

Local SPORTS

Great turnout for first Tennis Club clinic of 2023

Mike Balsom
The Local

Niagara-on-the-Lake Tennis Club pro Shawna Macfarlane wasn't expecting 30 members to show up for Saturday afternoon's Serve, Rally and Play clinic. But she was more than ready to handle that many enthusiastic players for the first club event of the year.

Macfarlane was prepared with what she told The Local was "a bag full of tricks," games to get the players to shake off their winter rust and introduce new and returning members to the social aspect of the organization, all while refreshing their skills in the game.

"We have a lot of new people in the club this year," she said, "and we're really excited about that. And we do have a few new things happening, too."

That includes two Live Ball member mixer sessions on May 6 and 13.

"Live Ball is an on-court event with music and activities," she explained. "People are moving full speed for about 10 min-

utes, they take a break for about five minutes, then resume again for another 10. It's a competitive side of the game which really eliminates the serve, a faster, fun game with the ball in play 24/7."

As Macfarlane led the large group through a series of activities beginning with some NERF ball warmups, The Local tracked down club vice-president Hugh Dow, who expects membership could stretch past 400 this year with all the new members.

"Obviously last year's Canada Summer Games was a big factor in that," he says. "It attracted a lot of interest in the game and the club. It was a real banner year for us."

Perhaps it was last year's upgrades, including the opening of two new courts and the refinishing of the four existing ones, that brought about the chance for the Memorial Park facility to host two new events this summer.

"We have the Ontario Senior Games on May 25," Dow explained. "We're sharing the duties for this with Welland, who has the 55- and 65-year old groups. We're doing the 70, 75 and 80-plus groups. It's men's doubles, wom-

en's doubles and mixed doubles. Winners go on to the provincial games from here, and if they win there it's off to the nationals."

Dow is also excited about the club hosting an Ontario Tennis Association Rookie Tournament on Saturday, July 15. That will see kids 12 and under getting their first introduction to competitive tournament play. Boys and girls will arrive from all across Ontario for the one-day event.

"Now that we're more of a high-profile club we realize the importance of junior development," Dow says. "We haven't done it before, but with our six courts and our upgraded facilities we felt we are now much better equipped to do it. It may well lead to other tournaments coming here."

And there are further improvements to the club facilities beyond what was done for last summer's big event. New lights were added to the pavilion, motion detector lights were added to the courts, and a new pad at the north end of the courts was poured. The current bleachers on the west side will be moved there, while a new set will be in-



Shawna Macfarlane gives some instruction to the full group Saturday. (Mike Balsom)

stalled in its place next to the pavilion. All of those changes have been funded by the club.

Marilyn Francis, this year's club president, looked over at the great turnout of Macfarlane's clinic, pointing to it as an example of the value of joining the club rather than just playing on the town's public tennis courts elsewhere.

"There's a huge difference," she said. "Here, people can meet other people who play tennis. You can find people to play at

different levels, whether you're a beginner, intermediate or experienced player. And we offer lots of different organized events."

Dow said almost 100 have signed up for men's nights on Mondays. Ladies night is Wednesday each week, while Friday night is for mixed doubles.

As well, Macfarlane will be running a strong youth program this summer on Wednesday evenings and the club is considering hosting a summer camp for kids

some time in late July.

"I think it's our earliest start ever," Dow said Saturday. "Much different than last year, when so much rain forced us to push our first day back a number of times. The weather has really cooperated this year."

Membership prices run from \$40 for students under 18 years old to \$170 for an adult membership. The family price is \$340. For information visit niagaratennisclub.com.

Golf course in good shape for opening

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pleased with the feedback they had received from the grounds crew prior to the scheduled

"It should make things much more smooth," Vant adds. "It should limit calls to the pro shop,