

This is part 6 of the NOTL Tennis Chronicles, recounting the story of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Tennis Club at the time of its 50th anniversary celebrations in 2020. Parts 1 through 5 brought us from the beginnings in 1970 through to the preparations for new omni-turf in early 2002.



Irene Wall had been looking after the NTA since 1995, and during most of the first seven years the omni-courts were in rough shape. It's hard to overstate the jubilation she must have felt to see the new courts rolled into place in the spring of 2002. She and Clive Buist were a great partnership, with patient persistence from Irene and skilful managing of the wheels of government from Clive.

The team from Sportexe installed the new surface on some sunny April days, and all was ready for a grand opening on May 4th.

The official ribbon-cutting party consisted of Gary Pillitteri, federal MP; Clive Buist, NOTL parks & recreation director; Irene Wall, NTA president; Lord Mayor Gary Burroughs and Bart Maves, provincial MPP.

The resurfacing was financed with a joint federal-provincial grant of \$48,000 and a matching amount from the Town of NOTL.

Blue skies and sunshine greeted the players who had come to celebrate and enjoy the first day of play on the refurbished courts. It was the third red-letter day in the club's 32 year history, following the building of the courts in 1986 and the building of the pavilion in 1990.

2002

Members : 166 adults + 18 juniors
Fee : \$55/\$70/\$20
Bank balance : \$ 3,425.55





Representatives of all three levels of government braved brisk winter winds Thursday to announce a grant of \$24,000 from each of the provincial and federal governments to resurface the Memorial Park tennis courts. The total cost of the project, scheduled for completion this May, is \$96,000, with the town contributing the rest.

Aldermen approve tennis court resurfacing

Aldermen approved spending \$40,000 to resurface the town's decrepit Memorial Park tennis courts this week.

More than half of the \$88,950 project has been covered by a \$48,000 Superbuild grant the town received from the provincial and federal governments in February. The town's portion of the bill will come from the parks reserve fund, which is money accumulated from the five per cent parks charge developers must pay.

No one should have the idea any of this came easily. The Superbuild grant had been a year-in-the-making, and when it was approved there was a ceremony at the pavilion to mark the announcement. A cluster of sturdy club members huddled on the snowy courts in February to show their support and applaud the dignitaries.



The removal of the original omni-turf was accomplished by the club members and is included in part 5 of these chronicles.



As the final load of sand was spread on the new omni surface at the end of April, Irene enjoyed a well-earned victory lap.





Opening Day on May 4th included all the attention to detail that Irene was noted for : there were poster displays in the pavilion, along with welcoming food and beverages, both for the morning coffee and for lunch. A variety of prizes had been organized, including 10 passes from the Seaway Driving Range, which had been the beneficiary of the original omni-turf.

The Pro's Welcome Night was held on May 24th, with a free clinic, a mixed doubles round robin and Pam's Pro Shop. And the annual Midsummer Social with pizza & wings for a twoonie was held on June 21st. The season wrap-up saw the same format on August 23rd. As it happens, they were the final events for the team of Irene Wall and Anne Kravchenko. Together, they had successfully managed the club's programming for 8 years, but it was time for Anne to move on. She recommended that Irene interview Kathy Carter about filling the spot.

The membership tally for 2002 included 166 adults (46 singles and 59 couples) with 18 juniors among the member families. We collected \$6,730, of which \$4,736.25 was turned over to the Town.

Photos :

Center : Enjoying Opening Day are Irene Wall, Linda Gordon and Janice Schachtschneider.

Bottom : Irene Wall and Anne Kravchenko



2003

Members : 176 adults, 30 juniors

Fee : \$65/\$80/\$30

Bank balance : \$4,614.41

Now that the courts were in tip-top shape, it seemed appropriate to raise the membership fees by \$10 for each category. Kathy Carter was retained to handle coaching duties, and she and Irene laid out a schedule to maintain the pattern of previous years.

Things ran like clockwork, beginning with a meeting in January. For 2003, joining Irene on the committee were Janice Schachtschneider, John Christie, Bev Lees, Shirley Rednall, Judy Rive and Peter Unger. The brochure was revised and ready for distribution by March 15th. Members received a copy in the mail, along with information from Kathy about lessons. Opening Day was on May 3rd, promoted with one large ad in the Niagara Advance and four mentions in the upcoming events section. There was a second mailing by May 15th, including a directory of members and an Events-to-Member newsletter detailing the Pro's Welcome Nite on May 30th, and the Twoonie Mid-season Social on July 4th.

