

# Local SPORTS

## Tennis club set to open, rules up in air

**Mike Balsom**  
Special to The Local

Last Tuesday's official opening of two shiny new courts at Memorial Park put an exclamation point on the previous weekend's return of tennis in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Parks and recreation manager Kevin Turcotte visited the court Tuesday afternoon, standing by as NOTL Tennis Club president Hugh Dow and club professional Shawna Macfarlane exchanged volleys, slamming brand new tennis balls across nets that had just been installed the day before.

Visitors to the park will notice a striking difference between the new courts and the four older, acrylic-coated cushioned asphalt surfaces, which were installed in 2012.

"We conducted a poll amongst the members as to what colour combination they preferred," Dow explains. "The two choices were the green-on-green of the four existing courts, or the blue-on-green, which tends to be the colour combination that most of the major tournaments are now using. The results came back 70 per cent in favour of the blue."

Though the new blue surface looks different, Dow is happy it is essentially the same as the established green surface that sits next to it.

"Court Contractors (of Mississauga), who built the

courts for us, did a fantastic job," Dow says. "They built the existing courts for us, too. We really wanted to maintain the same type of surface, which is why we were hoping they would be selected (via the town's bid-and-tender process). They build a really good quality court."

With the tennis competition for next summer's Canada Summer Games scheduled to be played at Memorial Park, the blue courts make sense for a tournament of that magnitude.

"We're looking at some possible renovations for the Canada Summer Games (next summer)," says Turcotte. "We're bringing a report in June to talk a little bit more about them. There may be an opportunity to change the colour (of the older courts) to match."

With the selection of Memorial Park as a host site for the games, Turcotte expects the Host Society to provide the town with about \$40,000 for any changes, additions or improvements to Memorial Park.

The new courts opened on schedule, and came in on budget, says Turcotte.

"It's a liquid asphalt installation," and it's kind of specialized," Turcotte tells The Local. "We knew it was going to stretch over two years. We constructed in the fall for the base, and you have to let the asphalt breathe a little bit. We knew we were going to paint it in the spring. We wanted to try to get

them open for summer of '21, and we hit that target."

Dow says club members have been effusive with their praise of the new courts thus far. And all six courts have been busy since the province opened outdoor activities with some restrictions on May 22.

"The feedback has been very positive," says Dow. "We've been pretty fully booked most of the time. Everyone's anxious of course to try them out and to see what they're like."

Under current regulations, only singles games can be played on local courts. According to Dow, the bulk of the action amongst club members usually centres around doubles games.

"The majority of players prefer to play doubles," he says. "There are many people who do not like playing singles. It's a much more demanding game physically than doubles. As soon as we get clearance to play doubles we'll begin our doubles leagues, which are Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings (men's, women's, and mixed leagues, respectively)."

With a boost this year in the number of members, it is expected those league nights will be more popular than ever. Dow says the more than 75 who have registered for the men's doubles league are itching to compete.

"There is some impatience from a number of members," Dow adds, "and a bit of pressure being put on the town to



NOTL Tennis Club president Hugh Dow, with club professional Shawna Macfarlane, and parks and recreation manager Kevin Turcotte celebrate the opening of two more courts at Memorial Park, just in time for the provincial reopening of tennis courts. (Mike Balsom)

relax the rules and allow us to play doubles. We are aware that in Toronto they are allowing the community clubs to play doubles."

Indeed, research into the Gwendolen, Swansea and Central Tennis Clubs in the GTA seems to show those organizations are currently allowing doubles play. Dow adds that doubles play is also being allowed at the Welland Tennis Club, as well as in Niagara Falls and St. Catharines, though The Local was unable to confirm this at press time.

"All of the municipalities basically make their own decisions on things like this," Dow explains. "All municipalities

have different situations and different opinions. That's why you get some inconsistent application across the province. In Welland, they can play doubles, but they can't put people on adjacent courts, apparently."

"I sent (town CAO) Marnie Cluckie the Toronto regulations," he continues, "and asked her to take a look at them. She was very responsive, and said she would study them, and she would table them at the next Emergency Control Group (ECG) Meeting."

That ECG meeting was held Monday morning. At press time the town was awaiting advice from Niagara's acting medical officer of health on

doubles play.

"We're hopeful with that, and obviously we'll be very grateful if in fact there is a change in the regulation," Dow adds. "There will be a stampede to get on the courts, I can tell you."

The public courts at Rye Street, St. Davids Lions Club and Garrison Village Parks are also open for play. Courts in those locations are used on a first-come, first-served basis. These parks are open from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Users are reminded that groups are limited to five people, including members of different households, while maintaining physical distance.