

Pickleball

continued from page B1
and fracturing his arm two years ago, then breaking his finger more recently, his daughter forbade him to continue at tennis.

"We saw people playing Pickleball on the courts at VMI and she told me to try it," said Valko. "Then last Christmas I ordered them a Pickleball net for a court on our driveway and my son in law drew the lines in. I started teaching my [10-year-old twin granddaughters] how to play and now, they're better than me."

In addition, his other daughter Erin also plays, as do two of her three children, the youngest of whom is only 3 months old, but Valko assures everyone that "he'll be playing by the time he's old enough to walk."

Bringing The Game Here

Although the game of Pickleball has officially been around for almost 50 years, it only recently came to the local scene, thanks to Alan Bassett, who moved to the Rockbridge area two years ago.

Bassett, a retired mental health counselor, had formerly lived in Virginia for 30 years and wanted to return after living in Colorado for three years. When Bassett first moved

to Colorado Springs to be near his family, he said he began to notice "people playing an odd game on tennis courts."

Bassett, who was also a former tennis player, had torn his calf but still wanted to be physically active as well as meet people so when the players invited him to try it, he became immediately sold on the game.

"It enabled me to remain physically active without causing further injury," he said.

From his experiences in Colorado, Bassett formed the opinion that many players are fanatics about the game.

"We often played outdoors in Colorado during the winter when temperatures were below freezing or slightly above, and with the anticipation of several warm, sunny days, some of us would show up with shovels, brooms and a snow blower to clear two or three courts," he said. "We'd then play for three or four days straight in sweat pants and shirts, shorts, gloves, warm hats and winter jackets to play for two or three hours."

After moving to Lexington, however, it was a different story.

"No one was playing the game here or had even heard of it," he said. "I started putting notices up on bulletin boards at Washington and Lee University and the Lexington Coffee Shop just looking for three other people to play the game. I was practicing against the backboards at W&L tennis courts hoping it would attract attention, but it didn't."

Bassett then found an active Pickleball group at a YMCA in Waynesboro and played there for awhile, until he got a call from a local woman who told him she wanted to learn the game.

Later more people saw his notice. "One afternoon I agreed to meet with Alice [Correll], Sue [McCoy] as well as Rick Kirgis and Sylvia Kirgis," he remembers. "We met at the W&L tennis courts and that's how it all started."

"The next time we started playing at VMI late last spring and we've been in operation ever since," he added.

The fact that the colleges let players use their courts is a good thing, he and the others agree, but they wish they had a public court, or courts, designated as their own.

Instead, they bring tape to mark off the court and lower the tennis net slightly to the correct Pickleball height when they play. They do, however, have use of the W&L pavilion in the cold wintry weather, as well as on rainy days, the rest of the year. The group has purchased their own nets for that venue. Also, the local YMCA has allowed them to play indoors on rainy Saturdays.

'Anyone Can Play'

Bassett, in particular, is aware of how popular the game is elsewhere and would like to see it spread and grow here. He would love to see an opportunity provided for working people and mothers to play in the evenings or during off-shift times. He would also love to see it incorporated into middle and high schools as an intramural or club sport since it provides many of the same benefits for the young as it does for seniors.

"Anyone can play this game," he said. "You don't have to have outstanding athletic ability. It's great exercise, social and a heck of a lot of fun. That's one of its big attractions. It is a lifetime sport - inexpensive and portable."

Everyone agrees Pickleball is appealing for a cardio workout, and for an enjoyable, fun time together, the latter being a special motivator for Heatley after the loss of his wife Esther two years ago.

"I felt a huge gap in my life and at the same time, I discovered Pickleball," he said. "It's only in the last half year, thanks to Pickleball, I really felt I could kind of 'let go' a little bit."

Heatley also said that despite the fact they only play three times a week for an hour or two, it has added a "whole new dimension of social life."

They meet Monday, Thursday and Saturday mornings at 9 at the VMI tennis courts, weather permitting, and one hour later in colder weather. A decision is usually made by 8 a.m. if it is raining about an alternative.

To learn more, contact Heatley at 463-1032 or at rheatley@ntelos.net. Heatley also refers people to the online site for United States of America Pickleball Association or USAPA, <http://www.usapa.org> under "Places to Play, VA, Lexington."



Looking For More Festival Sponsors

Rockbridge Community Festival sponsor Eddie Clowser (left) of Hess & Company and festival sponsor chair Katie Sinnett (right) are looking forward to other sponsors coming forward to help support this year's event on Aug. 23. Over \$250,000 has been raised through the years at the annual festival to assist local charities. To become a sponsor, area residents can contribute at the \$50 (bronze), \$100 (silver), or \$250 (diamond) levels and help increase the amount of contributions from this year's festival. Donations may be made online at www.rockbridgecommunityfestival.org or by mailing a check to P.O. Box 1095, Lexington, VA 24450. The deadline is Aug. 18.

RARA Topic For Retired Teachers

Mary Brown, executive director of Rockbridge Area Relief Association, will be the speaker at the next meeting of the Rockbridge Retired Teachers Monday, Aug. 18, at the Holiday Inn Express. The

meeting will begin at 11:30 a.m. and will be followed by a luncheon at noon.

Brown will discuss the work of RARA in Lexington, Buena Vista and Rockbridge County. Those attending are

asked to bring a monetary donation to help with the purchase of food for families in the community who are in need.

For more information, call Jean Reynolds at 463-5350.

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