USTA EASTERN LONG ISLAND

On The Ball: News from LI

Celebrating the Best at Annual Awards

More than 200 members of the Nassau and Suffolk County tennis communities turned out to celebrate at the 36th Annual USTA Long Island Regional Awards. Held at the Sea Cliff Manor, the event brought together tennis players and those who volunteer their time and energy to grow and support tennis on Long Island. Descriptions of some of the awardees and their achievements are below.

Click here for a complete list of awards as presented in the Awards Dinner Journal published by *Long Island Tennis Magazine*.
To see all the photos from the event, please click here.

Hy Zausner Lifetime Achievement Award: Walter Staritsky

A longtime tennis coach at Carefree Racquet Club in Merrick, Walter has been on the local tennis scene since the 1980s. He created the "CRUNCH" session, what was probably the forerunner to cardio-tennis -- a fast, fun and social experience in improving your tennis skills. He continues to coach players of all ages and abilities.



Rose Buck Scalamandre Tennis Family of the Year: The Greens

The Green Family has been playing tennis together for more than 50 years. A highlight of their love for the game is the annual Green Family tennis tournament that brings together multiple generations for competition and fun.



Vitas Gerulaitis "For the Love of Tennis" Award: Bill Levine

Bill has dedicated his life to demonstrating his love for tennis through playing and organizing men's tennis. For more than 25 years, he has coordinated a men's USTA 8.0 team. During that time, he has provided playing experience to scores of men eager to play competitive tennis.



Arthur Ashe Multicultural Award: Vanessa Miller

Vanessa has expanded access to tennis for children in her community, helping the Baldwin PAL program grow tremendously. She continues to expand the PAL's coaching staff, creating opportunities for coaches to develop their skills, grow the game of tennis and make a meaningful impact on the lives of young players.

HS Tennis Team of the Year: Syosset

Syosset's boys' and girls' varsity teams are committed to excellence, sportsmanship and service on and off the court. This year, the girls team was New York State champions and the boys' team was NYS runner-up, all while also giving back to the community through initiatives like Syo Unity Tennis (teach students with disabilities in grades K-12) and "Tennis with the Teachers" (student-teacher duos enjoy round robin competition and fun). Players also support TeenTeachScience, a nonprofit founded by a varsity tennis captain, that held 5 educational sessions and 2 tennis fundraisers, raising $5,000 for the Alzheimer's Association.

Innovative Tennis Program: Love Serving Autism (LI Chapter)

Love Serving Autism is an outstanding example of how tennis can create meaningful opportunities, inclusion and connection within the community. The program gives children with autism and special needs the opportunity to experience tennis in a welcoming, supportive and positive environment. The organization focuses on teaching the kids and helps to develop and educate the coaches. Coaches learn effective strategies and techniques for understanding and working with children with special needs. Coaches learn to better understand each child's unique needs and create an environment where they can learn, participate and succeed. The program brings together coaches, families, players and volunteers while demonstrating that tennis truly can be a sport for everyone.

Daniel Burgess, Sr. Community Service Award: Olivia Lichota

Olivia, a 16-year-old Friends Academy student and varsity tennis player, raised over $20,000 in just three weeks to launch Olivia's Youth Tennis Clinic in partnership with the Boys & Girls Club of Glen Cove. The program welcomes children ages 8 to 12 for a four-week tennis clinic to introduce them to the game, build confidence, teamwork, sportsmanship and healthy habits.





Special Service Award: Kitty Anderson-Galvez

A USTA volunteer for years, Kitty has expanded her love of the game by becoming a certified Tennis Coach. Working with the youngest kids to introduce the fundamentals of the sport, she teaches them in a style that has them falling in love with tennis and all its components--the skills, camaraderie, teamwork--even finding joy in collecting the balls at the end of each session. She fully connects with her students and is passionate about making tennis fun for everyone who steps on the court with her. Kitty travels across Long Island running programs in Oyster Bay, Huntington, Syosset, Woodbury, Roslyn and many other locations.





