**The History of Pickleball**

**in Nebraska**

2020

Pickleball was founded in 1965 on Bainbridge Island off the coast of Seattle Washington. It is one of the fastest growing sports that meets the needs of many different ages and abilities. Below is a link to a video that shows how it all began.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=32&v=6kPJDi4LF1o&feature=emb_logo>

Bill Holt and I thought it would be a good idea to preserve the beginnings of pickleball throughout the state of Nebraska. The History of Pickleball in Nebraska is covered in this document by 14 different community authors. Bill Holt has preserved the pickleball tournament origins and other interesting facts. This history is arranged in this alphabetical manner: 1. Pickleball in Nebraska Schools 2. Pickleball in the Metro Area (Omaha, Lincoln) 3. Pickleball Outside the Metro Area 4. History of Cornhusker State Games

I hope you enjoy this attempt to preserve the origins of pickleball in Nebraska.

We have done our best to include all areas of Pickleball History in Nebraska. If something has been left out, please contact me as I think we might need an amended addition,

Bill Roehrs

**1983 - First Pickleball Played in Nebraska Schools**

Bill Roehrs interviewed Jim Rathe, Retired PE teacher at Lincoln Northeast on February 1, 2020

**Pickleball in Lincoln Public Schools**

In 1983, Robert Heffelfinger, the department chair, at Lincoln NE attended a National Health, Physical Education and Recreation National Convention. While attending the convention, Robert attended a clinic about pickleball.

Physical Education teachers in the Lincoln Public Schools attended a one-day clinic between semesters which served as In-Service requirement.

Mr. Heffelfinger presented a workshop for all JH & SH Physical Education teachers. At the convention, they were given a pattern which included dimensions of a pickleball paddle. “Heff”, as the fellow teachers called him, made enough paddles out of wood and provided them for all JH and SH teachers to use during this event.

The game was then introduced to various PE classes as a family type sport by the PE teachers depending on how their schedule was arranged. At NE High, Jim Rathe had a 9 - week unit where students would play pickleball one day and badminton the next as the courts were very similar in size. Jim was creative and found a quieter heavy foam ball which substituted for the normal pickleball and allowed the ball to be struck with power and still would remain in play. The kids enjoyed both racquet sports. To this day, grades 4-12 students are exposed to pickleball in LPS. SW High School have brought their Lifetime Sports classes to Peterson Park for a week long experience. PLI has provided mentors in the past to help students have a good experience.

**Metro Area**

**Pickleball in Omaha Nebraska**

by Bill Holt

**2008**

Bill Holt and Royal Ness first played pickleball in Arizona, where they both participated in a pickleball intro clinic in February in Sun City Grand, Surprise, AZ. They continued to improve their new-found skills in Arizona for another month before returning to Omaha.

Upon returning to Omaha, pickleball was started at the tennis courts next to Laura Dodge School, close to where Royal lived. The tennis net was used as the pickleball net, which had sagged to about the proper height for pickleball. Lines for pickleball were chalked. When it rained the lines had to be re-chalked. A couple of tools were developed to help with the chalking which decreased the time and effort spent chalking.

Royal and Bill were joined by Warren Mellema and Dick Kerns, which was the beginning of pickleball in Omaha. With everyone inviting friends to come learn and play pickleball, there were about 10-12 players with two pickleball courts. Royal and Bill led the Intro to pickleball to others thru one-on-one as well as intro clinics. The USAPA website Places to Play tab did not list any locations to play pickleball in Nebraska.

The 1st place to play in Nebraska shown on the USAPA website was Laura Dodge School in Omaha. Meadow Lane was the next place to play in Omaha and Prairie Lane followed with a place to play.