Members received phone calls in mid-August, inviting them to an End-of-season Social on August 22nd. It had become traditional to add watermelon to the menu along with pizza and wings. Attendance averaged about 25 members and the events were always well-organized and enjoyable.

There had been issues with the lights from the start of their installation in 1986, so now that the omni surface was in good shape, the lights became the area of greatest concern. There was always something!

Membership included 40 singles and 68 families, for a total of 176 adults. There were 29 children among the families and one additional junior player. We collected \$8,195 and presented \$5,703.75 to the Town.

We donated \$200 toward the building fund for the new arena.



Historic donations: John Wiens (right), chairman of the New Arena Fundraising Committee, was at the Niagara Historical Museum to thank several locals for their donations, including (rear) museum curator Clark Bernat, Betty Steele from the NOTL Lawn Bowlers, Irene Wall from the NOTL Tennis Club and Ed Peterson, also of the Lawn Bowlers.



Kathy Carter became our teaching pro in 2003.

2004

Members : 197 adults, 19 juniors

Fee : \$65/\$80/\$30

Bank balance : \$6,229.17

It was Irene Wall's 10th year as leader of the NTA, and thus very appropriate for her to be recognized by the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake with a volunteer achievement award. The citation noted : *Irene loves the game of tennis, and her love shows in her dedication to the sport and the association.*"

2004 rolled on with the same attention to detail that was Irene's trademark. There was some discussion about adding a hitting wall to the courts, as the Rotary Club had sponsored one at the Rye Park courts, but no action was taken. We contributed \$100 to the costs of lens cleaning for the lights.

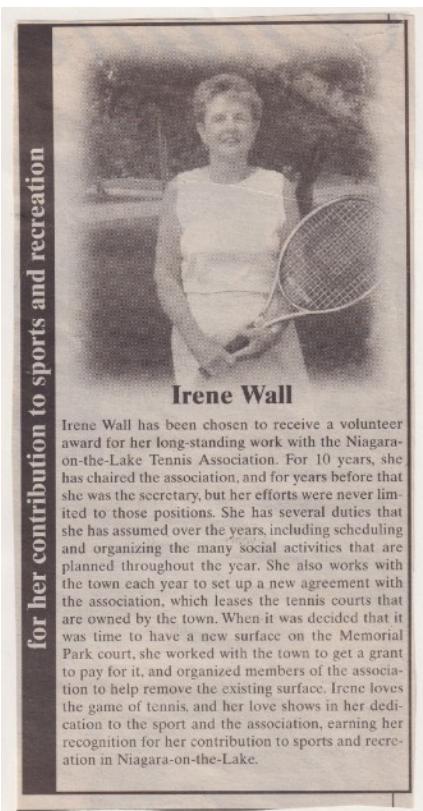
As she had done in 2003, Kathy Carter offered lessons for kids during July and August. Families could register for sessions that were one hour per day for a week, at 3:00, 4:00 or 5:00.

The club's schedule followed the familiar pattern of Opening Day, Pro's Welcome (with Pam's Pro Shop), the Twoonie Mid-season, and the End-of-season Member Appreciation event. Opening Day always included prizes : a draw for a membership refund from among all those who had registered early, and two draws for tennis lessons with Kathy.

We were informed by the Arena Fund-Raising Committee that we had been allocated a section of the trophy case at the new arena to display a trophy, plaque or photo.

Membership included 69 singles and 64 families for a total of 197 adult players. There were 16 children among the families and another 3 registered juniors. We collected \$8,890, and for the first time since 1993 we presented our agreed maximum of \$6,500 to the Town.

In the photo : Marlene McCarthy, Bev Lees, Gillian & Vittorio Venturi.



2005

Members : 211 adults, 37 juniors

Fee : \$65/\$80/\$30

Bank balance : \$ 7,931.05

Irene had begun her leadership of the NTA with a celebration of the club's 25th anniversary. Now it was 10 years later and a celebration of the 35th anniversary was in order. The festivities were to be centred on the annual Pro's Welcome Nite, scheduled for June 3rd. The theme was "prizes-prizes-prizes".

Pam Seitz donated a tennis racquet for a draw and offered that Pam's Pro Shop would also gift each player with a can of tennis balls. Irene canvassed many merchants and received plenty of support. The bountiful prize table gave the event a very festive air and it was a joyful thing to have 80 members in attendance for the big night. Benny Sauter catered with beautiful baking, while Kathy Carter organized the on-court activities.

