

OTTAWA TENNIS AND LAWN BOWLING CLUB

Continuity from generation to generation at the OTLBC

By Claire Brodie

Laval Fournier, a retired teacher from Glebe Collegiate who taught whole generations of Old Ottawa South children in his day, has been a member of the Ottawa Tennis and Lawn Bowling Club (OTLBC) since the 1990s. Long ago, he made it his mission to nurture a century-old hydrangea that was planted when the clubhouse was built in 1923. Today, the tree is old, gnarled and hollowed out by time; and yet, with Laval’s loving care, it continues to blossom year after year. Laval is determined to keep that hydrangea going as a symbol of continuity at the club.

Continuity – from year to year and generation to generation – is a major fact of life at OTLBC. Some of the older members arrived here as very small children with their parents. They say that many of their earliest memories are of the club, and they are proudly carrying the tradition forward to their own children and grandchildren.

Stephanie McNeely and James Grant are relatively new residents in Old Ottawa South and members of the club, but they too were attracted by a sense of continuity. It is something they

Grove Avenue, is an example of that kind of engagement. He joined the club in the 1950s. During that time, he has been an active player and a tireless volunteer, at one time serving as president. When he stepped down from that role, the board of directors created an award in his name for volunteerism. Dave keeps a scrapbook of his life at the club that contains membership cards for every year dating back to 1960.

Mike Rollo is younger. He also grew up on Grove Avenue, and he joined the club as a child in 2000. An adult player today, he began as an avid junior. He was also an employee in his day, working as a camp counsellor and at the front desk. As a player, he advanced to be a club champion and is now an active member of the advanced adult group. Other members, who joined as singles and have also worked at the club, have married here and are now bringing their babies to the club in carriers. For them, the club is like a great big family.

And, as in any family, the generations intersect. Every Friday, Teresa Beauregard meets her father – he is 93 years old this year – for a game on Court 5. At the other end of the age spectrum, 15-year-old Anja



Laval Fournier pruning his beloved hydrangea in the fall.

PHOTOS BY MORGAN JOHNSON-DUGAY

their own children but as an extended family. The Hart children have been coming to OTLBC since they were little. They learned how to swim here. They play tennis or volleyball and celebrate family birthdays by the pool. His sister, Katie Hart, her husband, Neil McCormick, his parents and the McCormick children are also members. For years, this whole family has been hanging out together at the club, having fun and preserving and building strong, lifelong bonds.

It is all about connection. Maggie

Fawcett and Jen Small went to Glebe in their day, and Laval Fournier was their teacher. Today, they live with their young families in Old Ottawa South, and belong to OTLBC. “We live in this neighbourhood because of the life it offers us, including the tennis community,” says Maggie. “We want to belong to this club forever.”

Claire Brodie is the Event and Customer Service Manager at the Ottawa Tennis and Lawn Bowling Club.



The Grant family eating at the Cameron on the clubhouse balcony.



Jen Small and Maggie Fawcett, friends since high school.

want for their children, and they like the sense of being part of a long and continuing story. “The multi-generation aspect is part of what makes this place so special,” they say. “We feel we’re part of something much bigger than ourselves.” They have felt a part of OTLBC from the very beginning.

There is one club veteran, Robert Yip, who makes it his mission to welcome new members and to introduce them into the life of the club. The idea is to make sure that new members find the kind of experience they are looking for and that they happily engage for the long term.

Dave Fleming, who grew up on

Zimonjic works for the club on court maintenance, while her 13-year-old brother Jakob is a tennis member. He walks down to the club regularly with a basket of balls and spends hours practising. He plays tennis with his peers, of course, but he also regularly partners with people from his father’s or grandfather’s generation who he considers his friends. To encourage this trend, the club organizes a special event where parents put their racquets in a pile so that the kids can choose a grown-up partner at random.

Many members – Kimberly Banks Hart and Matt Hart, for example – experience the club not just with

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OTTAWA TENNIS AND LAWN BOWLING CLUB

Newcomers welcomed at the OTLBC

By Janet Uren

Mariane Arrage and Tracy Turnbull are two relatively new members of the Ottawa Tennis and Lawn Bowling Club (OTLBC). Mariane joined five years ago and Tracy in 2018. Tracy was aware of the club long before she joined. As a student at Carleton University, she used to walk through Brewer Park on her way home. “It reminded me of summer camp from my childhood, and I always yearned to go in.”

In fact, Tracy was already a tennis fan, if not a player. She had travelled to many tournaments and had been “ogling” Björn Borg for years. “I figured it would be awesome to watch local tennis from the balcony of the club and have lunch away from the hustle and bustle.” In 2018 – after quitting smoking and feeling that she needed to get in shape – she took the plunge, literally. “I started with a pool membership because I had not touched a racket in 30 years or so. Then I took a bunch of beginners’ clinics. I loved Colin McAlpin, the club pro, and the way he embraced new players. In 2019, I became a full-fledged tennis member.”

In Mariane’s case, she was already a tennis player when a friend recommended OTLBC to her. She was attracted partly because of the club’s high-quality clay courts – the club has more such courts than any club in Canada – and partly because of convenience, as she lives just 10 minutes from the club. That is why she decided to try OTLBC; she has stayed mostly because of the warm welcome she was given.