**2009**

In the spring of 2009, Warren Mellema suggested that moving the pickleball play to Meadow Lane Park. This park had more trees around the courts which provided more protection from the wind. At Meadow Lane Park, it was necessary to prop the nets up a couple of inches with a stick as the chain link nets had sagged that much over the years. An outdoor duct tape was used for court lines. This tape was guaranteed to not leave a residue if left down for up to 6 months. The tape was down for over a year, and there was no residue when removed. Of course, it was necessary to have extra tape to repair when a player’s foot had dragged on the base line. We started playing indoors at the Tennis Club on North 120th St. Pickleball players were not well received by the tennis players, and had to play between 2 and 4 p.m. after the Ladies Tennis League and before the 4 o'clock lessons for the students.  The ladies did not like the noise of the balls on the paddles and thought the pb players had too much and too loud of conversation.

**2010**

In April, 2010, Warren Mellema contacted the Omaha Parks & Rec and encouraged them to consider converting one of the many underutilized tennis courts to pickleball courts. Parks & Rec personnel visited the Meadow Lane Park courts and observed this new sport.

In the fall of 2010, Royal Ness, Dick Kerns, and Bill Holt met with Scott Ash from the Nebraska Sports Council, which oversees the Cornhusker State Games. The purpose of the meeting was to explore the possibility of adding pickleball to the Cornhusker State Games. Although it was beyond the normal date to add a sport, Scott was of the opinion that the CSG Board of Directors would approve adding pickleball. Toward to end of the meeting Scott suggested that finding a sponsor for pickleball for $1,500 would go a long way to obtain the approval by the board to add pickleball. A sponsor was found in a few weeks with the quick approval for pickleball to be added to the 2011 CSG.

**2011**

The conversion of the Meadow Lane Park tennis courts to 4 permanent and two temporary pickleball courts was completed in June 2011 in time for the first CSG pickleball tournament. In March of 2011, Janet Davidson contacted Bill Holt regarding pickleball being offered in the Cornhusker State Games and also asked Bill to come to Lincoln to promote pickleball and play in the 2011 CSG. Janet also contacted Jerry Shorney, Lincoln Parks and Rec Dept. about pickleball being played on city tennis courts. Jerry had lines painted at Upco and Tyrrell Parks. Janet also made contact with the Lincoln Journal to cover this inaugural event. Not sure if it was covered.

**2011 July**

The first pickleball tournament in the Cornhusker State Games was played at Meadow Lane park with 39 players. Bill Holt was the tournament director.

**2012**

Nebraska (Omaha) Pickleball Club was formed with Bill Holt serving as President. The membership has grown from about 40 to over 500 players in 2020.

**2014**

Pickleball Omaha moved its primary place to play from Meadow Lane Park to Prairie Lane Park as a result of the increase in the number of players.  This was done in conjunction with working with Omaha Parks & Rec to identify public tennis courts with room for expansion and adequate parking.  Since Prairie Lane Park had three tennis courts, we were able to have 10 pickleball courts rather than the 6 courts at Meadow Lane Park.  Parking was adequate here, while other sites considered did not have adequate parking.

Assistance was given to other areas around the city starting about this time and has gradually expanded.  The following is a list of many of the places which now have pickleball in the Omaha metro area:

Prairie Lane Park, Meadow Lane Park, Genesis Health Club, Tennis Club,

Stone Creek, Halleck Park, Papillion, Lied Center, Bellevue, Kroc Center

**Community Centers**

Common Ground at Elkhorn, Saddlebrook, Adams Park, Florence, Camelot, Montclair

Jewish Community Center, Omaha CC, Happy Hollow CC, Shadow Ridge CC

**2016**

Shane Wampler joined the Omaha Parks & Rec with responsibility for expanding pickleball in the Community Centers to the sites listed above.

In the fall of 2016, the IRS approved Pickleball Omaha as a 501c(7).

**2017**

The Prairie Lane courts were resurfaced with color coating.

**2019-Present**

Pickleball Omaha has an ongoing conversation with the City of Omaha regarding indoor pickleball facilities.