At the end of the season, we had registered 69 singles and 71 families, for a total of 211 adult players (the highest number since 1991) and 37 juniors. We collected \$9,870 and once again presented \$6,500 to the Town.



Ready with the coffee on Opening Day - Bev Lees, Irene Wall, John Wall, Peter Unger.

Members since 1970 - Bev Lees, Marlene & Danny McCarthy, John Wall, Aline Whittaker





35 Anniversary Tennis Association
JUNE 3 2005



Pam Seitz from Pam's Pro Shop gave us wonderful support for many years.

Kathy Carter was the ringmaster.





Benny Sauter created memorable pastries and festive treats.



Pat Bryan was the lucky winner of a new racquet, presented by Irene and Kathy.



2006

Members : 175 adults, 22 juniors

Fee : \$65/\$80/\$30

Bank balance : \$10,502.95

It was business as usual as we settled into our 36th season. The committee met in January, as always, with Irene being joined by Janice Schachtschneider, John Christie, Bev Lees, Peter Unger and John Wall. Janice took care of registration and mailings, John was the treasurer, Pete looked after the daytime men's games, while John and Bev had been ready hands since 1970.

Opening Day was May 6th, the Pro's Welcome Nite (with Kathy Carter and Pam's Pro Shop) was June 9th, the Twoonie Midseason Social was on July 14th, and the End-of-season Member Appreciation was on August 25th. We had become expert at doing pizza-wings-and-watermelon. Kathy continued to offer lessons of all kinds, and had week-long sessions for kids during the summer months.

The main comments at the meeting concerned the continuing problem of the lights. Irene researched the installation of the soccer field lights, since they appeared to be well done. A hitting wall was again discussed, but to no resolution; the Town's wall at Rye Park had not worked out well.

Annual expenses (approximate) through these years included shoe tags (\$160), keys (\$560), mailing and printing (\$325) and advertising (\$150). The social events cost about \$500.

We registered 71 singles and 52 families, for a total of 175 adult players and 22 juniors. A total of \$10,800 was collected, of which \$6,500 was presented to the Town.

It was agreed by the Town that our registration fees for 2007 could be increased by \$5 per category, and agreed by the club that the maximum paid to the Town would be increased to \$6,700.



The most longstanding regular two-court game through these years was organized by Irene Wall, although it was known as "Pat's Tuesday Night Tennis". Above, in 2002, clockwise : Irene Wall, Pat Young, Gill Bryan and Bev Lees.

Below in 2004, standing : Bev Lees, Irene Wall, Rosemary Goodwin, Linda Gordon, Shirley Rednall (with Paula).

In front : Pat Young, Marlene McCarthy and Sheila Hill.



2007

Members : 187 adults, 27 juniors

Fee : \$70/\$85/\$35

Bank balance : \$13,109.89

The 2007 season appeared to be like the preceding years, with one essential exception : at Opening Day, Irene Wall announced this would be her final year as president. For 13 years she had carried the lion's share of the load and she felt it was time for other members to lead the club.

She had the season fully planned and it unfolded as always with Opening Day on May 5th, the Pro's Welcome Nite on June 8th, the Twoonie Midsummer Social on July 13th.

Some problems were brought to the attention of Clive Buist, including the need to re-shingle the pavilion roof (it was leaking) and to seal around the base of the storage space to prevent seeping into the kitchen floor. In addition, the omni courts were described as having "a great deal of damage" with moss growth and ant holes.

By the end of the season, we had registered 85 singles and 51 families, for a total of 187 adult players and 27 juniors. We collected \$11,235 and presented \$6,700 to the Town. Irene signed the Agreement with the Town for the following season, and then her work was, at long last, done.



Marilyn Francis; Bev Lees & Thitima Christopher



ABOVE : At the Rogers Cup - (Back) Rosemary Goodwin, Linda Gordon, Gill Bryan, Pat Young, Sylvia Christie, Irene Wall;
(Front) Shirley Redhall, Tonie Simpson, Bev Lees, Marlene McCarthy.
LEFT : Kathy Carter and Nana Shamba
BELOW : Jerry Kanters, Helmut Hammerling, Rick Bennet, Benny Sauter