“People are so friendly,” says Mariane, and she got involved right away in a system of “ladders.” “Depending on your level,” Mariane explains, “you work through a list of players at the same level over a couple of weeks. If you win, you move up and get to meet new people. It’s great at first for someone who doesn’t know anyone.”

For Tracy, the “ladders” were not her “thing.” She preferred lessons and the

more social context of round robins, bringing a lot of people together to meet and play. “Colin also introduced me to some fabulous players who shared my mindset – fun, laugh-our-heads-off tennis – and Maria and Morgan and all the people on the management side made it easy too. You can contact all sorts of folks through the email and phone numbers that the club keeps.”

The club also has a New Members Day, where long-time members greet the new arrivals, show them around and answer questions. “These members are like ambassadors. They welcomed me and invited me to play with them,” says Mariane.

Since joining the club, Mariane has become an ambassador in her own right, bringing some of her friends and family on board. “My husband is a hockey player. He didn’t want to play tennis, but this year with COVID-19, there was no hockey, so he took up tennis instead. Now he is committed, really passionate,” says Mariane, “and has already enrolled for next year. Hockey is coming back, but he says he has to find time for tennis as well.”

In Tracy’s case, it is horseback riding that competes for time, and she divides her recreational life between the club and a farm where she keeps her horse. These are the two pillars, she says, of a happy, healthy lifestyle. “I’ve become much more confident in my game in the last two years, and I am a lot healthier too!”

Tracy has found a new social life at the club, and, as well as the tennis lessons, clinics and games, has thrown herself into all kinds of activities – the end-of-the-year fashion show, for example, the silent auction and lunch or dinner on the verandah.

As for Mariane, when not on the court, she is an active volunteer. The OTLBC has professional managers in place, working under Executive Director Maria Pierre-Noel. It also depends, however, on volunteer services provided by engaged members. In just five years, Mariane has become one of these, even serving on the board of directors. “I had an



Mariane with two of the club’s welcoming ambassadors.

PHOTO BY MORGAN JOHNSON-DUGAY

opportunity there to see what an excellent job Maria and her team are doing and how committed they are to making sure that the members are happy and safe, especially during the pandemic, when they introduced a really great online booking system.” Mariane and Tracy are both supporters of the club’s current restoration project, which is working towards renovation of the OTLBC’s century-old clubhouse in time for the building’s centennial in 2023. “I want the building, but also the

sport of tennis, to survive for future generations,” says Mariane. “This is such a wonderful place to be outdoors, to be active. I’m inspired to see such diversity at our club – ranging from youth, students, professionals and retirees – and to see how playing tennis builds valuable connections, keeps all of us connected and helps us to stay healthy!”

Janet Uren is a professional writer living in Ottawa.



Tracy Turnbull celebrating the conclusion a safe and fun 2020 season.

PHOTO BY MORGAN JOHNSON-DUGAY



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OTTAWA TENNIS AND LAWN BOWLING CLUB

Performance Tennis, a gathering place for tennis lovers



Gary and Valerie Hawkes have been members of the Ottawa Tennis and Lawn Bowling Club since 2004.

PHOTO BY MORGAN JOHNSON-DUGAY

By Janet Uren

Neighbourhood shops used to double as community gathering places. Mostly that’s a thing of the past, except at one little tennis shop on Leonard Avenue, where the old-fashioned feeling of neighbourliness has returned.

Gary Hawkes lives next door to the business he founded in 2016 at 70A Leonard Avenue and called Performance Tennis. The name signals his commitment to inclusivity in the sport. “I chose the name because it’s for everybody. Everybody wants to improve. It’s not about ‘high performance,’ or ‘low performance.’ And I like that it’s bilingual, the same word in both French and English.”

Performance Tennis was never part of some grand plan, though Gary did have it in mind to follow his government career with some kind of small business. “When I bought the house on Leonard in 2004, it had an annex I knew would be perfect for that,” says Gary. “Otherwise, the business just kind of happened. I started out stringing racquets, and it evolved.”

Like many local business people, Gary has been challenged by the

pandemic. Except in periods of lockdown, however, he has seen increasing demand. “Tennis is one of the sports that people can play safely during COVID-19, so once the club re-opened during the summer” – the Ottawa Tennis and Lawn Bowling Club (OTLBC) on Cameron Avenue – “we were really busy. And it was not just long-term tennis players. New people were trying tennis; others were returning to the sport.”

Gary, who grew up in Winnipeg, was not a tennis player when he came to Ottawa as a young civil servant. “I say I have always loved the sport but, in fact, I didn’t play as a kid. The first time I picked up a racquet was on an overseas trip to West Africa. Some young men at the hotel were hanging around the court, looking for a game, so I tried it out.” He was sold. In 2009, during one of their postings home, he and Valerie joined the OTLBC, where she is just as enthusiastic about swimming laps as he is about tennis.

That was when the idea for a new business began to germinate. “I learned how to string racquets at a Tennis Canada seminar,” Gary recalls. “They used a stringing machine that was new at the beginning of the day and

‘used’ at the end, so they offered it for sale. I bought it and stuck it in the annex. Once I had the machine, people started coming. And I thought, if I’m stringing racquets, maybe I could offer some other tennis-related products and services.”