**Pickleball in Lincoln Nebraska**

by Bill Roehrs

**2020 January** **20** (Interviews with Bonnie McMullen & records kept by Bill Holt)

The statements below came from interviews with Bonnie McMullen, Janet Davidson and Ken Carnes.

**2003**

Bonnie McMullen entered the Huntsman Senior Games in October of 2003. The tournament was

held in St. George, Utah. The first documented pickleball to be played in Nebraska was in 2003.

Bonnie McMullen, Shari Carlson, Nancy Petta, Kate Gaul, Dar Dvorak were the first pickleball

players in Nebraska. They played pickleball at the Raymond Nebraska Park tennis courts. The

paddles used were Elite made by PICKLE-BALL. Inc. and Pro-lite, the first two companies to make

non-wooden paddles.

**2011 April 30**

The 1st pickleball clinic in Lincoln was held at Upco Park. The original players in Lincoln included Bonnie McMullen, Janet Davidson, Amy and Jeff Fredrick, Deb and Brad Berka and Beth Davidson, among others, playing at Upco Park. The first organized pickleball open to the general public was played at Upco Park (40th & Adams) that spring, and regularly attracted 4-6 people, growing soon to 8-10 regulars. Ken and Dorothy Carnes were also part of this group. Sunday afternoons became the usual meeting time for pickleball at Upco Park where 8-10 players would participate. More and more players began to play pickleball at Upco Park. This schedule continued until 2016.

**2011 May**

Ken Carnes started indoor pickleball at St. Paul United Methodist, Lincoln. Three courts were taped and enjoyed on Sunday and Wednesday. Pickleball was played the first Wed and Sunday at St. Paul.

**2015**

Pickleball was expanded to include Union College tennis courts on the south part of town. Union College was very generous and supportive allowing use and lining their three tennis courts. Nancy Petta, the PE teacher taught pickleball rather than tennis as the college PE class. She was really ahead of her time.

There were 3 people that showed up the first day of organized play. They were Bill Roehrs, John Hendry and Jolleen Clymer. By the end of the summer there were around 50 people playing pickleball at Union College. There were a lot of beginners started that summer.

Plans for a complex of dedicated pickleball courts began by selecting Peterson Park with the guidance of the Parks and Recreation staff. Bill Roehrs and John Hendry evaluated various parks that the city suggested had underused tennis courts. Peterson Park was selected for the following reason: 1. Reasonable access for the majority of the present pickleball players 2. Little disturbance anticipated to neighborhoods in terms of traffic and noise 3. Adequate parking which could be expanded 4. Condition of the concrete 5. Future growth options 6. Overall appeal to the site

The Lincoln Parks Department challenged our club membership to raise several thousand dollars as an endowment for the converting of 2 tennis courts into 6 pickleball courts. With the guidance of Jolleen Clymer, John Hendry and generous donors we were able to raise $25,000 for our Endowment Fund. This endowment can be used for future repairs of these courts.

The Park Advisory Board approved the plan in 2015. In 2016, six dedicated pickleball courts were built at Peterson Park by the Lincoln Parks and Rec Department with great support from Mayor Chris Beutler. If the popularity of pickleball reaches it’s expected growth, 4 more courts could be built in the green space directly east of the present courts beyond the playground area. (These courts are scheduled to be complete by June 1, 2020.) The first pickleball project of converting 2 underused tennis courts into 6 pickleball courts was funded by Lincoln Cares money and the Parks and Rec Department. The cost was approximately $100,000.

**2016**

Peterson Park Courts Grand Opening was on July 12, 2016. The Grand Opening Ceremony included the Star-Spangled Banner being sung by the Pius X Boy’s Quartet. Remarks were made by Lynn Johnson, Director of the Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department and Bill Roehrs, representing the enthusiastic pickleball population. The inaugural serves were done by Janet Davidson, of Springfield Mo., Bill Holt of Omaha, who helped bring pickleball to Lincoln, Jeff Friedrick, Brad Berka and Bonnie McMullen. A brief game was played by nationally ranked pickleball player originally from Lincoln, Laura Fenton Kovanda and Brad Berka.

