

USTA Middle States

NetPLAY

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MIDDLE STATES

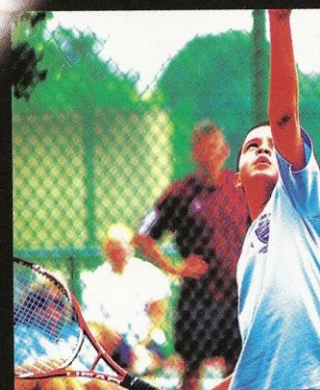


The Next Stop

Adults and Seniors advance to USTA Nationals

*Jr. Team Tennis heats up summer
with Section Championships*

*Advanta World Team Tennis Smash Hits
Brings Stars to 'Nova*



"World Class Tennis At Home"

By Carrie Rupp

Fewer than 3,000 people call the town of Ebensburg, Pa., home. Included in its population is an 87-year-old woman named Vicki Askew. Although, the soft-spoken woman has only lived in Ebensburg, located in Cambria County, for eight years, she confidently calls the town home.



Vicki Askew

In a community where truly everyone knows your name, Askew's love of tennis has put the quaint town on the map.

On a picturesque day in August, The Ebensburg Tennis Center (ETC) opened its doors to the town of Ebensburg and its surrounding communities. The six court facility, three indoor and three outdoor courts, has created a buzz that has been encouraging to ETC's Director of Tennis Jamie Taylor.

"I believe this center can rejuvenate the sport of tennis in our community and in

other communities," Taylor said. "With this facility in their own backyard, people will get involved in tennis all over again."

The Journey Home

A native of Southern Pines, N.C., Askew and her husband of 42 years, Harold, who is originally from Ebensburg, were living in Pembroke Pines, Fla. Both Vicki and Harold were heavily involved within the community, Vicki served as the executive director of the Chamber of Commerce and Harold was a commissioner and vice mayor. As her time in front of the community dwindled, and retirement became a more viable option, Vicki, at the age of 50, met a group of younger women who introduced her to the sport of tennis. Thanks to the reliable Florida weather, Vicki quickly took to the sport, playing three to five times a week.

As the couple grew older, Harold's desire to return to his roots and to his family grew strong. The couple moved to Ebensburg eight years ago, and have had a lasting impact ever since.

The Phone Call

Vicki immediately joined the local Women's Club, while Harold was a member of the Ebensburg Borough Council. But for Vicki, something was still missing.

She began talking to local women at her salon and a dress store, trying to find a place to play tennis as well as companions to play with. She settled on ProCare (formerly Blair Racquet Club) in Altoona, a 22-mile drive from her home.

The mileage, Askew claims, was not the problem, it was the weather. Her drive to Blair Racquet Club became a burden during the harsh winter months. Curvy mountain roads laced in ice posed a dangerous challenge for Vicki. Harold's concern for his wife's ventures grew with every winter storm.

A simple phone call to one of Vicki's two sons, Vince McMahon, Chairman of the Board of World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc., (WWE), was the impetus that would eventually end Vicki's long and dangerous trips.

"A little better than two years ago my husband called my son and said 'Your mother's traveling down the mountain on icy roads several times a week to play tennis, and I would certainly like to see a facility here so she wouldn't have to travel as far.' And that's truly how it began," Askew said.

Although she gives her husband credit for presenting the idea, she reserves the spotlight for the one who made it happen.

McMahon donated \$2.5 million through the Vince & Linda McMahon Family

Foundation, Inc., to the City of Ebensburg for the construction of an indoor tennis facility. Wanting to avoid the spotlight, McMahon made it clear from the start that the gift and the tennis center was not about him, deferring the spotlight that he often exudes in the wrestling ring to his mother.

"It was impossible to keep the donation quiet, but he truly deserves the credit," Askew said.

With the help of the Ebensburg Borough, Ebensburg's Recreation Director Matt Pfeil, local engineering firm L. Robert Kimball & Associates, construction firm Ralph Albarano & Sons, Inc., and the addition of Taylor as Director of Tennis, the planning began. The official groundbreaking ceremony was held on Sept. 29, 2006, on the spot of land chosen for the project – 257 Lakeview Road.



Vince McMahon

Construction

The construction process was littered with roadblocks during its initial stages. Wetlands posed a difficult challenge, limiting space and halting progression. In addition, the land was a former dump site for the borough. The need to remove bits of concrete and other debris slowed things down. The rough Allegheny Mountain winter and a rainy spring also lengthened the timetable.

Towards the end of spring, Askew said she started to visit the site more often, noticing an immediate progression in the building.

"For such a long time it [construction] was just dragging, but it has come together so well, and so quickly at the end," Askew said. "I wasn't the only one keeping an eye on the process. I run into people everywhere who have come down to peak at it, and they all tell me that it's just so beautiful."

The finished product sits on a bit of land adjacent to a lake and community park which features a baseball diamond as well as a walking path. The Allegheny Mountains pose as the perfect backdrop for the \$2.5 million facility.

World-Class Amenities

The scenery isn't the only feature that sets the facility apart from the rest. Its amenities are world-class.

"The whole package separates itself from other facilities," Taylor said. "I think everything is to offer, everything is top-tier. Just being associated with it is so nice."

