

A TREASURED TENNIS OASIS



Above and right: Flemington Tennis Club members playing and building friendships.

For nearly a century, the Flemington Tennis Club has provided a secluded spot for tennis enthusiasts to pursue their love of the game.

BY SARAH LARSON

It's easy to miss the Flemington Tennis Club, a not-for-profit private recreational and social club dedicated to providing tennis facilities for its members and promoting tennis in the community. Tucked inconspicuously on about a half-acre in an otherwise residential neighborhood of single-family homes along Elwood Street near its intersection with Maple Avenue, the club consists of three courts surfaced with HAR-TRU Green Clay, the world's leading clay court surface. Surrounded by a chain link fence, the club offers free parking, a shaded pavilion, and comfort facilities.

But for its members, FTC is a unique treasure.

"It's like having a tennis court in your backyard," says Meredith Bzdak, who makes the 25-minute trek from her home in High Bridge a couple of times a week to play there. "It's never crowded. You feel like you are at home. You get to know everyone."

For nearly a century, the club has brought together people who

love tennis - or who want to learn the game - to have fun, build new friendships, and create lasting memories. There's a lot to love about the game of tennis, says FTC President Dana Loyd, including its competitive aspects, its exercise and fitness aspects, and, of course, the social aspects.

"We often have parties and social events at the club, and we all have become good friends," says Loyd, adding that his own story is a good illustration. Six years ago, when he joined as a novice, Loyd says he was warmly accepted by the existing members and received much encouragement and advice from them. "Two years later, I became president (of the club)," he says.

The Flemington Tennis Club officially opened for its 96th season on April 30, 2022. The courts are open for members' play from 7 a.m. until dusk every day, and no reservations are necessary, Loyd said. Organized play is available for players of all ages throughout the week in both singles and doubles play. Pick-up games are

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– Michael Bzdak



available on weekends and holidays, and on Friday nights throughout the summer, mixed doubles play round robin games. A ball machine also is available for solo practice.

Membership is limited to 100 people. With about 45 current members, the club is happy to welcome new members, Loyd said. An annual membership costs \$500 for a family or \$425 for a single adult.

“We encourage interested folks to stop by on a Saturday or Sunday morning during our pick-up game sessions,” Loyd said. “Visitors can join in with us to try out, or they can simply watch the matches. Our members are very friendly and welcoming.”

Every new member receives a single sheet of paper outlining the club’s rules and regulations, including such mundane items as to who has priority when the courts are full and when the courts need to be swept (every two sets). There is also this note about sportsmanship, which sets the tone: “Tennis is a ladies’ and gentlemen’s sport. All members are expected to observe these Rules and Regulations and tennis traditions and etiquette, which include a pleasant and friendly demeanor toward all club members and guests.”

The club traces its official start date to 1927 when childhood buddies Joe Barrick and Bill Slattery “happened upon a group of locals playing tennis on a single court on Elwood Avenue,” according to a history of

the club. World War II interrupted Barrick’s growing love of tennis, but after he returned from a stint in the U.S. Navy, he set to work improving the conditions of the court on Elwood, which grew over the years from one court to its current three. Eventually, the club was incorporated and has been run by a volunteer board since 1962.

In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the club to suspend play for several months. When COVID restrictions were lifted for outdoor group play, members slowly started returning.

“As the year went on,” Loyd said, “more members came back to get outside, to become more active, and to try to return their lives to normalcy.”

Meredith Bzdak and her husband, Michael, joined FTC 15 years ago. Michael’s work colleague at Johnson & Johnson suggested it as a good spot to participate in a company tournament. And even though there are plenty of tennis courts between High Bridge and Flemington, the Bzdaks says FTC makes it worth the travel time.

“It’s an odd location right in the middle of a neighborhood,” says Michael Bzdak. “But it works.” □

Sarah Larson wrote about Flemington DIY in the April/May Issue of Flemington Life.

Photos courtesy of Flemington Tennis Club.