05 07 '05

July 11 2008 : Irene Wall Tribute

Fast forward to July 11 2008 : A very special event was held to honour Irene and recognize her contribution to the club for such an extended time. The atmosphere was festive and unreservedly admiring of Irene from start to finish. Many helped with the decorating and setup, including **Gill Bryan, Sylvia Christie, Linda Gordon and Bev Lees.** The refreshments, the bountiful buffet dinner and the celebratory cake were arranged by the matchless **Charlene Juras**, for whom good-enough is never good enough. A full roster of 16 men and 16 women registered for the mixed doubles event, managed by **Anne Kravchenko** and **Shawna Macfarlane.** The gang from **Pat's Tuesday Tennis** took care of the roasting-and-toasting, and had their audience in stitches. **Don Goodwin** was the master of ceremonies, with a gathering of 67 past and present members in full agreement with his praise of Irene's dedication to the club. Before she addressed the group herself, Irene was presented with a "key-to-the-tennis-club", symbolic of a lifetime membership, along with a racquet bag, warmup suit and other souvenirs. Thank you, Irene!





thank
you



Transition to the Road Ahead

On reflection, there were ways in which the NOTL Tennis Club in 2007 was much the same as it had been in 1970. From the start, the format included club nights three evenings a week, and regular annual events about once a month. The major change along the way had been to add morning play twice a week.

This left the majority of time on the courts open and unscheduled, such that a considerable number of players purchased their annual membership in order to access those open times, rather than to participate in the club's reserved times.

But the joy of tennis comes when players develop friendships through shared on-court experiences and après-tennis chats. Some members were successful in forming groups of four, and an occasional group of eight, but a substantial number were finding it difficult to make such connections. During the seasons of 2005-2006-2007, several women members began actively trying to form groups, with Janice Schachtschneider, Sarah Chapman and Charlene Juras leading the way. This led to a pilot project in August 2007, in which all four courts were reserved from 10:00 - 12:00 on Friday mornings in return for a commitment to fill the 16 spots each week. It was a considerable challenge, but was successful and generated a lot of enthusiasm. Upon review of the project with recreation director Clive Buist, he agreed that structured programming could lead to greater participation : more members playing more often and networking with more other members. In order to give it a try, he offered the club the opportunity to program the courts fully, rather than being limited to 18 hours a week. So for 2008, we accepted this responsibility along with a pledge to be welcoming and inclusive in all our endeavours.

Among the pioneers of the Regular Games system, from the top :

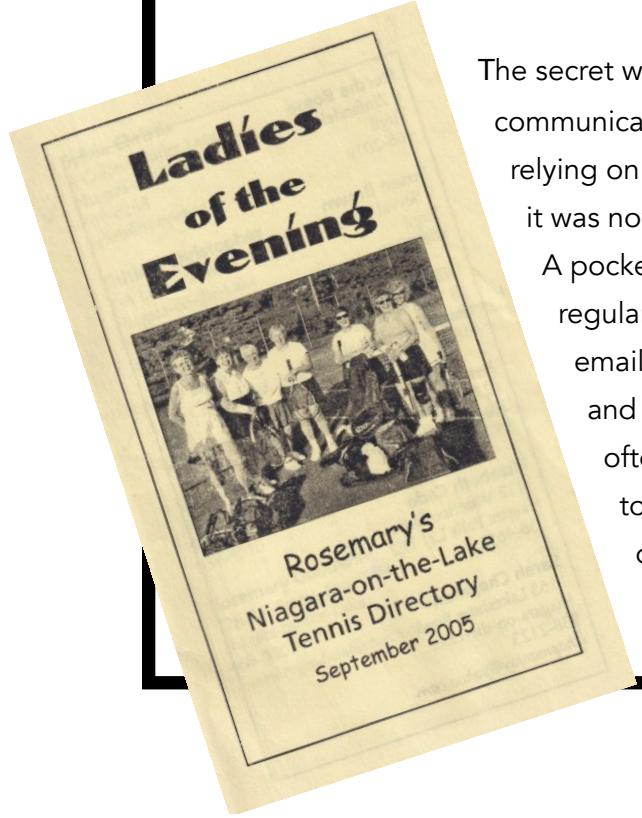
Dorothy Booth, Nana Shamba, Gillian Venturi, Sylvia Christie

Susan Browne, Carole Kanters

Anne Robinson, Thitima Christopher, Mary Pohorly, Lil Cohen

Charlene Juras, Nana Shamba





The secret weapon for organizing group play would prove to be the wonderful communication possibilities brought to us by the internet. Rather than relying on phone calls, often with messages left and phone-tag ensuing, it was now possible to reach everyone at once ...or almost everyone.

A pocket directory of women members interested in finding a regular game included 31 names in 2005, of whom 13 had an email address. By 2007, the directory had grown to 43 names, and included 36 email addresses. Local internet service was often slow and "checking in" wasn't done as often as today, but there were new possibilities and reason for optimism. Onward to 2008!