As a member of the OTLBC, for the last decade or so, Gary Hawkes has made his mark, especially on the junior programs. “I opened my mouth,” he says wryly. “I was playing with Ron Stein, president of the club at the time, and I looked around and saw mostly older people on the courts. I said, ‘There aren’t many children, are there?’ And he said, ‘You’re right. Why don’t you do something about it?’”

It turned out that the time was ripe for a new appeal to juniors, with more and more families with children moving into Old Ottawa South. As well, it was a time of building excitement around tennis, with more television coverage and some real stars emerging nationally. There was also the intrinsic appeal of tennis, with families always looking for something they can do together. “And some parents are looking for a safer alternative to hockey.”

The challenge at the club was to develop programs that would serve younger players and encourage families to join. Gary looked to Tennis

Canada to see what they were doing for juniors, and he adapted programs under the heading of “Let’s Play.”

“Partly it’s about the equipment,” Gary explains. “Kids, especially kids under 10, are not strong enough to play with large racquets, so we use scaled-down equipment and a smaller court. We also introduce a lot of fun and games to replace traditional approaches.”

Gary’s efforts have borne fruit, as have those of Jim Fawcett of Hopewell Avenue, who succeeded Gary during his final posting. The result? There are more children at the club now than ever before. “We still have work to do,” says Gary, “but we have made real progress.”

Gary Hawkes is a happy kind of shopkeeper. He has fallen into the right kind of business, at the right scale and in the right neighbourhood. “I love what I’m doing. The shop, and also the club, are the main part of my social life now,” he says. “People come into the shop, and we chat, sometimes about tennis, sometimes about other things.”

It sure looks like the old-fashioned shop – a kind of neighbourhood gathering place – is back in Old Ottawa South.

Janet Uren is a professional writer living in Ottawa.



Gary Hawkes stands outside his tennis shop at the corner of Leonard and Hopewell, where his love of tennis has morphed into a small neighbourhood business.

PHOTO BY VALERIE HINDLE



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OTTAWA TENNIS AND LAWN BOWLING CLUB

Old Ottawa South – the “promised land”

By Janet Uren

Introducing Andy Jonynas, a resident of Old Ottawa South for 20 years and a dedicated member of the Ottawa Tennis and Lawn Bowling Club (OTLBC).

“When articling for my CPA’s in the 1970s,” says Andy Jonynas, “I surprised myself by the number of hours I could work, and that I actually got the designation. Accounting was not my best subject in university, but I was mystified by its complexity and drawn to it. The work ethic got engrained.”

As a newcomer to Ottawa in 1980, Andy was at a loss how to use his spare time. Then he discovered tennis. “The day I first played on a public court I decided this was a project that I could work at for years. To my surprise, by joining the OTLBC, I got decent at it.” He also made friends at the club, and there he met his wife, Pavla.

In his first year at the OTLBC, Andy was living in Aylmer, even though he spent much of every summer day in Old Ottawa South. “In my first year, I commuted. But each apartment and house thereafter was closer to the club. Finally, we moved to the ‘promised’ land, and now we live on Sunnyside, less than two kilometres from the club.”

Tennis is not the only sport that Andy practices. “The OTLBC had a profound effect,” he explains. “As my confidence in the sport grew, it made me explore other interests.”

Finding the winters long without tennis, Andy took up cross-country skiing. At first, he could manage to skate-ski only about 100 metres before collapsing; A couple of months later, he was skiing 30 kilometres at a time. Being an accountant, he naturally started to keep track of the ground covered. “I am now less than two years away from skiing the circumference of the earth.”

Andy did not stop there. He tried ball hockey and, at age 52, ice hockey, which he started by learning how to skate. Soon he was playing hockey

seven days a week, plus skiing, cycling and indoor tennis. After retiring, he says, he doubled the time he devoted to sports.

Even Andy began to find this a bit extreme. “It started to wear me out, physically and mentally – plus on a rainy day, I felt lost – so I took up piano at age 60. I banged away until I saw progress, and when I did, I wanted more.”

Andy has also become a writer in retirement. “After a trip abroad, I wrote a small travelogue for a few friends. To my surprise, they passed the story onto others. This inspired me to write memoirs about the tennis club, my piano adventures and other things, and now I have a bit of a following.”

It all began with tennis and, knowing what the club has done for him, Andy makes an effort to welcome others who come there, like him, searching for health, happiness and connection. “The club has a soul to it. I remember how intimidated I felt walking into it on opening day, 1980, with my cheap racquet and one hour of experience. So, I really try to make new members feel at home.”

Andy is famous at the club not just for the hours he plays, but for the range of people he plays with; newcomers and old-timers alike, all the way from juniors to seniors.

After 41 years of membership, Andy remains as connected as ever to the OTLBC, and it is not just tennis that keeps him that way. “The club is a village, where often people know what you are going to do before you do it, but, in times of a personal crisis, the community bands together to help.”

During the pandemic, Andy has seen that ethic in practice. “Coming off weeks of shutdown last spring, where everyone’s life had been reduced to an existence, it was so uplifting to see the old faces and that they were happy to see you. COVID-19 was still around, but we didn’t feel it because we were at the club all last summer, even if the programs had to be reduced because of COVID-19.”

