU CLAY.



THE PORT JEFFERSON COUNTRY CLUB TENNIS COURTS IN PORT JEFFERSON, N.Y. OVERLOOK THE LONG ISLAND SOUND.

WESTERN REGION

League Captain Spotlight: Andy Wallenstein

What items do you always keep in your tennis bag?

WALLENSTEIN: No good luck charms. A recent addition to my tennis bag was an eye-glass repair kit. I haven't needed to use it for myself yet, but just a week or so after having added it my doubles partner had a lens pop out in the middle of a match!

What's your favorite tennis shot?

WALLENSTEIN: I like a good forehand down the line passing shot. Even if it winds up being within reach of the net player, they're still going to have a tough time with it, and when you actually pass them it's a great winner. (Please don't tell my opponents, though. I like to surprise them the first time!)

How would you describe your playing style?

WALLENSTEIN: I like to mix it up. I have pretty quick reflexes and enjoy a good drop-shot or

other well-placed soft shot, but I'll also hit with pace when given the opportunity.

What's the craziest thing you've ever seen happen on a tennis court?

WALLENSTEIN: I don't know that I would call it crazy but one time, during a USTA doubles match, one of us hit a ball over the fence, which is a standard tennis-fence height, so probably about ten feet high. After the match, as three of us were figuring out our best course of action, the fourth player scaled the fence like Spiderman, retrieved the ball, and came back over the fence in less time than it took me to write this! It was quite impressive.

How do you motivate your teams in tough moments? Any go-to advice?

WALLENSTEIN: I'll usually just let the players know if a match is an important one and hope that their own competitiveness and desire for the team to do well motivates them to play their best.



What did you miss most about tennis during the suspension?

WALLENSTEIN: I missed everything I love about tennis: seeing friends, the competition, the exercise. It was great to get back out there and just be able to move and hit. I was glad that tennis was identified as a relatively safe activity, which allowed tennis play to resume sooner than a lot of other [sports].



Photo: Spizzirri competes in USTA Eastern's Collegiate Series.

USTA Eastern's Collegiate Series

The section organized a post-quarantine event for college players to help them get back in the swing.

By Scott Sode

With so much uncertainty regarding college athletics this fall, USTA Eastern, in conjunction with the Cary Leeds Center for Tennis and Learning, organized the first-ever USTA Eastern Collegiate Series to provide high-level competitive play opportunities for college athletes and juniors across the section. The series—a group of four standalone tournaments held over four weekends in August and September at Cary Leeds in the Bronx—featured players from over 20 colleges and universities, including Adelphi University, Columbia University, Hofstra University, New Jersey City University, New York University, SUNY Oneonta, St. John's University, Syracuse University, UCLA, University of Connecticut, University of Texas, University of Virginia and Vassar College. Multiple measures were taken by Tournament Director Cesar Leon to ensure the safety of all athletes involved.

"Many collegiate players and top juniors in the USTA Eastern section ended their seasons early in March and haven't gotten the chance to play many—or any—competitive matches since then," said USTA Eastern Youth Programs Manager Gustavo Loza, who developed the series. "We wanted to give them an opportunity to safely get back on the court and compete against other high-level athletes."

Jessica Livianu, of St. John's University, was grateful for the opportunity and appreciated that she could get multiple matches under her belt at the event.

"I was really happy to be back on the court and playing and competing," she said. "Of course I'm still a little rusty, so I'm trying to brush off that rust so I can play better with every match."

Livianu went on to lift the women's trophy at the first tournament, held on August 17.

UCLA's Elysia Bolton, who captured the women's title in the second tournament of the series on August 24, was thrilled to be able to play

at a high level again. During the shutdown, the Cold Harbor Spring native trained with pro players Kristie Ahn and Christina McHale but hadn't played a competitive match prior to contesting the Collegiate Series.

"It felt really good to be back on the court," Bolton said. "I haven't played [a match] since March, when we beat Stanford, so it felt really good to play out some points."

University of Texas sophomore Eliot Spizzirri, a former Eastern junior who won the boys' doubles title at the 2019 US Open, echoed that sentiment. He hadn't played a competitive match in four months and noted the event was

helping him to find his timing on the court after an injury layoff during the COVID-19 shutdown.