After this demonstration, the courts were officially declared OPEN for Play!

**2017**

On June 27, 2017, Pickleball Lincoln became a 501c (3) non-profit corporation. We initially had 75 members. On January 1, 2020, Pickleball Lincoln has over 400 members.

**2019**

With the growth of the number of people playing pickleball in Lincoln, plans were made to utilize seldom used tennis courts in town and to raise money to build 4 more courts at Peterson Park. $280,000 was raised in two years which will allow the 4 new courts to be built by June 1, 2020.

3 Lock boxes and 12 portable nets were purchased to allow 3 more seldom used tennis courts to have 4 pickleball court at each site. Ballard, Eden and Henry Parks have dual lines drawn where 2 courts can be used for pickleball or 4 courts could be used for pickleball.

**Outside the Metro Area**

**Aurora** **Pickleball**

By Mike Allen

In conjunction with another individual from Aurora, pickleball was introduced into the community around 2015. I was introduced to PB in 2014 by some friends in GI. A lady here in town was introduced to PB while snow birding the next winter. Once we found out we were both into PB, we decided to try and bring PB to Aurora.

We began by getting permission to put down a couple courts inside a community center on their basketball gym. Next interested individuals were solicited and were given some beginner clinics and play was organized a couple of mornings a week. After a while as word spread, some others who couldn’t play during the daytime on week days inquired about week-end play. A Saturday morning session was established. After 3 years we were able to change the layout and that enabled us to layout 3 courts instead of 2.

The summer of 2017 saw the opening of 4 new outdoor tennis courts and after some discussions with the planners for the tennis courts we were able to get them to include layout lines for 4 pickleball courts on one of the tennis courts. We now have 3 indoor courts and 4 outdoor courts and we currently have open play 3 days a week and 3 evenings a week on both the indoor and outdoor courts weather permitting.

We are still growing and are having to contend with crowded courts at times. Our ultimate goal is to get enough interest and enough players playing to justify persuading the city to build 4 to 6 dedicated pickleball courts.

**Blair Pickleball**

By Deb Gross

In 2013 I retired from teaching in Blair. My lifelong friend, Lyn Pahls, from Omaha had also retired and started playing this game called pickleball and was on the board for Pickleball Omaha. We had played tennis together and she kept telling me I should try pickleball. I finally went to Omaha and with no lessons was thrown on a court and did what I was told. I learned by just doing. Everyone was patient and helpful and I fell in love with pickleball. I knew I needed to talk to our YMCA director in Blair

Unbeknownst to me, Sandra Ellis, Director of the Blair YMCA, at that time, had just purchased pickleball equipment and was interested in starting pickleball at the Y. Perfect timing! Now I just needed to find some people to play with me. I shared pickleball with my friend, Joleene Rewerts, who had also retired from teaching and we started recruiting people to play. Originally we were just trying to get four people to play and now we have over 40 regulars and we play Monday - Friday from 9-12. There is also a Friday night "happy hour" group that plays regularly. There are people from Kennard, Herman, Tekamah and Missouri Valley, IA, who play at Blair's YMCA.

Pickleball was introduced at the Blair Family YMCA in the Fall of 2013. Jim Scheffler, a life-long tennis player, was one of the firsts to join our group and played until he was 87. Pickleball is for all ages!