Growing Tennis Together Grants

Grant money from USTA Eastern is available to help local organizations offer tennis programs designed to grow the game of tennis across the Eastern Section and the Long Island Region. Neil Thakur, Community Tennis Coordinator/Long Island, helps administer the grants and assists community organizations in their efforts. He shared some recent project successes with "On the Ball: News from LI."

Suffolk County Tennis and Education Foundation (SCTEF)





The 2026 SCTEF Summer Tennis program delivered a full season of tennis at 3 parks (Bay Shore, Holbrook and Lake Ronkonkoma), serving 248 players ages 5–18 of all levels. Instruction included 10-and-under skill-and-play-based activities to advanced varsity sessions. Support from the USTA Growing Tennis Together Grant enabled SCTEF to provide the best tennis experience while keeping fees accessible despite rising operational costs, increased competition from multi-sport camps and shifting youth population demographics.



Response Sports Consulting LLC

The Mount Sinai School Summer Tennis Program offers affordable, high-quality tennis opportunities for all ages. In the program's first summer, 26 adult and junior participants enjoyed an 8-week Summer Tennis Camp plus additional programming. An accessible option introduced new players and families to the sport. All lead coaches are USTA-trained; Mount Sinai HS tennis players assisted and gained valuable coaching experience.





United Through Sports

This organization advanced its adaptive tennis program on Long Island by launching a vital financial assistance initiative for neurodiverse youth. The funds allowed for subsidizing 50% of tuition costs for special needs youth who do not receive government or other funding, and offered a free-of-charge tennis program to low-income families.

Net Generation Plays US Open

Many LI youngsters got their first taste of Grand Slam tennis this year through US Open Net Generation, which invited local tennis clubs to bring their students to play on court at the BJK National Tennis Center during the US Open. Eight programs brought 12 junior players each to play red ball tennis on court prior to the professional matches. Participants were: Advantage All Tennis, Carefree Racquet Club, Christopher Morley, NCPAL Baldwin Unit, Sportime Port Washington and Syosset, Robbie Wagner's and Eastern Athletic Clubs. (see photos page 8)

School Workshops

Back to school in September saw tennis workshops for teachers in two LI school districts, Mt. Sinai and Hempstead. **Mt. Sinai Schools** held a half-day Net Generation workshop, led by Tito Perez, for 12 K-12 PE teachers. Educators learned the tools and resources to introduce tennis during regular PE classes and create a clear pathway into community programs. All five district schools have registered for the equipment package and planned to begin offering tennis this fall. In the **Hempstead School District**, Jason Wass led a half-day Net Generation clinic for 22 K-12 teachers. All five district schools have registered for an equipment package and planned to incorporate tennis into their PE classes beginning this fall.

New Island Tennis/Hamptons Community Tennis

The Fun Fridays program offered free 2-hour evening clinics in Hampton Bays. Now in its 3rd year, the program is a local meeting ground, introducing people to the sport and building community through tennis and learning. Parents and families—who are often priced out of traditional Hamptons clubs—experience tennis with qualified coaches in a fun, relaxed, music-filled atmosphere. For 5 weeks this past summer, New Island Tennis ran six courts, serving 40 to 60 players per week.



USTA Leagues Update

By Milly Keighery, Adult League Coordinator, Long Island Region

Celebrating an Incredible 2026 Season

What a summer it has been for Long Island tennis! As the 2026 season winds down and our qualifying teams prepare for Nationals, now is the perfect time to celebrate another fantastic year of USTA League tennis across Long Island—and the players and captains who made it all possible.

