

'Amador Outdoor' visits the Amador Tennis Club

By **MIKE SWEENEY**

SPECIAL TO THE LEDGER DISPATCH



Ken Dean, Veda Dean, Jennifer Dean and their friend, Luke Finch, from the "Lasershots." PHOTO COURTESY OF MIKE SWEENEY

In 1989, when I moved to Amador County, there was no official Amador Tennis Club. The closest thing to an organized group that I remember was the group of mostly middle-aged and senior men that met up at Amador High on Wednesday nights. Guys like Johnny "Rocket" Escamilla and Larry "The Magician" Galli were the leaders of this group, and we had a blast playing singles and doubles after work. I don't think we meant to be discriminatory, but we certainly didn't do outreach to women or children.

Sometime in the 90s, a couple of women began to show up on Wednesday nights, apparently oblivious to the fact that the Wednesday night group was for men. I don't remember us giving them a lot of encouragement early on, but that didn't stop them. Eventually, they not only wanted to play, they wanted things to be organized. They talked of fundraisers, improvements, newsletters and teaching clinics. Times were changing for Amador County tennis and, thanks to these two individuals, the changes have all been for the better.

SEE AMADOR OUTDOOR, PAGE 55

Amador Outdoor

FROM PAGE 49

The two women I'm referring to are, of course, Rosalie Pryor Escamilla and Benita Asher. They have been the driving forces behind the Amador Tennis Club for the past 15 years or so. Many people have contributed to the club's accomplishments the past two decades, but Rosalie and Benita provided the leadership necessary to get big things done. They were the catalysts behind accomplishments like: incorporating ATC into a nonprofit corporation; resurfacing the courts at both high schools (several times); adding high-quality lights to the Argonaut courts; and establishing a top-notch USTA Junior Tennis Program.

Of the many ATC accomplishments, the most impressive is the development of a United States Tennis Association Junior Program. This outstanding venture has helped hundreds of Amador kids learn the game of tennis and had a positive impact on hundreds of families. It was developed by ATC back in 2007 and coordinated by Rosalie and Benita for many years. Last year, they passed the torch to Jackson resident and accomplished educator and tennis player Dan Klement. And, lest you think they have lost interest, Benita continues to serve as ATC



Junior Tennis League Coach Dan Klement works with kids. PHOTO BY MIKE SWEENEY

Board Secretary, while Rosalie is the current President.

Dan and his family have been in the Amador community for six years and he's passionate about tennis and the powerful impact it can have on children and families. He also has a couple of big-time reasons for keeping the program going. His seven-year-old daughter, Maeve, loves the sport, and his two-year-old son, Ronen, is already working on his forehand.

The Fall 2013 Amador Junior Tennis League started on Sunday, Sept. 29 and will run for six weeks. There are 59 participants, ages 7 to 14, playing in three ability levels: beginning, intermediate and advanced. Teams are coed

and doubles are emphasized for intermediate and beginning teams, while advanced players play both singles and doubles. I checked out the league this past Sunday and came away dazzled by the positive vibes, sportsmanship and athleticism evident on the tennis courts at Argonaut.

The first player I noticed had a powerful backhand and an above-average forehand. It soon became obvious that the young man across the net from him could also thump the ball quite well. It turns out that the first player was none other than local dignitary Steve Hermanson, who was warming up his 12-year-old son, Cole, as Cole prepared to play a doubles match with the advanced group. Steve played varsity tennis in college and he told me that he still loves the game and enjoys playing it with his two sons and his wife, Kristina. Eight-year-old Luke was also on hand to root Cole on. He said he has fun with tennis, but opted to play soccer this fall season. Cole is in his second year with the junior program and looks like he could quite possibly follow in his father's footsteps and perhaps play in high school and college. Kristina noted that tennis is a great family sport and one that she hopes her boys will enjoy throughout their lives.

The next Junior Tennis League family I talked with was led by nine-year-old Veda Dean, who wanted to make it

very clear she turns ten on Tuesday. Veda's participation in junior tennis is also very much a family affair, as her "Aces" team is coached by her mom, Jennifer, and dad, Ken. The Deans all play tennis nowadays and mom and dad say that, although their games have room for improvement, they love playing a sport the whole family can play. Mom might have displayed a competitive edge when she said, "When I need a point, I hit it to Ken's backhand. It's not very good." Ken and Jennifer both praised Dan Klement's extraordinary support of players, parents and coaches, as well as his organizational skills. They said junior tennis is the best experience they have ever had with organized sports.

So, if you need some inspiration and are tired of watching overgrown men give each other concussions on Sunday afternoons, head over to the Amador Junior Tennis League at Argonaut High from 2 to 5 p.m. You will see skills and character develop right before your eyes. Rosalie, Benita, Dan and everybody associated with the Amador Tennis Club can be proud of this Amador treasure. Oh, and Wednesday night tennis continues to thrive, except these days you see a lot more women and young folks playing than in the old days. For information on all Amador Tennis Club activities, visit amadortennisclub.org.