**Fremont Pickleball**

by Diana Myers & Kerri Pentel

Pickleball was introduced at the Fremont Family YMCA in the Fall of 2014. The players who started the program were Don Charleston, Royal Hunt, Pete HInes, John Liston, Denise Grunke, Bill Holt (Nebraska Ambassador) and Diana Myers (Fremont Family YMCA staff). The program started with introductory lessons and expanded to include drop in play on two mornings and two evenings each weekly, fun play days with players from other communities and tournaments involving those from all over the state. The YMCA started with taping pickleball lines on the tennis courts to see the level of interest from those in the Fremont area. Once it was established that there was considerable interest in this new sport, the YMCA painted pickleball lines for six courts, four on the indoor tennis courts and two on the outdoor tennis courts. As the number of players grew, two more indoor pickleball courts were added. When conducting tournaments all five indoor tennis courts are used providing ten pickleball courts. For tournaments conducted by Diana Myers from the YMCA, Rhonda Buckley was a key volunteer who was very instrumental in helping organize these events. There were also many other volunteers who stepped up to assist with drop in sessions, lessons and tournaments. When Diana Myers left the YMCA in late 2017, Kerri Pentel began coordinating the Fremont pickleball program for the YMCA.

Fremont YMCA began pickleball in 2014 with 2 taped courts on a tennis court. We now have 6 painted lined courts on our tennis courts. We have 4 open drop-in leagues a week free for our members. We run 2 tournaments a year. These tournaments are run on 10 courts and have brought in over 75 participants from many surrounding communities. Our pickleball program is strong and continues to grow with participation every year. We also offer an outreach program to local schools and high schools who use our courts and equipment to learn this new sport for all ages.

**Gering/Scottsbluff Pickleball**

by Mike Miles

My bride and I retired and moved here from Arvada, CO. in Dec. 2015. I had previous experience with pickleball from my work as the executive director of the Apex Park & Recreation District in Arvada. Initially I could only find pickleball at two outdoor courts at the Scottsbluff Country Club. There was no organized activity.

I started an indoor pickleball program at the Carpenter Center, a local recreation center in Jan 2016. We have 3 indoor courts. It was pretty slow growth for the first year. We probably had around a dozen players that year. We are now up to 100 + or -. We have 7 sessions per week now Mon thru Sat. Attendance runs between 12 - 24 folks regularly. We host a friendly mixer tournament each Jan.

There were 4 players originally myself, my bride Kathy, Shirley Schurer, and Janice Wynne.

I am working with the City of Gering to attempt to get some outdoor courts. Probably going to be a long haul to accomplish that dream.

**Gothenburg Pickleball**

by Nanette Bates

     About a year and a half ago Julie Czochara, director of Gothenburg's YMCA, approached Nanette Bates and Donna Yilk and asked them if they would like to play pickleball. Julie was originally from Buffalo, New York and had played the game for several years. Nanette and Donna had played tennis before so thought pickleball sounded fun. They started playing 3 days a week inside on Gothenburg's YMCA's spacious basketball court. There are now twelve regular members. New members are always welcome. Playing times are MWF mornings from 9-12. Be prepared to laugh as much as you play!

**Grand Island Pickleball**

by Nita Lechner

Bob McFarland, a GI PE teacher at GISH actually had taught Pickleball in his classes for years. He had taken his game to a new level as he participated in many tournaments around the nation. His partner, Carolyn Foster, a PE teacher from St. Paul introduced me to the game in 2015 at badminton one night. We only played it once though, since we were all about badminton then. Bob passed away October 9, 2011 and we never played it again until 4 years ago. At that time only a handful of GI people played at the YMCA.

The next step in the evolution was I put down a court in my driveway and each Sunday afternoon 4-10 of us would gather and play all afternoon and then BBQ after. It became an awesome social event and we all brought different drinks and food every Sunday.

We set up play at the Y on Tuesday and Thursday nights. After the passing of Bob we lost the spot at the school and the Y was the only place for us to go. We gained a handful of people and lost a few due to moving. At that time a few of us participated in tournaments, but there were very few around then.

