

The Palm Coast Historian

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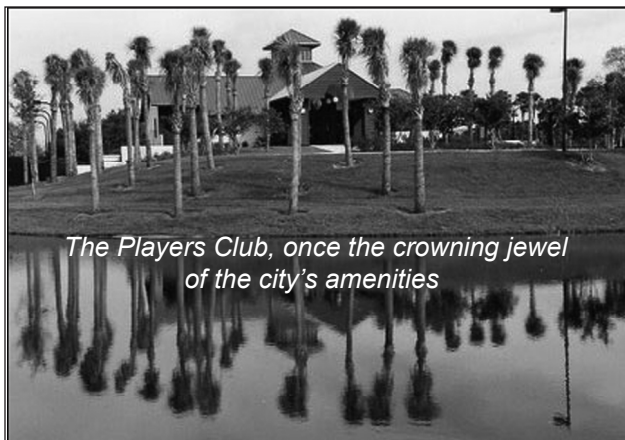
Issue: Summer 2010

Part 2 continues the brief overview of the crucial role that tennis played and continues to play in the development of the City of Palm Coast. A more detailed series of articles entitled THE GOLDEN AGE OF TENNIS IN PALM COAST will be published in the near future.

The Role Tennis Played in the Development of Palm Coast, Part 2

by George A. Libonate Jr.

The management of Lowe Enterprises quickly made the decision that the Belle Terre Swim and Racquet Club could not add to management's bottom line. Since this facility, with its small membership, didn't seem to have the potential to become a profit center for the corporation, Lowe decided to get the asset off its books and donate the complex to the Flagler County School Board. The community can be thankful that the school district was willing to take on fiscal responsibility for maintaining and operating this vital asset. If the school board hadn't assumed this responsibility, the facility would have suffered the ultimate fate of the abandoned Players Club – yesterday's magnificent jewel, today's rotting monument to malfeasance.



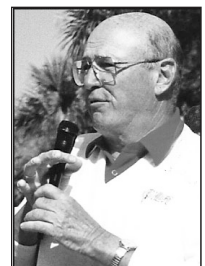
The Players Club, once the crowning jewel of the city's amenities

During the first six months under Lowe's management, a flurry of administrative decisions were made that eventually resulted in dramatic changes

at the Players Club. Jim Hagler, responsible for hospitality operations, initiated steps to "reposition the hotel and the other amenities to cultivate a lifestyle that would attract guests to the hotel." Lowe needed guests, lots of them. Unlike ITT, this corporation had little to gain from attracting homebuyers, increasing land sales or improving the quality of life of their long term community members.

As mentioned earlier, they also made some critical personnel changes. In September of 1996, Jim Vidamour resigned after serving the tennis community for 15 years. A month later he was replaced by David Jenkins. Jenkins came to Palm Coast as head pro, having served in a similar capacity at a 12-court tennis club in Jacksonville. He also had worked at prestigious Amelia Island where he served as a pro and director of tennis with significant responsibility for the once famous Bausch & Lomb Tournament. A year later, on September 13, 1997, Tom Gullikson ended his 17-year relationship with the tennis community in Palm Coast. These were game-changing losses for the tennis community.

When results did not meet expectations, Lowe decided to turn over operations to world famous Peter Burwash International (PBI) with Dave Neuhart as head tennis pro. This new team



Peter Burwash

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF FLAGLER COUNTY

(sixth in the series by Sisco Deen)

Flagler County Places, Then and Now

Haw Creek

When the narrow gauge railroad was constructed through the Haw Creek section, two families were living in the area, the Walter Eugene Knights and the Nathan Roberts. Mr. Knight was raising sheep and doing some farming. Mr. Roberts did some farming too, but he had a fair sized orange grove and a large Scuppernong grape arbor.

With the many working people coming into the area, Utley James White built three houses there. Utley also put up telephone lines and all the homes had telephone service. All the bridge timbers for the Key West Extension of the Florida East Coast Railway were cut from the Haw Creek section and manufactured in the Utley J. White Sawmill at Dupont. The Key West Extension was later the Over Seas Highway (now U.S. 1), when the railway was removed.

In 1907, Mr. White planted Irish potatoes for commercial purposes. When the Dupont Land Company took over in 1912, they built the Tippecanoe Inn at Dupont. Under the management of Mr. and Mrs. Gomez Pacetti, it offered splendid accommodations for that day and time.

Dupont Land Company also changed the narrow gauge railroad to Haw Creek to standard gauge. This connected with the Florida East Coast Railroad at Dupont. The "Dummy," as the train was called, made several trips a day to Haw Creek, and the people living there at that time boasted of mail delivery twice a day.