What Andy discovered at the start

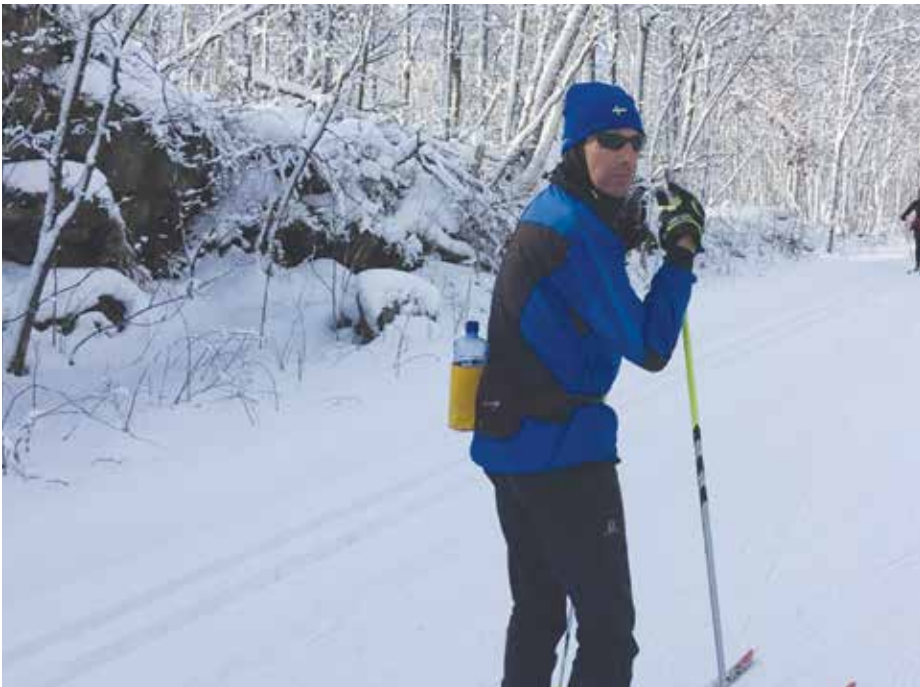


Andy Jonynas’s love affair with tennis began when he joined the OTLBC 41 years ago. PHOTO BY MORGAN JOHNSON-DUGAY

of his career, still applies – that the joy of life comes from finding something difficult to do and working at it: “On a tennis court, I am always trying to figure out what minor adjustments will make me hit the ball harder or get to the ball faster. The use of what parts of the skate blade or which edge in hockey. How the wrist can be used and finger positioning in playing pieces on the piano. If any of this was too easy, I would get bored.”

It all started with accounting. “As I get closer to ‘skiing around the world,’” says Andy, “while out on the trails, I write the story in my head about how the power of numbers pushed me to it.”

Janet Uren is a professional writer who lives in Ottawa.



Andy Jonynas on the ski trail. PHOTO BY PAVLA SELEPOVA

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OTTAWA TENNIS AND LAWN BOWLING CLUB

How to be happy in a pandemic; plant a garden



Last season a dozen people preserved their health and happiness during the pandemic by working as volunteer gardeners at the Ottawa Tennis and Lawn Bowling Club. The gardens are full of tulips this spring awaiting the return of the gardeners and tennis players.

PHOTO BY CLAIRE BRODIE

By Janet Uren

There is an old proverb – “If you would be happy for an hour, brew a cup of tea. If you would be happy for a day, prepare a feast; if you would be happy forever, plant a garden.” And that is just what some Old Ottawa South volunteers are doing at the Ottawa Tennis and Lawn Bowling Club (OTLBC). They are planting flowers. And this year especially – as the pandemic drags on – the garden is helping to keep them happy.

Anne Buchanan who lives in Old Ottawa South has been a member at the OTLBC for 18 years. She is also a gardener – “a potterer in the garden,” she says modestly. Sadly, her garden on Aylmer Avenue is blighted by shade – unlike the wonderful, sun-drenched grounds of the OTLBC.

It is a case of enlightened self-interest. The OTLBC relies on its volunteers who shoulder all sorts of “special” projects – the gardens, for instance. Just as the flowerbeds at the club were beginning to need attention in 2019, Anne Buchanan was thirsting for a big sunny garden to work in. “I approached Maria” – executive director at the club – “and asked if volunteer gardeners would be useful. Then I reached out to other members and now have a team of about 10.”

Teresa Beauregard joined the group last year. She was an aspiring gardener but, having recently moved into a townhouse in Old Ottawa South, she needed a place to learn. Especially during COVID-19, she has found this project wonderfully “therapeutic.” She has especially appreciated the camaraderie and cannot wait to get back to work in 2021, as soon as they open the gates. “It is working with others that I really value, the relationships.”

The theme for the garden comes straight from the club’s slogan – “Your cottage in the city.” “We wanted to create that lush, informal look you see in cottage gardens,” says Anne, “a look of summer profusion, with masses of roses, irises, daisies and black-eyed susans.” Aware of the need for a low-maintenance approach, she has also emphasized shrubs and perennials.

The garden project is a shared learning experience for everyone. Fortunately, one of the club members – Maryann van Buren – is a professional gardener, and she has weighed in with useful advice. The club has also supported them with a small budget for tools, plants, compost, soil and fertilizer, as well as the support of Chris Smith, court and grounds manager. “We do try to be frugal,” says Anne, “and we have had a lot of plant donations” –

including some irises that had special significance for one of the members, as well as some sun-starved transplants from her own garden.