In September of 2017 I approached the YMCA, Park & Rec, and the GI Tennis Center about giving Free lessons at all three venues and getting this sport started in GI. All three were IN and Carolyn and I began teaching lessons in October and growing the number of players. I then organized a club known as the Grand Island Pickleball Club. We have since become a pretty good force in the community and involve ourselves in not only pickleball but do things as a group. One of which is tending to the large garden at the GI City Cemetery. A sign with the GIPC logo was placed in the garden for all to see. We have many social gatherings on holidays and gather after play for a beer once in a while. It all makes for a great group of players and friends. The club has hosted a picnic, Day at the Races at Fonner Park, Christmas parties, and St. Patrick’s Day parties.

I had purchased two nets, several paddles and balls on my own to begin with. Then I sold shirts as the start-up project for GIPC, and purchased two more nets. There was enough money to then buy two more nets and we put lines down in two parks for outdoor play and 4 in a church parking lot. Mike Persampieri set up our FB page. The club grew, as they have all over the country!

We have three indoor venues: YMCA, the GI Tennis Center, and the Field House (Park & Rec), as well as 6 PB specific courts at Stolley Park, 2 at Sothman Park, and 4 at Pier Park, which are rarely used. Indoor venues are becoming a problem so we have a long road ahead of ourselves to continue to grow as the number of players continues to grow.

We held two tournaments at the YMCA our first year, but money went to the Y. We involved ourselves in the community and continued to grow the sport and club. Numerous players from our club participate in a lot of tournaments including those in Lincoln, Omaha, Kearney, GI, Fremont, and a few travel out of state, fairing very well. (It has been a very humbling experience to have players I taught how to play kick my butt all over the court.)

We have evolved into a pretty powerful club at this time. It is really exciting! In 2019 a board was elected and we went through the Greater Grand Island Community Foundation and participated in Go Big Give, receiving over $56,000 in one day for our efforts.

I have personally written several grants and been awarded two $5,000 grants and one $20,000 grant, with two more being written and submitted shortly. Our goal is $125,000 which was originally required to cover the 25% of the cost that Park and Rec requested. The bids came in at $433,000, so with what we have already we have our 25%, but will continue to go until we reach $125,000, our original goal.

At this time, March 2020, the City Council has approved the 8 new courts to be constructed at the Veterans Sports Complex north of GI. Start-up should be early this spring and completion hopefully mid-summer. These 8 courts will include fencing, lighting, shade structures, and bleachers.

We have held King and Queen of the Court, Heartland Holiday Classic, and the Heartland Groundhog Slam, each tournament was bigger and better and drew in several pros with our last one. The GI Convention Center and Fonner Park were our corporate sponsors. With everything that is happening in an upward motion, Grand Island Pickleball Club can be labeled “Progressive” and “Successful” and we are meeting our mission 100%.

What is our mission?

Promote fun, fitness, friendships, and family time in Greater Grand Island by growing Pickleball.

**Grant Pickleball**

by Ron Kent

 Mary & I started it in the summer of 2014 after spending time in Ahwatukee, AZ. We talked to the recreation department in Grant. They agreed to paint the lines on a tennis court & provided a portable net & 4 paddles & balls. I gave a program at Rotary & Mary at her sorority to demonstrate the game. From there we grew to 2 portable & 1 permanent net for outdoors & added night play twice/week during the winter at the Elementary School. Later we helped teach some people in Ogallala to help them get started. Also, a couple that came down to play with us started a group in Imperial.

**Hastings Pickleball**

by Ron Haase

Pickleball got its start in Hastings in the late summer of 2017 when the staff at the Hastings Parks and Recreation Department marked off a court in the Parks &Rec office building, which is the old Hastings National Guard Armory. There was a group of elderly retired men who played tennis twice a week on one of the outdoor public tennis courts. Ryan Martin from the Parks & Rec office stopped by one morning to invite the tennis players to come give pickleball a try when there was a rainy day keeping them from playing tennis outdoors. A few weeks later a rainy day occurred and the group went to the old Armory. Ryan had a few paddles and balls and gave them the basics of the rules to get things started. The game didn’t catch on with most of that group, but Ron Haase really liked it and thought it would be something he could do together with his wife and other couples. He discussed with Ryan some times that the court would be available and then went home and looked up the official rules online and started calling other retired couples he knew who might like to play.