"It was exciting to be competing again," he said. "It's been a great tournament. It definitely gave me a little extra motivation in practice this week."

Some of the high-level USTA Eastern juniors who rounded out the Collegiate Series draws included Kaitlyn Carnicella, Daniel Cohen, Ari Cotoulas, Taylor Goetz, Ariana Pursoo, Nicholas Steiglehner and Valencia Xu. Steiglehner won the men's title in the final tournament, held on September 20, while Pursoo reached two separate women's finals.

Collegiate Series Results

TOURNAMENT 1 (AUGUST 14-17)

Men's Champion:

Liam Krall

Southern Methodist University

Women's Champion:

Jessica Livianu

St. John's University

TOURNAMENT 2 (AUGUST 21-24)

Men's Champion:

Gabriele Brancatelli

Purdue University

Women's Champion:

Elysia Bolton

UCLA

TOURNAMENT 3 (SEPTEMBER 11-13)*

Women's Champion:

Anna Shkudun

Syracuse

**Only a women's event was held*

TOURNAMENT 4 (SEPTEMBER 18-20)*

Men's Champion:

Nicholas Steiglehner

Eastern Junior

**Only a men's event was held*

Photos courtesy of Long Island Tennis Magazine

SEPTEMBER

Find Your Level

With safety top of mind, USTA Eastern is bringing introductory tennis clinics to communities across the tri-state area.

By Scott Sode

In early Fall, USTA Eastern hosted "Find Your Level", an introductory tennis event, at the Donald Van Blake Courts in Plainfield, N.J., and



Photo: Participants practice their form at the inaugural Find Your Level event.

then organized a five-week session for new participants to the sport at the same location. The goal of these events—which we have begun holding in communities across the tri-state area—is to make the sport as accessible as possible for anybody who wants to play, especially in the current climate. State and local health officials have repeatedly cited tennis as one of the safer options for physical fitness because the sport naturally allows players to maintain social distance from each other. It's also a great family-friendly activity for those who are quarantining together and offers a host of critical cardiovascular and mental health benefits. A study published by Mayo Clinic Proceedings found that those who played tennis increased their lifespan by 9.7 years—a larger increase than any other sport. Just as importantly, the game can boost mood and strengthen mental health, according to researchers at the State University of Southern Connecticut. Their study found that tennis players display more optimism and on average become less angry, anxious or depressed than those who play other sports.

At these events, we have followed all safety measures as prescribed by local government officials and the United States Tennis Association. We will provide a racquet to anybody who does not own one.

We spoke with Pastor Shawn T. Wallace—one of the participants at the first event—about his positive experience mixing it up on a tennis court for the first time, and why he's come to enjoy the sport so much.

Have you played tennis before?

WALLACE: I'd never played tennis before. I have always enjoyed watching tennis but have never learned to play.

What are some of the things you enjoyed most about the event? What did you learn or take away from the experience as a whole?

WALLACE: I appreciated that they had something for every participant regardless of your level or experience—even my 6-year-old daughter who attended. It was refreshing to have instructors who actually showed you what to do and not just tell you what to do. The time that they took to make sure that I understood and that I was doing things the proper way was very good. I also enjoyed the variety of activities that we were able to participate in. Just from that one event, I have definitely gained a greater appreciation for athletes who play tennis.

Many studies have affirmed the health benefits of tennis. What do you think about tennis as an option for exercise?

WALLACE: Tennis is a full mind and body workout. It is an excellent form of exercise. My experience at the event has encouraged me to want to play tennis more.

What do you like about tennis overall?

WALLACE: I like the overall physical aspect of tennis, but I am also intrigued by the mental part of it. I like watching it and seeing how players make adjustments throughout the course of a match, how they are able to identify and shift based on how their opponent might be playing. Actually playing the game and learning more about the game has heightened my interest in tennis and my overall enjoyment of it.



USTA Eastern Diversity & Inclusion Manager David Williams helps a player practice her swing.

NEW JERSEY REGION League Captain Spotlight: Maria Coradini



What items do you always keep in your tennis bag?

CORADINI: Religious items, hoping they'll help me win! But if not, [I have them] to pray that I play fair, have fun, and stay healthy, safe and uninjured. I also carry Bounce dryer sheets scattered all over to have a fresh smelling bag!