Long Island Shines at Sectionals

Throughout August and September, LI teams traveled across the Eastern Section to compete at Sectionals. Once again, Long Island was incredibly well represented. Our teams competed hard, supported one another and demonstrated the wonderful team spirit that makes our league community so special. For several LI, the journey continues all the way to Nationals! A huge congratulations to the teams that earned the opportunity to represent USTA Eastern on the national stage:

- ST Syosett, Hyman: 18+ 4.0 Men's
- ST Bethpage, Kellner: 18+ 2.5 Women's
- Morley, Kwon: 40+ 3.0 Women's
- EAC, Dix Hills Capilets: 40+ 4.5 Women's
- Morley, Moramarco: 55+ 6.0 Men's
- ST Syosett, Mandelbaum: 55+ 8.0 Men's
- ST Kings Park, Fenton/Consiglio: 65+ 7.0 Men's
- ST Syosett, Khullar/Lamba: 65+ 8.0 Men's
- Morley, Ng/Yang: 18+ 6.0 Mixed
- Morley, Ng/Yang: 40+ 6.0 Mixed
- ST Lynbrook, Healy: 55+ 6.0 Mixed
- ST Bethpage, Mao: 55+ 7.0 Mixed



Celebrating Our Captains

September also gave us an opportunity to recognize the people who make our leagues possible: our captains. We hosted two Captains' Appreciation events—one in Nassau and one in Suffolk—to recognize the tremendous amount of time, energy and enthusiasm our captains give throughout the year.

It was wonderful to spend time together off the court, celebrate another successful season and, most importantly, simply say thank you for everything our captains do for their players and for USTA League tennis on Long Island.

This year, our captains also received an unbelievably generous opportunity from the USTA: the chance to attend the Presidential Suite at the 2026 US Open to watch the Doubles Finals. It was an incredibly special experience and another wonderful way to recognize the important role our captains play in making USTA League tennis such a success.

More Tennis Ahead

While our summer leagues may be wrapping up, there is certainly no slowing down. Our fall leagues are already underway, and we're looking ahead to another exciting season in 2027. We have kicked off our 2.5/3.0 Women's Combo League, 4.5 Men's and Women's Tri-Level leagues and 18+ Mixed Doubles. Next up are our 4.0 and 5.0 Tri-Level leagues, followed by 40+ and 55+ Mixed Doubles. It's one of my favorite things about USTA League tennis: there is always another team to join, another season around the corner and another opportunity to get out on court.

Thank You, Long Island!

A huge thank you to all of our players—and especially our captains—for making 2026 such a successful year. Whether you competed at Sectionals, are heading to Nationals, joined a league for the very first time or have been playing USTA League tennis for decades, you are all part of what makes the Long Island tennis community so special. Here's to finishing 2026 strong—and carrying that incredible Long Island energy into another exciting year of league tennis!







Eastern Tennis Hall of Fame Honors 3 LI-ers

Three people with Long Island roots were inducted into the Eastern Tennis Hall of Fame in a ceremony held August 25, 2026 at the Metropolitan Club in New York City. Longtime instructor Joel Ross—who grew up in Westbury—and Robbie Wagner—who owns clubs in Glenwood Landing and Glen Cove—received the section's highest honor, as did former Long Island Region president Daniel Burgess, who was posthumously recognized for his efforts to grow the game across Nassau and Suffolk counties.

Daniel "Danny" Burgess

Tennis instructor, loving husband and father Daniel "Danny" Burgess posthumously received induction into the Eastern Tennis Hall of Fame for a lifetime of helping others gain access to the game and all its benefits. Right up until his passing on September 28, 2020, Burgess exhibited remarkable leadership and remained an integral member of the USTA Eastern tennis community. He was endlessly passionate about introducing the sport to young people.



"Tennis was his life," says Danny's wife, Agnes. "He loved it."

Danny focused extensively on teaching juniors and relished serving as a mentor. He offered complimentary lessons and often drove players to tournaments or other events when they needed a ride. "As a coach, he loved witnessing the process of improvement, teaching players to never give up," Agnes says. "There are just so many character traits you're helping build in that role."

During his six-year tenure as USTA Eastern Long Island Region Board President, Danny made outreach to potential young players a primary feature 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 the Long Island Region's 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, like kids days or 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."