Because the court was only available during daytime office hours, the initial focus was on retirees who were available to play during the day. Some liked it and some didn’t, but the numbers began to grow. We soon needed a second court and then a third which filled the capacity of the building. By then word of mouth was expanding the number of players almost every week. Two outdoor courts were added utilizing the two least frequently used public tennis courts. During the last year the Parks & Rec staff arranged for the building to be staffed two evenings a week for a few months for lessons and league/tournament play. This immediately attracted lots of younger players and of course increased the demand for courts. The number of courts has continued to increase, both public and private, but the quality and availability of courts still leaves something to be desired. Hastings players are presently struggling with how to move forward to get better and more readily available places to play.

**Kearney Pickleball**

by Dave Waggoner

The quirky sport of pickleball is proving to be popular in the Kearney Community.

Packed Kearney Park and Recreation leagues and dedicated community courts are just some indicators of how quickly the game is growing in the Hub Territory.At a recent public demonstration at Apollo Park, Dave Waggoner showed a crowd of community members how the game is played. “It’s good for any age group,” Waggoner said. The Nebraska City native splits his time between Kearney and Mesa, Ariz. It’s during one of his warm winter stays that he first played pickleball.“We’re a very mixed group,” he said. “(I like) meeting other people.”

He’s played against all sorts of individuals: old people, young people, people in wheelchairs and people from around the world. He loves the game so much that he transformed a warehouse near the Kearney Canal into an indoor pickleball court and invites community members to come play at the private facility year-round. Whether or not Waggoner was the first pickleball enthusiast in Kearney may be unclear, but one thing is certain: People want to play pickleball.

Jade Meads, the KPR Recreation Superintendent, said the success of league play, which started in 2013, led to the installation of a permanent court and net at Apollo Park. The court is located between the tennis courts and the skate park. And while it’s difficult to compare registration numbers between sports, Meads said it seems to be one of the most popular ones. The games are played at Horizon Middle School. Once construction starts there this summer, they will move to Sunrise Middle School.

“The schools are starting to teach the game, and I think that has increased the popularity, but it is such an easy game to learn and play,” she said.

Meads estimates that half of the people who sign up for the KPR pickleball leagues are senior citizens, and the other half are college students and young adults.

**Lexington Pickleball**

By Terri Burch

  We opened our facility in 2015, currently connected to the middle school (who also needed more space), sharing 3 full gyms.  After a year of having basketball and volleyball as the main source of recreation, we brainstormed for further activities we could incorporate to generate more usage for our facility and Pickleball was suggested.  I ordered a net and supplies that very day.

  We drew members in by simply asking them to come 'play' and the game grew from there.  Word of mouth has allowed Pickleball to grow at our facility.  We automatically set up the nets every Tuesday and Thursday morning and people come to play or pick up a game.

A member at the Grand Island YMCA caught me when I was there one day, for a training, she told me all about the PickleUP app and thus we are on the app.