Anne likes to keep the organization simple. “The first year, everybody worked together. Then someone suggested we divide the garden into sections, so that people could have their own piece to look after. That idea has really taken off, especially during COVID, as it has allowed us to keep a safe distance from each other.”

As project leader, Anne does the research and works out the plan for what she hopes will develop into a constantly changing show of colour over the summer. “Otherwise, I let people approach it as they wish. Some like a regular work schedule. Others prefer to work when there’s a special need. Fortunately, there’s a couple of very strong fellows who like to dig.” One is Teresa Beauregard’s nephew, Patrick.


Stephanie McNeely is also a resident of Old Ottawa South, a new volunteer at the club, and a member of the garden project. She is particularly interested in plants that attract butterflies. “I got involved in the David Suzuki Foundation project, seeking public places for ‘pollinator plants,’ such as asters, yarrow and

sedge.” The Rideau River is a “butterfly conduit” and a major pollinator project is underway next door in Brewer Park. Stephanie’s patch at the OTLBC last summer was a small one – “we don’t necessarily want to attract too many bees near the courts but adding milkweed and other native plants is a great way to help butterflies” she says. However, people often stop to say thank you to the volunteer gardeners, and Stephanie always seizes the opportunity to tell them about the Butterflyway initiative.

The garden project is poised to begin its third season, but the pandemic, returning with a vengeance this spring, threw something of a wrench into the works. “We got in under the wire,” says Anne. “Before the club was locked up tight, we weeded the beds, put in compost and got everything ready. Now, the weeds are enjoying a bit of a break.”

The pandemic will end eventually, and one of the first signs in this neighbourhood of “better times ahead” will be the sight of gardeners working happily away at the OTLBC.

Janet Uren is a professional writer who lives in Ottawa.



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OTTAWA TENNIS AND LAWN BOWLING CLUB

Don Armstrong holds the “ladder” for local tennis players



Don Armstrong, member of the OTLBC for 47 years.

PHOTO CREDIT KULANI DE LARRINAGA

By Janet Uren

Don Armstrong has lived in central Ottawa – including Old Ottawa South – for nearly 50 years, and he has belonged to the Ottawa Tennis and Lawn Bowling Club (OTLBC) for nearly as long. Today, the OTLBC prides itself on being “welcoming” and “inclusive,” and Don has played a part in making that true.

In 1974, the Toronto-born Don Armstrong arrived in Ottawa, a newly minted computer scientist from the University of Waterloo, heading for a job with Bell Canada. Though he had worked in Ottawa as a summer student, he was still pretty much a stranger in town. The tennis club came to the rescue.

“I came here first because it is one of the biggest clubs, and it has amazing courts,” he remembers. “But it also attracted me because it was very open. I have played at other clubs in Ottawa, and this one is different. There really is a culture of welcome.”

Tennis is only one of Don’s sports: since he retired, he has also taken up golf, and in winter he hits the ski hill. Still, tennis is a passion, and

he has contributed a lot of time and effort to the sport over the years. At OTLBC, for example, he has been a member of the tennis executive, chair of assorted committees and the organizer of countless games and tournaments. He was also a Tennis Canada Chair Umpire and at various points served on the Board of the National Capital Tennis Association and represented it on the Tennis Canada Officiating Committee.

Since 2004, Don has been organizing the box ladders at the Club. Players are grouped in boxes, each with about five players of similar playing ability, and they have three weeks to play each of the others in their box. Then, depending on how those games went, players move up, down, or stay put for the next round. There are boxes for every level from beginner to expert, so everyone can find their level. Ladders are an excellent way for members of all levels to meet others of similar ability and enjoy some friendly competition, but they are especially helpful to new members.

“Other clubs have ladders, but they are not as big, not as much part of the culture,” Don observes. “Whereas

other clubs may have 20 to 30 people taking part, we have around 160 people on average.”

Don, along with many other member volunteers, has also organized round robins. These are weekly drop-ins, open to anyone who shows up looking for a game. Every half hour or so, the players switch around, and by the end of play have had a chance to pit themselves against several different competitors. The exact format depends on the organizer, but Don likes to start everyone off with others near their playing level, so everyone gets a good game. “It’s really a good way to meet people or to get a game if you don’t have a partner or know other players,” says Don. “And it’s more relaxed than playing in a league where you have to try out and commit to playing regularly.”


Don has a master’s degree in mathematics, and people are always saying that must be helpful in setting up the ladders. “Not at all,” he insists. “It’s more art than science. Of course, it would not be hard if the player pool was static, but there are always people going on vacation, or dropping out for a round, and others joining or returning. Once in a while you also get someone who is winning too easily and needs to jump several

levels instead of moving up slowly. “I start with a formula, but always need to adjust.”


New members enjoy the openness of the club, but they do not always know how much history has gone into creating that welcoming culture. OTLBC was founded in 1881, which makes it the second oldest tennis club in the country. Having been a member of the club for 47 years, Don is deeply aware of the generations that came before him and those that will come after. Therefore, when the time came to restore the century-old clubhouse, he was happy to make a substantial donation, “to pay it forward,” he says.

It is all about community for Don. “OTLBC would not have survived for 140 years without a committed membership,” he explains, “people who understand that the club belongs to us and its future depends on us. That’s what I’m always trying to do as a volunteer – build community.”