The "package" includes three indoor courts featuring a Rebound Ace playing surface, a "softer" hard court with a medium to high bounce. It's the same surface that adorns the courts at the Australian Open's Melbourne Courts as well as the indoor courts at Swarthmore College's Mullan Center.

Taylor mentions the surface is "more forgiving" for older players as it is easier on joints and knees.

The outdoor courts boast the same surface you see at the US Open.

In addition to the courts, the facility also offers a pro shop, two locker rooms and a very modern lobby with a plasma TV set to broadcast Grand Slam action. Taylor notes the facility also boasts the computerized tennis video analysis program – Dartfish – as well as a top-of-the-line tennis ball machine.

Huge Potential

"We just want to introduce people to the game of tennis," Taylor said. "There's such a high interest in tennis in Central Pa., and this facility has huge potential in this area."

With an agenda full of open houses, free clinics, cardio tennis and round-robin tournaments, Taylor and his staff are already busy. With more than 80 memberships

Cover Story

sold prior to the grand opening, Taylor is planning for the future.

Grassroots programs for juniors, Jr. Team Tennis and Adult League competition are all additions Taylor hopes to see in the future.

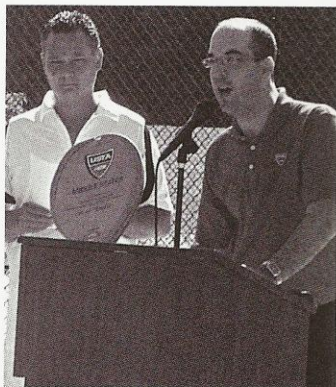
In an attempt to aid Taylor's mission, USTA Middle States representative Ben Zislis, Director of Community Development, presented Taylor and the ETC with 30 racquets on behalf of USTA Middle States and the Middle States Tennis Patrons' Foundation. The junior racquets will help Taylor introduce the game of tennis to those who may have otherwise never had the opportunity to play the sport.

Bringing opportunities to local children and adults is not Taylor's only goal. He also hopes to facilitate positive relationships with other local tennis clubs.

"This project is bridging a gap between other facilities where there was once segregation," Taylor said. "When I worked as a pro in South Carolina, the facilities were always working together in a cohesive manor, working to grow the game of tennis. That's our goal here."

"We want to work with other clubs and create interclub leagues," Taylor said. "We want to work together, not against each other."

Grand Opening



Ben Zislis, USTA MS, presents Jamie Taylor with racquets.

After many trips to Altoona and two-years of preparation, Askew said she could hardly sleep the night before the scheduled grand opening.

More than 150 guests attended the 10 a.m. ceremony, including Askew and her husband; Taylor; Csaba Balazs, the lead designer; Charlie Moyer, Ebensburg's mayor; PJ Stevens, President Commissioner of Cambria County Commissioners; four USTA Middle States representatives and numerous family and friends. Even Taylor's parents who live in Canada made the trip.

"What a beautiful facility we have here and how fortunate we are to have it," Moyer said. "Ebensburg will certainly be a recreational hub for our region."

Throughout the ceremony numerous speakers told of Askew's love of the game and humbling personality.

"This day honors Vicki," Moyer said. "Without her love of tennis, none of this would be possible."

PJ Stevens recognized both Harold and Vicki saying they've always been focused on the betterment of their community, providing many unsung contributions, and now the tennis center is a tangible and lasting testament of their vision.

The humbling sentiments were echoed inside of the facility where a bronzed plaque depicting Askew sits on a lobby wall. The plaque, which reads "In recognition of her enthusiasm and love of the sport, this tennis facility is dedicated to Vicki Askew," will forever remain a part of the ETC.

Askew, who had knee replacement surgery in December "only" plays once per week.

"I don't get out much now, but I'm grateful for when I can," Askew said.

Whether Askew plays once a week, or once a month, Taylor made sure the 87-year-old knew she is always welcome, presenting her with a gold lifetime membership card. Askew smiled, saying "You may be sorry, I may live to be 100."

After her speech, which drew a standing ovation, Askew and the distinguished guests stepped onto the bright blue and green courts. Following the count by Taylor, the group simultaneously hit the first of many more serves to land on the courts of the Ebensburg Tennis Center.

Facility News

The USTA announced that the Northern Delaware Tennis Association, Wilmington, Del. and Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, Pa. have been awarded a 2007 USTA Public Facility Funding Grants in conjunction with the Tennis in the Parks Initiative.

Proceeds from the grant will be used for the improvement of the Delaware Tennis Center. This site is a state park and was recognized in 2006 as a Top 50 Tennis Welcome Center by the USTA / ITA due to its impressive numbers of new and returning tennis players, the high level of participation in grassroots initiatives and for its extensive community tennis development programs.

Slippery Rock University will use the grant to improve its on-campus tennis center. The use of the tennis facilities at Slippery Rock University is crucial to the expansion of tennis in the community.

The university offers extensive community outreach programs and camps. In addition to the varsity women's program on-campus and the many other tennis programs made available by the university, multiple alumni mixers and functions are held at the facilities.

Is your facility or group looking for support for resurfacing or construction of courts? Contact Director of Community Development, Ben Zislis at Zislis@ms.usta.com for additional information.

