

INDOOR



Newport Tennis Club

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Jim Block*

What's so great about tennis on a clay court? Ask members of the Newport Tennis Club and you will hear them rave. The clay surface is easier on the joints. The ball bounces a bit slower allowing for a more controlled game, emphasizing well-executed strokes rather than just a serve. In addition, a player can check the mark to insure that a correct call was made on a ball hit close to a line.

Outdoor clay tennis courts abound in New Hampshire, but indoor clay courts, like those at the Newport Tennis Club, are not common in this area — or even elsewhere in New England.

In the early 1980s, when Newport area tennis enthusiasts often played matches on the public courts just beyond the high school, there was a demand for court time. The proverbial seed was planted for a private club when dozens of folks got together for the Wimblesmarsh tournament. The tournament was organized by Paul Krause, a founding member of the yet-to-be-formed Newport Tennis Club.

Wimblesmarsh ran for approximately six years, and used private and public courts for the matches. The name was coined from Wimbledon, of course, and “marsh” for Marshall Friedman, whose court was one of those used for the tourney. It was during this time



that participants began pondering the formation of a private tennis club where playing tennis on clay could take place year round. By 1991 this speculating was changed to building an actual facility on the property formerly owned by Dartmouth Motors' proprietor Marshall Friedman.

Founding members designed a building improving on other facilities they were familiar with. As a result, the Newport Tennis Club saw its first game played in August of 1991 in a steel

Butler building housing two clay courts, two locker rooms, viewing balconies, and a spacious social room used by members for tennis and non tennis gatherings.

Twenty years after its founding, the Newport Tennis Club has about 100 voting members. Several membership levels are offered: an equity membership which includes a single lifetime fee and an annual maintenance fee; an associate or trial membership, which is available for two successive six month periods;

More Information

The Newport Tennis Club is located on 237 North Main Street in Newport. Learn more at www.newporttennisclub.org

and a three month summer membership. All memberships include virtually unlimited court time with no additional hourly fees or the requirement for block or contract time.

John McCrillis, one of the founding members, comments, "This is not a commercial club."

"It is member owned and no one is trying to make a profit," says Jack Andrews, member of the board. "The fees are set to cover the expenses, which are maintenance, taxes and utilities."

"Access to the court is available to members 24/7," Betsy Boege, board member and membership chair, points out. "Reserving court time is easily done by phone using a local business answering service."

Whatever amenities the club offers, the conversation always comes back to clay, and the members are proud of that. As for maintenance, the sweeping of the courts and cleaning of the lines is done as players finish up their sets. Every four to six weeks, the courts are professionally groomed. And to keep the clay playing surface in the best condition possible, an annual reconstruction and leveling of the courts is done.

In the last few years, Newport Tennis Club has reached out to the community through the Towle School Winter Program. While some kids choose to skate, ski or snowboard, about 20 students from grades 5 and 6 make their way to the tennis courts on five winter afternoons. Using racquets provided by the United States Tennis Association, they begin the new adventure of learning tennis.

"With that many children," says McCrillis, "it was a challenge to get them all playing at the same time." But resident tennis pro Barry Schoonmaker took charge and made the most of the time and experience for the kids.

"I really enjoy coaching young children who have not been exposed to tennis," says Schoonmaker, "and seeing the kids really start to 'get it.'"

Nancy Jachim, who also helped out

with the program, says, "I'm pleased that the club is giving the kids an opportunity that they would not have otherwise — the chance to be introduced to tennis. I like seeing both new and returning students — they're always raring to go!" Jachim also enjoys seeing the students she's taught around town. "It's nice to be remembered and to make connections through the Tennis Club."

Schoonmaker, coach of the Colby-Sawyer College tennis teams, offers group clinics and individual instruction at Newport Tennis Club for both men and women at different levels of play.

One of the programs offered by the club is round robin play. "It's great, especially for new members, who might not know many people or who might not have playing partners," says McCrillis.

As the game was played and perfected indoors in this small New England town, a women's team from



the club has won district titles several times, the New England Championship in 2002, and went on to compete in the national tournament held in Palm Springs. When you drive by the sign at 237 North Main Street in Newport, you'll realize that a volley of tennis balls is bouncing in that building on the hill. And, says Boege, "We're here, we have court time, and we'd love new members." **K**