Janet Uren is a professional writer who lives in Ottawa.



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OTTAWA TENNIS AND LAWN BOWLING CLUB

How the OTLBC has shaped a family



Camp counsellors in 2012 at OTLBC with Meghan Storey (second from left).
PHOTO FROM THE OTLBC



Meghan Storey and Ben Tomlin met in 2007 at the Ottawa Tennis and Lawn Bowling Club, and later hosted their wedding reception there in 2012.

PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER STEVEN B
PHOTOGRAPHY

By Janet Uren

Meghan Storey, though she is a new teacher at Hopewell School this fall, has history in Old Ottawa South. In summer 2021, she says, her life came full circle. “I realized that as I was dropping my sons off at camp at the tennis club where I used to work.” Meghan came to the Ottawa Tennis and Lawn Bowling Club (OTLBC) looking for a summer job in 2007. What she found was a lot more significant. “OTLBC literally shaped my life.”

It was not tennis that attracted Meghan to the club some 14 years ago, but a job advertisement. “It all happened by chance. I was a student, just finishing a B.A., and I was looking for a summer job. I saw an online posting for front desk and restaurant staff, so I applied and got the job.”

The experience was wonderful, not least because during that first season she met Ben Tomlin. He had joined the tennis club with a friend, his goal

being to further his game. It was a life-changing moment for him as well. He and Meghan started dating on Thanksgiving weekend, and they have been together ever since.

In her second year at OTLBC, Meghan was co-director of the camp program, where – working with a tennis-playing colleague, Matthew Rigby – she was able to deploy her leadership and organizational skills to deliver a highly successful summertime experience for Ottawa children. After that, she worked part-time, filling in wherever she was needed.

Meghan and Ben married in 2012, and they were among the first to recognize the potential of the club for a big and formal wedding reception. Since then, the club has hosted many such events, but theirs was among the first to take advantage of the Great Hall, with its wide verandah overlooking the lawns and tennis courts, as a magical venue.

The iconic photograph of Ben and Meghan standing in wedding garb on the front steps of the Clubhouse symbolizes the role the club would continue to play in their lives as they went on to have children. After working for a couple of years at the club, Meghan did become a tennis player, though with three small boys

under the age of seven, she is now more likely to be seen hanging out at the pool with the kids. “We’ve been pool members since the children were babies. We come down all the time. The boys love it, and during the pandemic it was so important to them socially. They met kids at camp and then ran into them again at the pool.”

The club makes it easy for families. Ben is more actively engaged in tennis than his wife, but when Meghan joins him on the court, they have been grateful for the club’s babysitting program and the play area. Before the pandemic, they used to relax with friends in the Clubhouse while the boys played with other kids or were entertained at Movie Night in an adjoining room. “The club has been a really comfortable place for the family, and we’re really looking forward to the Clubhouse reopening.”

While it may be stretching things to say that the OTLBC is at the centre of their lives, it has been a mainstay over the years. “You know, the club really shaped my life and Ben’s. It’s funny looking back, and you say, ‘Oh yeah!’ Because you don’t really see it at the time, but it changed everything.”

Janet Uren is a professional writer who lives in Ottawa.



For Meghan and Ben’s sons - (left to right), Alfie, Henry and Orson - the OTLBC pool is a social and recreational oasis, especially during the pandemic.

PHOTO BY MEGHAN STOREY



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OTTAWA TENNIS AND LAWN BOWLING CLUB

Our part in preserving an historic neighbourhood
Construction begins
at the tennis club



The clubhouse at OTLBC, now a designated heritage building, opened its doors in 1923 and has been serving Ottawa tennis players for almost a century

By Janet Uren

Ten years in the planning, the restoration and renewal of the clubhouse of the Ottawa Tennis and Lawn Bowling Club (OTLBC) is finally about to happen. With construction being launched at the beginning of September, the first phase of an ambitious restoration plan is now underway. Nine months from now, in April 2022, the first part of a dream will have become reality.

OTLBC, which was founded in 1881, is nationally significant as the second oldest tennis club in Canada, and it was a pioneer in the sport in its day. The Clubhouse on Cameron Avenue opened in 1923 and will soon be celebrating its centenary. Designed by an important local architect, J. A. Ewart, the building is a rare survival from the grand old era of sporting clubs. In 2019, the City of Ottawa awarded heritage designation to the Clubhouse, recognizing it as a cultural and architectural landmark in the city.

Over time, the century-old Clubhouse has deteriorated due to wear and tear and badly needs attention. The club has raised \$1 million towards a \$1.5 million goal for the first phase of its restoration plan and finally has the confidence to move ahead. Phase I of the current project will essentially stabilize the building and address renewal of a large part of the ground floor. Fund-raising will continue to complete the next two phases of the project. Ultimately, the result will be a winterized building that is open to the public.

However, this project is about more than shoring up the foundations and updating mechanical and electrical systems; it is about strengthening

our relationship with the community. OTLBC is proud of the contribution it is making to maintaining the integrity of Old Ottawa South as one of the historic neighbourhoods of the city. As the preserver of five acres of green space, as the steward of a century-old clubhouse and as the manager of a community venue, OTLBC prides itself on being a good neighbour.