Many people used hand cars to go back and forth to their work and to Dupont. Telephones were connected to the Bunnell Exchange with Billie Graham McIntosh as the telephone operator.

After the timber had been cut from this area, people became interested in agriculture. Northern settlers began to come and build homes. During harvesting season long trains of produce on its

way to market was a common sight.

The school house was built in 1918. It was used for church services on Sunday. Neva Brown Eisenbach was the first teacher and George Wickline was one of her pupils. The Wicklines had moved from Dupont to the house on Section 25 where Mrs. Wickline had a rooming house. Neva roomed there but rode back and forth on "Dummy" much of the time for her family still lived at Dupont. Julia Ferguson Clegg was the second teacher. She lived with the Wicklines until they moved to Flagler Beach.

Turpentine became a big business in Haw Creek. One of George W. Deen's turpentine stills was located at Orange Hammock. My grandfather, James Emmett Deen, operated this still for a time as did Major James Frank Lambert. There was also a turpentine still at Relay (about where the present fire tower is on SR 11 just south of CR 304), operated by David Brown Paxton.

In the late 1800's a stage coach ran from St. Augustine to Daytona Beach, and they changed horses at Relay, hence the name.

Korona

Polish immigrants in Chicago, Detroit, and other cities were the original settlers of this new town. Before leaving for Florida, a committee was formed, raising \$1,000 to build a church in Korona. "God, Country and Honor" was their traditional motto. Their pioneering spirit and tremendous desire to find a new life in the south spurred them on.

The first 35 families arrived early in 1914, including members of the Stupecki, Waszewski, Strach, Trojanowski, Mazurewicz, Cyzycki, etc. families. They began building their homes and a duplex home for their priest, Rev. Father Andrew Baczyk. Part of his home later became their first post office, and the highlight of the day was waiting for the Florida East Coast local to drop off the mail pouch.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF FLAGLER COUNTY *(continued from Page 2)*

Izydor Waszewski was awarded the contract to build the church and the first Mass was celebrated with all the pomp and ceremony they could arrange. Mary Frankowiak – Miss Mary, as she was affectionately called – played the organ, sang the Mass and decorated the Altar for many years. Miss Mary died in 1968 and is buried in St. Mary's Church Cemetery, Korona.

Poor drainage, hordes of mosquitoes and no roads or farm tools forced some to return to Chicago. Others stayed on to eke out a living. Slowly the dense vegetation disappeared; more homes began dotting the countryside. Potato and vegetable crops helped build the economy of Korona. In later years many of the residents went into the poultry raising business.

More families began to arrive, among them the Smigielskis, Mikiulkas, Kozaks, Paseks, and others. The Michons, Novaks, and Pikulas settled in Codyville; the Krols, Kaczanowskis, Mlotkowskis, Kuczewskis and others in Favorita.

In 1926, a new landmark was added to Korona. The White Eagle Hotel was erected by the late Barney Trojanowski. He had quarters for his family and rooms for tourists on the upper floor. On the ground floor was a grocery, feed store and a real estate office. Later, the entire first floor was turned into a beer garden with a large dance floor. Here, for many years, dances were held Wednesdays and Saturdays. Polish people from all over Florida gathered to celebrate all the major holidays. Church suppers and club dances made this the gathering center of the area. This building was torn down in 1959 to make room for fourlaning U.S. 1. The present White Eagle Bar in Korona is very near where the original White Eagle was located.

The St. Christopher's (now out of favor with the church) Shrine next to the old church was built when Rev. Fr. C. Hoffman became resident pastor. His personality and drive made friends for him all over this section of the state. The Shrine was

his gift to Korona and to all motorists who would come and pray to the Patron Saint of travelers.

St. Mary's Parish was attended spiritually by the Redemptorist Priests from New Smyrna Beach until 1954. That year the parish was given to the Diocesan Priests of St. Augustine.

Lake Disston

Lake Disston is located in the extreme southwest section of Flagler County. It was named after Hamilton Disston (1844-1896) of Philadelphia, a real estate developer who purchased four million acres of Florida land in 1881. The transaction was reported as the most land ever purchased by a single individual in world history.

About 1924, while roaming the woodlands in search of pleasure and sport, a guest from the north (I have been unable to find his name) came upon this alluring spot in our county and immediately transformed the surroundings into a paradise for sportsmen. Buildings now gone and made of logs retained the rustic atmosphere and made it one of the foremost show places in the vicinity.