What's your earliest tennis memory?

CORADINI: My earliest memory is watching my twin girls taking lessons when they were five. I didn't know anything about tennis at that time. I said, "I'm going for a lesson as I might as well learn the rules if you both continue playing." Three months later I joined a team. The team did not care to win or lose as long as they had fun and looked good on the courts! [Laughs].

How would you describe your playing style?

CORADINI: Never give up on a shot! You never know what happens. Several times, I just extended my racquet and the ball stayed in play!

What did you miss most about tennis during the suspension?

CORADINI: Just getting to see my teammates! It was so sudden that we didn't even get to plan a team celebration.



Photos: Players, including Evangelista (front row, far right) and Perez Ochoa (front row, third from left) pose at the inaugural USTA Eastern Serves in Support tournament.

Serves in Support

The West Side Tennis Club, in Forest Hills, N.Y., hosted the section's first Serves in Support tournament and raised over \$28,000 for the American Cancer Society.

By Scott Sode

West Side Tennis Club member Marnie Perez Ochoa vividly recalls learning her mom had been diagnosed with breast cancer in March 2019.

"I found out while I was at work and I just remember sobbing on the hallway floor hoping no one would see me," she says. "Receiving that news was one of the worst moments of my life."

Since then, Perez Ochoa has watched her mother go through multiple surgeries and treatments; she's had to become an expert on the many advancements made in cancer research, and understands firsthand the need for raising both more funds and more awareness. So when USTA Eastern approached her about its Serves in Support initiative—a philanthropic collaboration between the section and ACS where clubs or individuals can host a fundraising tournament to benefit the ACS cause and raise awareness for cancer prevention—she jumped at the chance to organize an event at West Side.

"When Eastern told me about their partnership with ACS, I was really excited and knew I wanted to be a part of it," she explains. "Tennis has always been a huge part of my life. My grandmother [Yola Ramirez] was a Grand Slam champion in the 1950s. My grandfather also competed on tour. My parents met playing tennis. My mom, my uncle and I all played Division I tennis...It's kind of perfect that this event combined all of that together and brought it full circle."

West Side scheduled the tournament about three weeks out, for the weekend of October 3. Perez Ochoa immediately set to work, publicizing the event through email and the club's social media channels. "I didn't have to do too much internally because everyone was so keen to play," she says. "With the pandemic this year, I think all of the members were craving any type of social interaction. Then, when you add in a good cause on top of that, you get really great buy-in. We have several members that have or have had cancer so it definitely hits home for us as a club."

"With the pandemic this year, I think all of the members were craving any type of social interaction. Then, when you add in a good cause on top of that, you get really great buy-in."

Perez Ochoa hoped to be able to raise \$5,000 for ACS through the tournament. She knew that if both days sold out, she could reach at least half that goal just based upon the tournament fee alone. "I'm not going to lie, I was really nervous that we were not going to raise

anywhere near \$5,000," she admits. "I just didn't know how much people were going to be able to donate, or if they were going to be able to donate at all given what we are all going through [in the world]."

She didn't need to be nervous. As soon as West Side members received the email about the event, they started donating far beyond the \$40 entry fee.

"The total amount just kept growing and growing and our goal just kept increasing. Each time we set a new goal, we not only hit it but crushed it," Perez Ochoa says. "At one point my friends and I had a group text going and each person was donating \$1 more than the top donor. One of the guys in that group text was silent and didn't respond for several days, so I thought he may make a grand gesture at the end to beat everyone else. Then I saw his donation for \$5,000 come through and I was in absolute shock. He and his wife are some of the nicest people I have ever met, but I was genuinely in shock when I saw their donation."

She was in even more shock the night the total amount they raised surpassed \$20,000. Having dinner with a friend, Perez Ochoa says she started "jumping up and down, screaming in excitement...I genuinely got so excited after every donation. It doesn't matter how much the person donated. They all meant a lot to me. Sure, those big \$5,000 and \$2,500 donations were fantastic, but it was beautiful seeing how our community came together to raise so much money."

