

MTC CELEBRATES 50 YEARS IN MARKHAM



OH BABY, YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY!

It was 50 years ago in July that the first meeting of members was held at the old Markham Arena. An ad had been posted in the local paper indicating a new tennis club was being formed at Morgan Park and that interested players should attend. **Founding member Art Wootton**, who had just moved to Markham from Calgary, decided to attend, becoming the club's first secretary, along with **Bev Black** as president and **Dave Field** as treasurer. From there the first two tennis courts were born.

The club thrived at that location until around 1972 when a new subdivision along Wootton Way North allowed the club members to move operations and eventually expand to six courts at its current location in Reesor Park.

Also during the early years, a member-assembled cottage-kit was constructed on the property. Art Wootton recalls the experience in a recent interview: "Member Sam Schneider, who was a builder, masterminded the erection of this summer cottage, and he did it in one day. Sam brought his surveyor's level and leveled up the concrete block footings for the building but we were told by the Town that we couldn't put a permanent foundation in because they might want us to move it, but we could put it on temporary footings. Sam mustered up a crew of worker bees and we put that building up in one day!"

Current Club President, Scott Fraser, recalls his first exposure to the club when he was asked to volunteer on the board back in 1993 by then President

Steve Phinney:

"My wife Kim and I moved to Markham from Edmonton in the spring of 1992, and one of our key criteria for choosing our neighborhood was to be close to a community tennis club", he said. "Markham Tennis Club was the perfect fit. It had a nice cottage-style clubhouse, six hardcourts and close to 500 members. Everyone was so welcoming. We were expecting our first child in the fall of 1992 and wanted to ensure we kept active and enjoyed the summer before things got too hectic. Little did I know that a year later I would be asked by Steve to volunteer on the board as Vice-President! We enjoyed the club so much I couldn't refuse, but to be VP? I was pretty new to the whole club organization, but the way Steve framed it for me, I couldn't refuse." "Don't worry Scott", he said, "Becoming VP is not as bad as it sounds. Basically help us do whatever needs to be done and learn about the organization."

"Well, I took on that role with gusto, and kept my position as VP working side-by-side with many fantastic Presidents for 9 years, including Steve Phinney, Greig Candlish, Gerry Smith and Peggy Garach. By 2002, I was ready to step in and become President, having done every role imaginable at the club except treasurer!"

THE 80'S BOOM YEARS AND AN EVOLVING DEMOGRAPHIC

During the early 80's the club was booming. It had just over 1000 members,

when an adult membership was \$32 and junior membership was \$15. That was the heyday of tennis in Markham and in fact the world. The top three ATP players in 1984 were McEnroe, Connors and Lendl, and for the WTA ladies it was Navratilova, Evert and Mandikova. Tennis was the happening sport and MTC was engaging lots of families and adults with lessons and competitions.

By 1986, John McEnroe, the poster-child for bad-boy tennis, dropped from the rankings and never did return to his former glory days. Others, like Ivan Lendl, Boris Becker, Pete Sampras and Andre Agassi would dominate over the ensuing years. Meanwhile, MTC's membership averaged 450-500 members from about 1992 until 2010. Was this decline in membership coincident with McEnroe's retirement from tennis in 1992? Who knows, but many other factors control the popularity of any sport, including the changing family priorities and demographics.

Wikipedia discusses some of the early history of Markham which may partially account for the tremendous boom the Club had in the late 70's and early 80's. "In 1972, Markham was incorporated as a town, as its population skyrocketed due to urban sprawl from Toronto. In 1976, Markham's population was approximately 56,000."

Markham's population continued to grow rapidly: the decade between 1986 and 1996 saw the population of Markham increase by 51%. At the same time, Markham transitioned from being predominantly white to predominantly visible minority (more than half of Chinese origin). The Ward in which MTC lives, Ward 4, has 46% identified as European origin, and 33% as Asian origin, according to the 2011 Canada census.

NOT ONLY WAS THE CLUBHOUSE NEW, BUT ALL 6 HARDCOURTS HAD JUST BEEN RECENTLY RESURFACED ALONG WITH NEW FENCING, NEW LANDSCAPING, STONE PATIO AND WALKWAY.

consisting of two wheelchair-accessible washrooms, an entry ramp, large storage room, small kitchenette and nice viewing area. An official dedication and opening was made when the Club hosted its first OTA U18 Junior Provincial tournament July 3-8, 2017.

THE CLUB'S REBIRTH: 2015-2018

During this period, membership had been dropping and volunteers were in short supply to manage the day-to-day operations of the club. On top of this, the City had just issued a new Tennis Club Policy and had decided to take over ownership of the clubhouses at its community tennis clubs. A structural assessment was done on MTC's "cottage" clubhouse in the fall of 2015 and was declared unsafe. A special Clubhouse Committee from MTC's membership worked with the City to come up with a viable replacement and financial plan and by Feb 2017, construction began on a new 950 sq ft clubhouse

Not only was the clubhouse new, but all 6 hardcourts had just been recently resurfaced along with new fencing, new landscaping, stone patio and walkway.

In 2017, a new executive was formed consisting of returning and former Past Presidents Scott Fraser and Dave Gervan as well as new board members Kelly McLeod, Dorice Ross and Alison Horne. With such a small board, they quickly decided to enlist the skills of Jeff Lander (Tennis Central, Lander Management Group), a long time MTC friend and Markhamite, along with Richard Nicolson (York Racquets, Rosedale Tennis Club) to help rebuild the club and all the programming.

STRENGTH IN PROGRAMMING

Numerous club professionals have been part of MTC's history and have trained thousands of adults and youth over the span of 50 years. When the club was first formed, volunteer members like Bev Black, Joy Tammela, Lesley Wootton, Jack Carson, Sam Schneider and Jack Cross provided the coaching for the youth. As the years progressed the club brought in certified professionals like Doug Carter, Rory Hunter, Richard Gjewski, Jozef Saferik, Bill Maron, Lana Smith, Roger Hospedales, Mike Neuber and Robert Perri. Member favourites like the Wednesday evening Doubles Challenge and regular Cardio Tennis sessions have been the club's main-stay for years, as are the youth tennis camps in July and August.

With the hiring of Jeff Lander to oversee Club Operations, new tennis professionals were brought in for the summer of 2017 and continue with the club this year: Head Pro David Solc along with assistance pros Lauren Chyppya and Kusal Fernando. Members have been quite positive about their contributions over the first year, and they are connecting well with the membership.

MOVING FORWARD

If the club wants to stay relevant with all the competing activities available to families, the current executive feel it needs to make better connections with the elementary and high schools close to the club. Offering progressive tennis sessions to these many schools in the spring and fall will allow the club to connect with thousands of young children and their parents and hopefully convince a few of them that tennis is a sport worth pursuing, either recreationally or competitively, for health and fitness.

Also in our future is consideration for a winter bubble over the 6 courts to make MTC a year-round tennis facility. There are a number of bubble options in the winter now, but none are close to the MTC neighborhood (closest indoor centres are Angus Glen, Tam Heather, Mayfair Clubs and L'Amoreaux). MTC has had some recent discussions with the City and it is hoped that when their Park & Rec Master Plan is re-forecasted out for the next 10 years that they include bubbles as a viable indoor tennis option for those willing to privately fund and operate a facility in the winter.