There is a public boat ramp on this crystal lake; however, most of the land around the lake seems to be privately owned. You can reach the lake by taking SR 11 south out of Bunnell to CR 304. Take 304 west to CR 305, then 305 south to CR 305A.

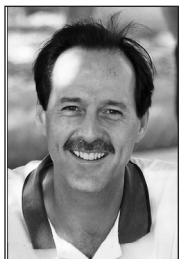
(More **Flagler County** history in next issue)

PCHS Membership

It's not too early to renew your membership for 2011. Remember, Single – \$10; Family –\$15. Best bargain in town. Join or renew today and cross it off your "To Do" list (or even your "Bucket" list).

The Role Tennis Played in the Development of Palm Coast

(continued from front page)



Dave Neuhart

assumed management and operational control of the Players Club in August 1998. Initially, PBI made a sincere attempt to grow tennis memberships. They offered a wide variety of programming options including adult and youth instructional clinics. But with new management came operational changes and the end to many of the special social and community service events. Management also decided to cut back on the number and scope of special exhibitions and USTA/FTA-sanctioned tournaments that had been hosted at the Players Club. Burwash did continue to promote the men's 25 and over and women's 25, 30, 75, 80 and over national clay and grass court championship tournaments. However, it was clear to everyone, and particularly to resident members of the Players Club, that Lowe Enterprises was more interested in promoting the hotel as a destination golf resort than a tennis destination or a vital community resource. Of all of the changes that had taken place at the Players Club, in the long run, it was the atmosphere that changed most.

Considering the investment that would have been required to address many recurring maintenance problems, Lowe decided to get out of



Fate of the abandoned Players Club

the tennis resort business. In 2003, the Players Club was sold to the European Village Corporation. At the time of the takeover, corporate leaders retained the services of PBI and stressed their

intention to make the Players Club the number one tennis facility in the country. But leadership's actions and investment were not equal to their rhetoric, and the facility quickly began to fall on hard times. Anticipating the ultimate demise of the Players Club, concerned tennis players from across the community met on September 23, 2003, at the Community Center to explore alternatives. Encouraged by the large enthusiastic turnout, the organizers prepared and approached city leaders with a plan for a public/private tennis facility financed as a joint venture. Although that plan did not come to fruition, that committee prepared the political groundwork necessary for the acceptance of a proposal made by the Friends of Tennis two years later.

In an effort to maximize profits, fees were increased while maintenance of the facility continued to decline, causing members to leave in droves. The Players Club, once a world class tennis venue and a lustrous jewel in the city's crown of amenities, soon became nothing more than an



Players Club, remnants of past glory days

overgrown, rundown construction site, a parasitic host for the rising edifice being built next door by Peter Rohr and associates. Where once-manicured lawns existed and lush tropical plants and magnificent oaks accentuated the beauty of an idyllic tennis setting, piles of construction debris and trash proliferated and refuse attacked the senses. Two courts were actually torn up and excavated in order to provide sufficient fill for

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The Role Tennis Played in the Development of Palm Coast

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the construction needs of the European Village’s owners!

In 2005, the need for a public clay court facility reached a crescendo when the owner of the Players Club reneged on members’ contracts and gave up any pretense of staffing or maintaining even a limited number of courts for play. On August 16, 2005, a small group of tennis friends met to organize and take action to address the deplorable and deteriorating situation. The mission of this group of nine players was to reignite interest in the game and develop a plan to convince city leaders of the necessity to construct and manage a public clay-court tennis center as a community resource. This steering committee became the organizing nucleus of a community tennis association that became known as the Friends of Tennis.

The Friends of Tennis developed a strategic plan that culminated in the Palm Coast City Council’s approval of Phase 1 of a plan to construct a ten hydro-grid court facility with a temporary office. This initial phase was part of an overall three-phase site plan that included the eventual construction of a players’ facility and 20 courts plus a stadium court for community events and featured matches. Groundbreaking for Phase I took



City manager Kelton and members of PC City Council break ground for the new Tennis Center

place on January 16, 2007. The Tennis Center was opened to the public on a fee-for-play basis



Pros at Tennis Center Grand Opening Exhibition Match – (from left) Ken Obermeier, Mislav Hizak, Tom Gullikson, Brian Gottfried, Scott Melville, Malivai Washington

and officially dedicated on November 10, 2007.