OTLBC will always continue to deliver its core mandate and to offer tennis, swimming and clubhouse facilities to its members. With the renewed clubhouse, however, it will also be able to open its doors more widely to its neighbours with programming that addresses physical and mental health as well as culture. New activities might include yoga, stretching workshops, meditation, book launches, lectures and art shows, not to mention an increasing number of corporate events, wedding receptions and anniversary parties.

The journey that has led to the start of construction in 2021 began 10 years ago, when Board Chair Peter

Sutcliffe, Executive Director Maria Pierre-Noel and architect Kris Benes put their heads together and came up with a philosophy of restoration that hinged on redeveloping the clubhouse for the benefit of the community. The philosophy they adopted stood on two pillars – first, preserving what was valuable from past, and second, changing the building in ways that would make it more functional and more inclusive in the future.

None of this vision could have been realized without the hard work of a subsequent chair – William Floch – who led the membership in changing the legal and governance model of OTLBC from private club to non-profit organization. That one fundamental change opened the door to a new relationship with the community. It also made the club eligible for much needed public grants, which Maria Pierre-Noel and Claire Brodie have energetically and successfully pursued. The current chair, Jenny Mitchell, carried the work forward by spearheading an ambitious fundraising program, which will continue through to Phase II and realization of the dream.

This is a complex project, and it has not been lightly embarked upon. We could never have got to this point without the active support, hard work and buy-in of our current Board of Directors. Many intense discussions have taken place during the planning period. The Executive Committee and board members have painstakingly reviewed the feasibility

of the first phase. They are confident that this historic project will be successful, and that it will have a positive impact on both the club and the community.

In so many ways, this project exemplifies community engagement and volunteerism. Current and past members of three different boards of directors have donated countless hours of their time and expertise. Other members of the community – historians, writers, designers, specialty businesses and more – have been inspired to donate a wide range of in-kind services to help make the dream come true.

To manage and deliver Phase I of the project, OTLBC has retained MP Lundy Construction Inc. We recognize that construction can be disruptive, and, to help mitigate any negative impact, we will proactively communicate with our neighbours during the construction period.

OTLBC thanks the Old Ottawa South community for its support, patience and understanding during construction. When the work is finished, we look forward to welcoming you back, as our neighbours, to “Your Cottage in the City.”

If you have any questions about this century-old architectural landmark in Ottawa or would like to offer your support, please visit www.otlbc.com/donate or contact Maria Pierre-Noel at maria@otlbc.com

Janet Uren is a professional writer who lives in Ottawa.



Construction began in September.
PHOTO BY MORGAN JOHNSON DUGAY

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OTTAWA TENNIS AND LAWN BOWLING CLUB

A tennis coach’s philosophy

By Janet Uren

Most mornings in summer, Mykell Reifer is on his bike, heading joyfully for Old Ottawa South where, since 2013, he has been coaching at the Ottawa Tennis and Lawn Bowling Club (OTLBC).

The son of a Canadian and a dual citizen of both Canada and Barbados, Reifer came here as a teenager to attend university. He has stayed - despite the initially brutal experience of winter - to continue his studies and also to bring years of focused effort and excellence as a competitor to the service of tennis players, young and old, in this community.

Reifer was 10 years old when a teacher first put a tennis racquet in his hand, but the boy was already an athlete. His father, an international cricketer, had introduced his son both to cricket and swimming. Mykell was about to discover a new sport.

“The phys ed teacher at my school was organizing a tennis tournament, with other schools coming to compete. She figured I had good hand-eye coordination and had some transferrable skills from cricket, like following and tracking a ball and summoning up short bursts of energy. I ended up winning the tournament. A national coach saw me play and

invited me to try it out at his club.”

Once he started to play tennis, Mykell was “hooked.” One hour a week of lessons and play turned into three hours, then five. Soon, he was playing five hours a day. One of his young colleagues at the club was Darian King, who has since climbed to be 106th player in the world. The two trained together from age 11 and became lifelong friends. Reifer also trained at an American tennis academy as a junior, alongside future professionals Denis Kudla and Frances Tiafoe, at the Tennis Center at College Park (now called the Junior Tennis Champions Center).

For boys like Mykell and Darian, tennis was a world-opening experience, as they and seven or eight other young players began to travel all over the Caribbean and to the United States to compete. They revelled in the joy of their sport. “The main motivation to work so hard,” says Reifer, “was that it was so much fun, and we really bonded as a group.” Those feelings later formed the basis of Reifer’s ethos as a teacher: “the game has to be fun; there has to be joy.”

By 2008, Mykell Reifer was the number one ranked junior in Barbados. The following year, he won the Davis Cup trials in the



OTLBC coach Mykell Reifer.
PHOTO BY MORGAN JOHNSON DUGAY

open men’s category. That year, those trials replaced the national championship. He also had the privilege of representing his country internationally from the age of 14 (2005) to 18 (2009). As a junior, he ranked 779th in the world.

Reifer has been coaching almost as long as he has been playing tennis, three years in Barbados and eleven here in Canada. He began at age 16 as an assistant working with the top juniors in Barbados, and he found that, through teaching, he also was learning. “In coaching you use the skills that got you where you are as a competitor; but coaching also helped me to be a better player, because I had to analyze, understand and express what I was doing to be successful.”