OCTOBER

Ultimately, the Serves in Support event at West Side blew far past the initial \$5,000 benchmark, raising an astounding \$28,779 for ACS. Knowing his clientele, West Side CEO Mario DiPreta wasn't surprised by the outcome. "I was delighted to hold Serves in Support for such a great cause—I felt the event would hit home with the membership of the Club," he says. "I was not surprised we raised over \$28,000. [Our members] always step up in a big way."

Indeed, the ACS was thrilled with West Side's efforts. "The American Cancer Society is honored to partner with USTA Eastern," notes ACS Senior Manager of Community Development June Ingraham. "They offer exposure to a new audience in the tennis world and provide the ability to fundraise through collaboration with clubs, community tennis associations and at the college level. Our first tournament with the West Side Tennis Club was a stunning success thanks to an innovative and enthusiastic member who chaired the event. The bar has been set high, but we are confident our alliance [with Eastern] will yield strong results as we head into 2021 and beyond."

The tournament itself, held over October 3-4, was divided into two events. One of the days was open to all levels and featured 16

mixed doubles teams facing off and switching partners after every match, so, as Perez Ochoa explains, "people met and got to know other members outside of their usual circle." The other day featured some higher-level matches with 12 mixed teams competing; Perez Ochoa and her partner Andrew Pearlstein ended up making the final, but lost (in a very close tiebreaker) to West Side Board Member JP Evangelista and Christi Wagenaar.

"Each member's personal connection to cancer or empathy for what other members have experienced played a huge role in people's generosity for this event."

"Winning a tournament will always bring a smile to my face, but the real winner of the day was ACS," says Evangelista, whose own

mother Christine passed away from a hard-fought battle with pancreatic cancer earlier this year. "In my spare time, I do a variety of cancer research fundraising through various music industry entities, so seeing this happen at my home tennis club was very special. Each member's personal connection to cancer or shared empathy to what other members have experienced played a huge role in people's generosity for this event."

Overall, Perez Ochoa is thrilled to have been able to work with USTA Eastern and ACS to organize the first-ever Serves in Support tournament.

"It was a really rewarding experience," she says. "Right now with the political climate and the country feeling so divided, and the pandemic and quarantine, I feel like this event brought positivity and light into our community. We are already assuming we will have this event every year!"

Adds DiPreta: "The event was spectacular! [It was great to watch] our members utilizing all our courts available and cheering each other on. And it was great to see them having smiles on their faces and enjoying themselves for a wonderful cause during these uncertain times. We will hold another event [like this] in the future!"

METRO REGION

League Captain Spotlight: Patricia Gould

What items do you always keep in your tennis bag?

GOULD: Martina Navratilova Energy Balls. I can send you the recipe.

What's your earliest tennis memory?

GOULD: I started playing late. I became interested after watching my sons take lessons.

What's your favorite tennis shot?

GOULD: The volley. I like to end the point early.

How would you describe your playing style?

GOULD: Aggressive. I wish I had more patience!

And who's your favorite tennis player?

GOULD: Rafael Nadal. I love his attitude...and I think he is so cute.

What's the craziest thing you've ever seen happen on a tennis court?

GOULD: A family of squirrels opened everyone's tennis bags, took out the bars and food and sat there eating them while watching us play.

How do you motivate your teams in tough moments? Any go-to advice?

GOULD: Never quit. My team has lost the play-offs by one game so I tell my players that every game won helps us, even in a loss. And I love to include inspirational and funny quotes from coaching and playing greats in my emails, like, "I've found that prayers work best when you have great players" by Knute Rockne.

What did you miss most about tennis during the suspension?

GOULD: I missed my friends and coaches. I was surprised at how nervous I was for my first match back!

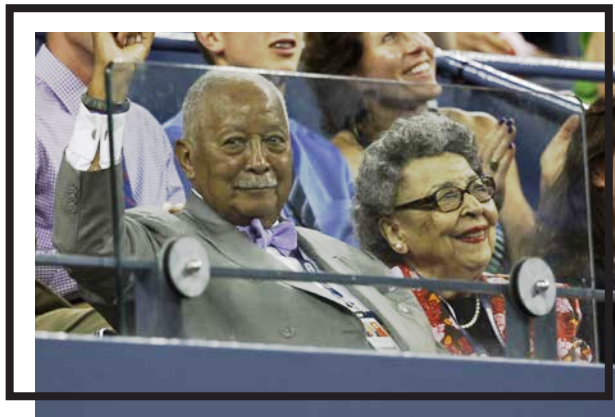


What do you love most about the game?

