

Tennis, Anywhere?

New McCall tennis club hopes to make public courts usable again

BY GEORGE SEEDS

For The Star-News

A new tennis club has formed in McCall that promises to bring together players while helping to renovate neglected public courts.

The club is off to a good start with the granting of \$14,500 in local-option tax money tentatively pledged by the city of McCall.

The McCall Tennis Club started as an informal discussion between Al Butler and Lea Williams while they were playing tennis a few weeks ago.

"We thought about putting together a group, initially for the purpose of trying to get a cluster of public courts available," Butler said. "We wanted to have an opportunity for adults to play, but we also really wanted to get some tennis going for kids too."

Butler, who played tennis competitively in high school and college, was also a superintendent of public schools in Michigan before retiring to McCall last year.

An avid tennis player and mother, Williams met Butler at a school meeting at Payette Lakes Middle School last month.

The connection came when Butler realized "She said something about tennis at the meeting, so I asked her about it afterwards and that's when I realized I knew her husband - we snowboarded together all the time," Butler said.

The three decided to get together regularly to play tennis.

"I told Al (Butler), 'You should be the president,' and he said 'fine, but you have to be the vice president,'" Williams said.

The first order of business was to find courts everyone could use. While there are more than a dozen private courts around McCall in various subdivisions and condominium complexes, there are only four public courts.

Those courts are adjacent to McCall-Donnelly High School off Mission Street. However, those courts are in serious need of renovation.

Years of neglect

After years of neglect, the surfaces show large cracks that sprout weeds.

The two courts that are in the worst condition were used until last year as a temporary skateboard park. Part of the fence is missing and the surface is worn to the point of being only marginally playable.

Williams learned from M-D officials that public use of the courts is limited to after-school hours unless specific permission is granted. Once the school year ends in June, the courts remain open to the public all summer.

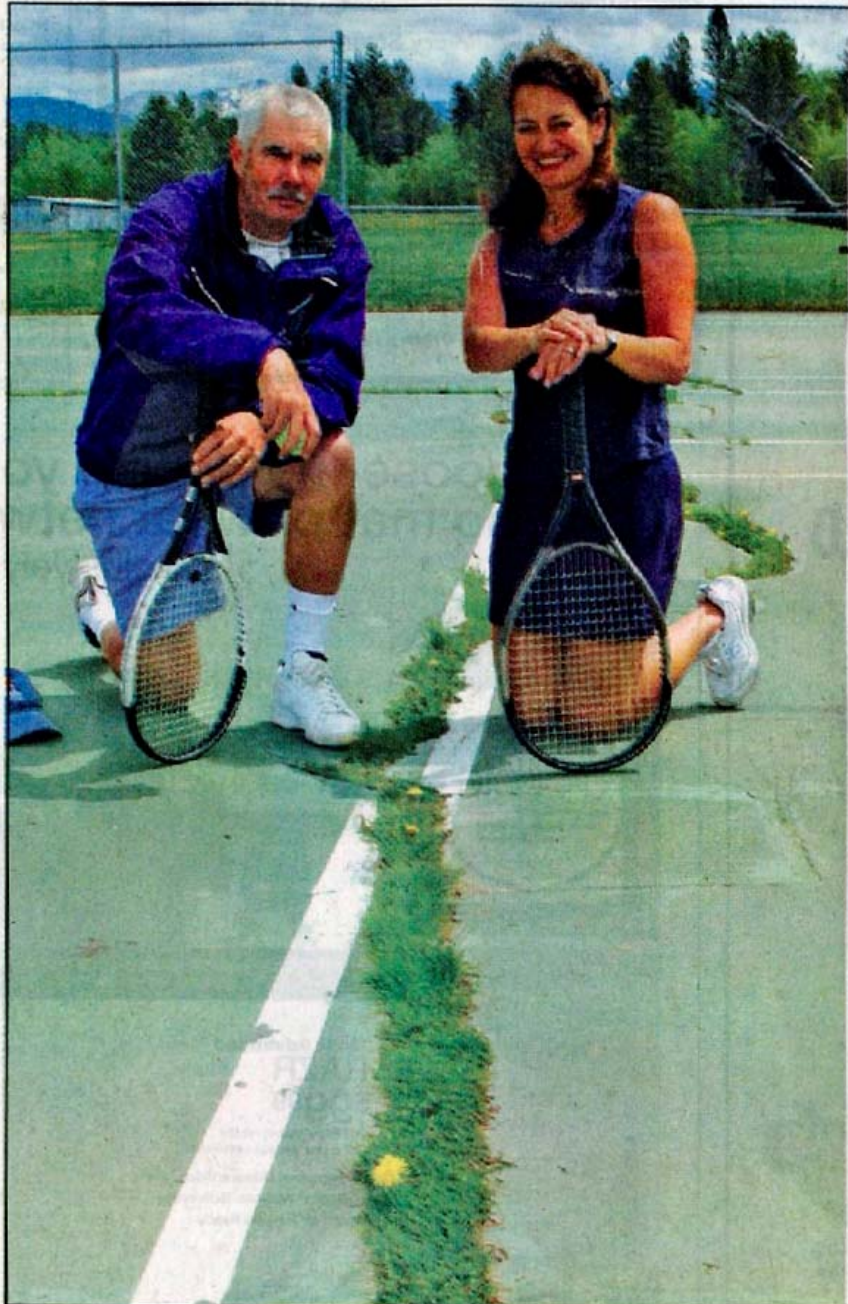
Even though the school district owns the courts, the group learned the McCall Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for annual maintenance.

Parks and recreation Director Brock Heasley said he was surprised to learn the courts were under his department.

"We didn't know about the agreement, but it's good thing," Heasley said. "By working with the school it allows public use of the courts - and there are no other public courts available in town."

Heasley had his department clean the courts and the parking lot as well as replace two nets and a net pulley.

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Al Butler and Lea Williams of the newly formed McCall Tennis Club kneel next to a large crack with weeds growing out of it at the public tennis courts near McCall-Donnelly High School. The club hopes to renovate the courts with funds from the city of McCall's local-option tax.

Star-News Photo by Tom Grote

Tennis

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LOT funds requested

For court renovations, Butler decided to put an application in with the Local Option Tax Committee for \$29,000, an amount that would cover the expenses of court resurfacing.

An additional \$4,700 estimated for the fences and windscreens would come from the club and other private sources.

Because of the numerous requests for funding, the local-option panel was only able to offer \$14,500, enough money to resurface two of the courts.

The tax committee's recommendation will be forwarded to the McCall City Council, which will make the final decision on whether to include the funding in the budget year starting Oct. 1.

In the meantime, the club has scheduled its first function, a club mixer, for June 2 at 6 p.m. at the Spring Mountain Ranch tennis courts off Spring Mountain Ranch Boulevard in McCall. The event is open to players of all abilities.

With over 40 people already on their e-mail list, the club is expecting a good turnout.

Other plans for this year include organizing groups of players according to ability, setting up playing times, and organizing teaching clinics for all members. The club is hoping to attract younger players as well.

For more information about the club, contact Butler by e-mail at nbutler@frontiernet.net or by phone at 634-5891.