Mykell Reifer has Canadian citizenship through his mother, who was raised in Montreal. When considering post-secondary education, therefore, he looked

north. He wrote to a tennis coach at Carleton University and was encouraged to apply. He was accepted and came to Ottawa, where he has since achieved a Bachelor’s degree in biology and psychology (2014) and a Masters in biology (2017). He hopes to continue into medicine and, with his interest in how the brain works, to specialize in neurology.

Reifer helped to bring back competitive tennis to Carleton when he and a group of friends formed a tennis club that eventually represented the university. One of the members of that team also coached at OTLBC and, when he had to withdraw, he asked his friend to apply in his stead. Reifer was hired in 2013 and has worked seven out of the last eight seasons at the club.

OTLBC has a recreational, rather than a competitive, focus, but Reifer believes he has done something to inspire young players at the club both through his philosophy of teaching but also through exhibition games with the other coach, Colin McAlpin, and with the likes of Darian King, when he came to visit. “The kids came out to watch this player, who has been one of the top players in the world, and it was eye-opening for them.”

It is a long way from Barbados to Canada - some 2,400 miles. It is even longer from that 10-year-old boy with a tennis racquet in his hand for the first time to the tennis coach and aspiring doctor. But every step on the journey has been driven by joy. That is Mykell Reifer’s philosophy.

Janet Uren is a professional writer who lives in Ottawa.



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From:
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To:
Santa Claus
North Pole
H0H 0H0

Dear Santa:

My name is the Ottawa Tennis and Lawn Bowling Club, but everybody calls me OTLBC. I am 141 years old. People say that I am an Ottawa “institution,” because I have lived all over the city – in Centretown and in the Glebe and now for 100 years in Old Ottawa South.

Everybody in the family has been REALLY good this year. We had many new friends coming to join us. It was fun getting to know them and to see how happy they were, being part of our family.

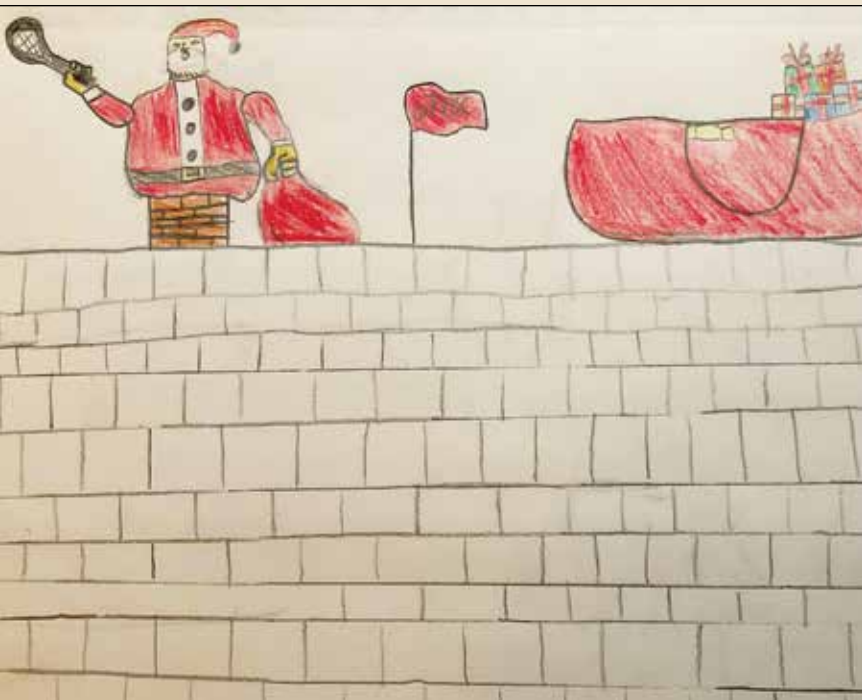
We worked hard to make sure that the family stayed safe, even though we have a pandemic here.

All summer, we couldn’t go inside, but we had lots of fun anyway in the fresh air. We were very careful, and nobody got sick.

People in Ottawa were very sad last winter because they had to

to summer camps, and boy were they happy. We even had beach volleyball and a new volleyball league specially for youth!

Santa, this is what I wish for Christmas.



stay home, and they were lonely. Then it was spring, and they came to play tennis at the club. Some wanted to learn how to play, and they said it was easier than they thought. They also splashed and swam in our pool when the days were hot. Hundreds of kids came

A lot of people helped us get the money to fix up the clubhouse, because it is really old, and now we are working on it, but we need some more help – not just to make sure it doesn’t fall down but to make it nice so the neighbours will want to visit. So, if you could send

us some new friends to help out, I would be really grateful.

I would also like good weather next year, so we can swim and play tennis and volleyball and have fun at camp.

But most of all, I would like COVID-19 to go away, so we can go back to normal with lots of people in the clubhouse, talking and having a good time.

I know that you and your elves have been working really hard getting ready for your trip on Christmas Eve, and I just want to say thank you.

It is okay to land your sleigh on the roof, but please don’t come down the chimney this year. They are working on the clubhouse, and it isn’t safe. We will leave some cookies for you and your reindeer in the trailer out front of the club.

Next year, when the clubhouse is open again, you can come down the chimney, even though we want our neighbours to come through the front door! We’re hoping they’ll be coming to have dinner here or to celebrate their birthdays or just to have fun!

Thanking you very much and wishing you a good trip.

Yours truly, OTLBC

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