GOULD: It is a mind and body exercise. And I love my friends. I knew very few people when I moved to NYC from California. Our first holiday party had 10 people. Now we have 70 guests. Mostly from tennis!

IN MEMORIAM

In addition to Daniel Burgess, our Leslie J. FitzGibbon Tennis Man of the Year, we mourn the losses and remember the legacies of some of our beloved USTA Eastern family members in 2020.



THE HONORABLE DAVID N. DINKINS & JOYCE DINKINS

Former New York City Mayor David N. Dinkins passed away November 23, 2020 at the age of 93. Dinkins served as the top city executive from 1990 to 1994 and was the first—and to date, only—Black man to hold that position. A major proponent of tennis, Dinkins was a fixture at the US Open each year and served on the board of the USTA after his time as mayor. He was particularly passionate about the National Junior Tennis & Learning (NJTL) network and the USTA Foundation and even hosted the winners of the NJTL Essay Contest at his own home for many years. Dinkins—who had

been introduced to NJTLs through Arthur Ashe—worked incredibly closely with the New York Junior Tennis and Learning (NYJTL) up until his passing.

“My greatest interest and concern was that people playing tennis look like this country,” Dinkins told Tennis Magazine in 2010.

In 1990, USTA Eastern’s Junior Tennis Foundation named a scholarship in his honor; young tennis players in the city still receive the scholarship every year at the USTA Eastern Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony. Mayor Dinkins himself was inducted into the USTA Eastern Hall of Fame in 1993 and received the Tennis Man of the Year Award in 1991.

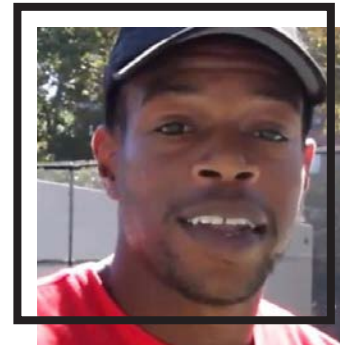
Dinkins’ wife, Joyce, whom he married in 1953, passed away earlier this year on October 11. According to a feature written by former USTA Eastern Public Relations Manager Nancy Gill McShea, Dinkins once told a story about driving through Harlem with Joyce and running into a street sweeper who happened to be one of Joyce’s former boyfriends. Dinkins said to his wife, “Aren’t you glad you didn’t marry him?” To which Joyce replied, “I’m not so sure because if I had married him he’d be the Mayor.”



BOB RYLAND

Former pro tennis player and instructor Bob Ryland passed away August 2, 2020 a little over a month after celebrating his 100th birthday. Ryland was one of the first Black male tennis players to compete in the NCAA Championships and the first to play professionally. He coached and taught tennis for over 60 years, advising some of the world’s top-ranked professionals, including Venus and Serena Williams, Harold Solomon, Renee Blount and Leslie Allen. In 2019, the Wall Street Journal reported that, at 99, Ryland was New York City’s oldest tennis permit holder. In 2019, he was still teaching the sport to kids around the city.

Ryland was also a USTA Eastern section stalwart. He taught the sport at Midtown Tennis Club in Manhattan for nearly 40 years, from 1963 to 1990. For his innumerable accomplishments and contributions to the game, he was inducted into the USTA Eastern Hall of Fame in 2002. “Bob’s name would have been right up there with the great players of his time — Hoad, Gonzalez, Budge, Bobby Riggs and the rest — had he not been born a Black man in America,” fellow USTA Eastern Hall of Famer Leslie Allen noted in a piece written for his induction. “Still, he endured and succeeded in a sport that was not inviting. We can appreciate his accomplishments and, for generations to come, learn from his experiences.”



DANIEL DAVIS

Harlem Junior Tennis & Education Program (HJTEP) coach Daniel Davis passed away on September 23, 2020. Davis grew up playing tennis with HJTEP and later became a standout Eastern junior, achieving the No. 7 ranking in the section. He later went to compete for Temple University, and then after graduation returned to HJTEP to serve as a coach. Over the years, he impacted hundreds of underserved children through the organization.