In keeping with tradition, Tom Gullikson, Mal Washington and other guest pros played an exhibition match to celebrate the grand opening. Today, the Palm Coast Tennis Center is a vibrant



Alena Dvornikova and Ken Obermeier

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The Role Tennis Played in the Development of Palm Coast

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and highly active facility that operates under the leadership of Ken Obermeier, Tennis Superintendent for the city, and Tennis Supervisor Alena Dvornikova. There is a wide variety of programs available to members and the public including individual tennis lessons, clinics, league play, social play and special social events that feature exhibitions, round robins, and tournaments. Recently, the center hosted two successful tournaments and has been recognized by the USTA as an "Outstanding Tennis Facility." This prestigious national award will be officially presented at the USTA's annual fall meeting in New York City.



Recent tournament play

Because the game is a social as well as competitive sport, participants are always ready to actively support tennis players at all ages and levels of play. The history of tennis in Palm Coast documents the willingness of players to volunteer to provide community service, organize and work to improve facilities, and provide opportunities for those who are returning to the game or just beginning to learn the sport. That was true for all those volunteers who joined together to organize the Palm Coast Tennis Association in 1974 and later for members of the Friends of Tennis who assumed that organizing role in 2005.



Friends of Tennis volunteers working on tennis skills with youth at the Teen Center



Drawn together by the love of the game, tennis players in this community continue to strive to see Palm Coast resume its rightful place as a premier tennis destination. Forty years ago, there were no tennis courts in the greater Palm Coast area; today there are 93 courts located at 21 existing tennis facilities. This dramatic growth should make it clear that tennis played a large and important role in this community's development. As this city grows, so will the number of residents who will want access to quality tennis facilities and programs. Like ITT's willingness to invest in Palm Coast's amenities, the city's willingness to invest in Phase 1 of a first class Tennis Center will continue to pay great dividends because of the quality of citizens who have been and will continue to be drawn to live and contribute their talents and industry in service to this community. Right from the early stages of community devel-

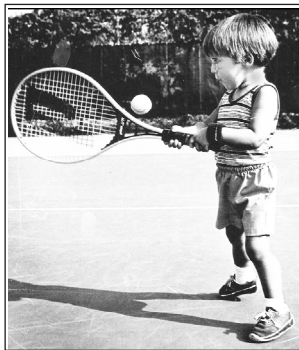
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The Role Tennis Played in the Development of Palm Coast

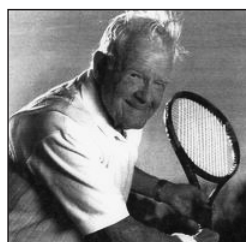
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opment, ITT's planners recognized the important role a tennis facility plays in providing a social hub where members can join together to develop a "sense of community spirit." That's why ITT invested in tennis amenities in every enclave they built from 1970 through 1995. They also understood that by attracting tennis players they would be attracting citizens who would become vital partners in creating a more vibrant community.

From this brief review of the history of tennis in Palm Coast, it should be obvious that the game of tennis served as a magnet in attracting residents and tennis enthusiasts to the community. Beyond that, members of this community recognize the value of tennis as a lifelong sport; many participants on our courts today began at age three or four and many are still playing well into their 80s and 90s. It should also be



Swinging a mean racket at 3 years



94-year-old Clarence Custer

clear from this history that participation in the game played an important role in the formation of community traditions that bound players together and created a sense of community spirit that was vital to Palm Coast's development during the last four decades. This community would have been a very different place had it not been for the vision its founders had in establishing and supporting the amenities that contributed to the community spirit that makes Palm Coast so very different from neighboring cities. For these and many other reasons, the City of Palm Coast must continue to invest in quality facilities and programs and

continue to build on the strong tradition of tennis in this community. If we do, we will continue to attract active, enthusiastic residents to this city. In that process, we will also attract dedicated citizens who will work to build a stronger more vital city and make it a better place to live for all those who elect to reside here.

~ ~ ~

Since 2005, I have been compiling artifacts related to the history of tennis in Palm Coast. Unfortunately, some of the information vital to that record is incomplete or is completely missing. In my effort to piece together an accurate record of the past 40 years, I'm asking for your help. If you have information relevant to the history of tennis, please contact me, George Libonate, at Galcoiv@yahoo.com. Your help will be greatly appreciated.



Palm Coast officially opened on October 29, 1970. A 40th Anniversary Celebration will be held on October 28, 2010. Save the date! Art Dycke

For Sale

IMAGES OF AMERICA: PALM COAST and ALAN SMOLEN: FATHER OF PALM COAST, 1975-1985, both by Art Dycke, Palm Coast City Historian, can be purchased for \$21.99 and \$15, respectively.

Contact Art Dycke, 446-8636, for additional information.

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The City of Palm Coast Historical Society
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Thank you, History Lover



The City of **PALM COAST** Historical Society

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