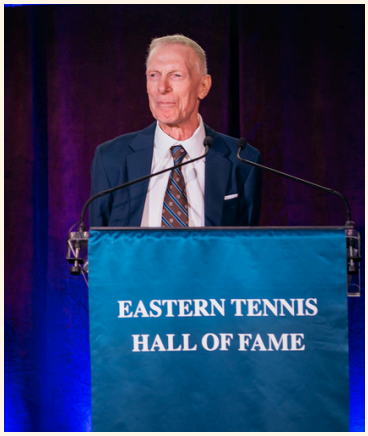
From left: Ross, Schnitzer, Wagner, Agnes Burgess and Phelps pose for a photo at the 2026 Eastern Tennis Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony.



Burgess family

Joel Ross

It's fitting that Joel Ross—a longtime Westchester-area tennis instructor who ran an eponymous academy and sleepaway camp for 30 years—chose the career that he did. Even as a young player from Westbury, he loved practicing. "I loved the process," he says now. "That's what I enjoyed about junior tennis. I liked hitting the wall. I loved working on my serve by myself. And I liked playing the tournaments because it was a venue where you could show off what you'd been practicing. If I win, I'm supposed to win. If I lose, I believe that's the way it's supposed to be."



Ross more often than not tended to win. As a member of the Westbury High School tennis team, he lifted the singles trophy at the New York State High School Championships twice, in 1967 and 1968.

What made Ross so formidable back then?

"Well, probably not my backhand," he says with a laugh. "But I had a good forehand and was good at serving. My backhand was passable. But I don't think I ever hit a topspin backhand in my life, even to this day!"

Topspin-less backhand and all, Ross would go on to compete for the University of Michigan and then spend five years on the professional circuit. He then settled in Westchester, where he became a renowned instructor—including hosting a popular summer camp—and managed the Mount Vernon Tennis Center for 30 years.

Robbie Wagner

If you're trying to understand why Robbie Wagner's Tournament Training Center has earned its reputation as one of the most renowned facilities in the Eastern Section for developing young talent, look no further than its Glenwood Landing location, where a banner hangs for every national champion who has trained there. You'll find so many banners that some of them now line the walls because they've run out of space in the rafters.



Many different factors contribute to a tennis center's success, but much credit goes to the man whose name is etched on the signs. Visit the Glen Cove location on a weekend night when the organization is hosting a junior tournament, and you just might find Wagner in the corner, nervously taking in one of the matches. You'll definitely see him in the mornings, when he brings the bagels for the kids competing.

"If the kids are there putting in the work, I want to be in their corner," Wagner says. "And even after five decades around the game, there's really no place I'd rather spend a Saturday night. I still have the passion."

That passion is the foundation upon which Wagner's coaching philosophy and business are built, and it's precisely what he looks for when bringing coaches on at his facility. Members of his current team include Greg Lumpkin—who has helped guide recent USTA Boys' 18s National Championship champion Jack Kennedy—and Adrian Chirici, who was honored with the USTA Eastern George Seewagen Award in 2018 for excellence in the discipline.

"Technique, patience and work ethic in coaches are all essential, but truly caring is the foundation of our entire program," Wagner says. "Caring is what I look for most, and it's non-negotiable. Because of that philosophy, we've been able to bring in phenomenal coaches who give everything they have."

Summer is for Kids

Hundreds of kids from local camps and groups across Nassau and Suffolk Counties came out to two Summer Kids' Days coordinated by USTA Long Island Regional Council and *Long Island Tennis Magazine* volunteers. The events took place at LuHi Summer Programs and Island Quest.

Photos from Kids Day events and US Open Net Generation programs.



















USTA Eastern Long Island

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We are committed to the promotion and growth of tennis for people of all ages and abilities to play and enjoy the game. Through the efforts of volunteers, USTA staff and strategic partners, we are dedicated to the highest standards of integrity, honesty and ethics in developing tennis programs in local communities throughout Long Island. Our mission will be served by having our youth, our adults and corporate partners enjoy the "sport for a lifetime."

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New Design for "On The Ball: News From LI"

After 15 years of bringing you news and features about tennis on Long Island, "On the Ball: News from LI" has a new look. We hope you like our refreshed format!

As always, please email us your news so we can include it in a future issue. You can also email us if you would like to subscribe to our quarterly newsletter.