LARRY “COACH STRETCH” HARTFIELD

Larry “Coach Stretch” Hartfield served as a local tennis coach and mentor in Harlem, the Bronx, Mt. Vernon, and upper Westchester for over 30 years. He worked as a tennis instructor at private clubs, but also dedicated much of his time to helping kids through the NYJTL organization. “The many of us that have been kept out of trouble, gone to college, became coaches, gave back to the community and the game are largely in part of Stretch’s influence,” said Danielle Carr, who organized a tournament this past fall in Hartfield’s memory.



HECTOR HENRY

Longtime coach Hector Henry passed away on April 22, 2020. Henry, who immigrated to the United States from Jamaica, first enjoyed a career as a soccer player, competing for the Jamaican National Team and also semi-professionally in the United States. Henry picked up tennis as his soccer career came to a close while attending Brooklyn College. He joined the school’s team and then, upon graduating, served as the program’s coach for the next ten seasons. He went on to serve in the same capacity for the NYJTL organization for over 40 years. A tireless advocate of the sport, he also volunteered many of his weekends with the Highland Park Tennis Association (HPTA) Junior Tennis Program. In 2019, the HPTA honored all his contributions by naming a tennis tournament after him. The Hector Henry Championships will be held every year around his birthday on September 7.



KEVIN O'BRIEN

Kevin O'Brien was an esteemed steward of the 96th Street Red Clay Tennis Courts in New York City's Riverside Park. He managed the courts for the New York City Parks Department from 1992 until his retirement in 2016, after which he continued working at the courts directly through the Riverside Clay Tennis Association (RCTA). In fact, it was Kevin’s personality and work ethic, as much as anything else, that forged the RCTA community over the years. His passing in the spring was mourned by over 1,000 fellow RCTA members and players.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

USTA EASTERN STAFF

Elena Bantovska
Julie Bliss Beal
Lynn Buffamonti
Lauren Bull
Jocelyn Cruz-Alfalla
Natalie Dagnall
Peter Del Vicario
Kathi Dolan
Christopher Dong
Susan Friedlaender
Kelly Goodhart
Amy Guttman
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Andrea DeMarco

USTA Eastern thanks its outgoing board members for their service:
Harry Keely, John Klenner, Tito Perez, Danielle Pulliam, Pablo Sierra and Michael Starke

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USTA EASTERN CONGRATULATES THESE WINNERS ON THEIR RESILIENCE AND INNOVATION THROUGH A CHALLENGING YEAR:

Pro/Specialty Retailer of the Year:

Mason's Tennis
New York, NY

Private/Commercial Facility of the Year:

Miller Tennis Center
Buffalo, NY

Tennis Industry Service Award:

Alex Levitsky, Global Sports & Tennis Design Group
Fair Haven, NJ

Innovative Tennis Event:

US Open
New York, NY

USTA EASTERN PROUDLY ANNOUNCES ITS 2020 JUNIOR SPORTSMANSHIP AWARD WINNERS

Boys 10s Sportsmanship
Award:
Cavan Donelly

Girls 10s Sportsmanship
Award:
Belle Xue

Boys 12s Sportsmanship
Award:
Ronin Spahn

Girls 12s Sportsmanship
Award:
Jordan Lee

Boys 14s Sportsmanship
Award:
Drew Fishback

Girls 14s Sportsmanship
Award:
Rebecca Hess

Boys 16s Sportsmanship
Award:
Nicholas Roddy

Girls 16s Sportsmanship
Award:
Sydney Langer

Boys 18s Sportsmanship
Award:
Arun Guruswamy

Girls 18s Sportsmanship
Award:
Mia Kintiroglou

Henry Benisch Award:
Adele Giovannoni

Tournament Director of the
Year:
Emer Cruz

CONGRATULATIONS TO THIS YEAR'S RECIPIENTS!

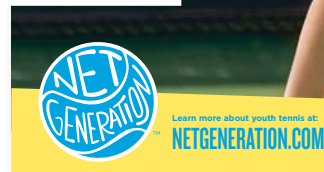


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