**Papillion Pickleball**

by Diana Myers

Pickleball was first introduced in the summer of 2017 at the outdoor Halleck Park Tennis Courts in Papillion. The City of Papillion Recreation Department, with Tim Moran and Jennifer Manzo (Recreation staff) along with Bill Holt (Nebraska Ambassador) introduced pickleball by offering lessons to the community. There were about a dozen players who tried the sport, but it didn’t really take off at that point. In the spring of 2019, Diana Myers joined the staff of the City of Papillion Recreation Department and decided to try reintroducing pickleball in Papillion. The new Papillion Community Recreation Center (Papillion Landing) was under construction to be completed at the end of 2019 or early 2020 and plans were to have six indoor pickleball courts painted on the floor of three full size gymnasiums. Diana offered lessons/drop in play one morning each week at the Halleck Park Tennis Courts for most of the summer and then for six weeks one evening each week in the fall. Players were excited that they would have an opportunity to continue playing when the weather turned cold. Players Steve Jordan and Charlene Boothe were very helpful in helping to recruit and introduce new players to the pickleball program in Papillion. Since Papillion Landing opened in early 2020, many community members are taking advantage of the opportunity to play indoors at the new facility. There are no formal play sessions scheduled at this point, but Nate Stahlecker (Papillion Landing Sports Coordinator) plans to implement some more structured play including tournaments in the near future. Diana Myers has offered several Pickleball 101 classes, with the assistance of volunteers, Marli Meyer and Jeanne Derr, to introduce new players to pickleball.

**York Pickleball**

by Gary Hall

I first played pickleball while at Roadhaven Resort in Apache Jct, Arizona in probably the winter of 2006.  When I returned to Fullerton, Nebraska and told my friends about it at coffee, they got quite a laugh.  The next day at coffee, a "new guy" was there.  Rich Hargadine had retired from teaching P.E. in Englewood Colorado and moved to the Fullerton, Nebraska area.  When my friends asked me what the game was I had played in Arizona, Rich exclaimed "Pickleball---that's my favorite game"! So, he and I and the retired superintendent of schools, Gene Burton, organized and obtained permission to play in the old gym in Fullerton.

In 2013, I moved to York.  The recreation director in York was a Fullerton, Ne native and she and I tried to start pickle ball in York.  Finally, after about a year of trying, I met Vaughn Kirkpatrick who was interested in the game.  We loaded up two vehicles of prospective pickle ballers and took them to Fullerton to try the game with the pickle ballers there.  The game caught on and we played at the junior high school here in York the first year.  A new recreation director in York called me and asked me if we'd like two courts in the York City Auditorium as they were going to repaint and refinish the floor.  I told her, I thought we could get four courts if we ran them north and south.  With Vaughn being a York native, we were able to get several people playing.  We now have somewhere around 30-40 pickle ballers in York and a great indoor place to play all winter. We also have four outdoor courts on the tennis courts at Harrison Park.

**The History of Cornhusker State Games Pickleball**

By Bill Holt

**2011**

2011 (July 23) Cornhusker State Games Meadow Lane Park Omaha, NE - # Participants 45

On July 23, 2011, the first Cornhusker State Games (CSG) pickleball tournament took place at Meadow Lane Park in Omaha with Bill Holt as the Tournament Director. This was also the first pickleball tournament in Nebraska.

2011 (August) Senior Games Jade Brown and Dave Waggoner Kearney, NE

2012 (July 27-28) Cornhusker State Games Meadow Lane Park Omaha, NE

2013 (July 26-27) Cornhusker State Games Meadow Lane Park Omaha, NE

2014 Cornhusker State Games Miracle Hills Omaha, NE

2015 State Games of America Miracle Hills Omaha, NE

2016 Cornhusker State Games Elite (Genesis) Omaha, NE

2017 Cornhusker State Games Miracle Hills Omaha, NE

2018 With work from **Mark Nelson,** Pickleball Lincoln, President and the cooperation of Omaha Pickleball Association, the pickleball state games were moved to Lincoln.

2018 Cornhusker State Games Woods Tennis Center Lincoln, NE

2019 Cornhusker State Games Woods Tennis Center Lincoln, NE- **175 Participants**

In the fall of 2013, the Nebraska Sports Council was notified that their bid to host the 2015 **State Games of America** had been accepted. The host state decides which sports will take place. Although pickleball had not been a sport in any previous State Games of America, it was decided to introduce pickleball to this biennial event.

It was decided that we needed to plan the 2014 CSG pickleball tournament with the same location and format that we would need for the 2015 State Games of America.

Due to the July heat, the tournament needed to be indoors. Bill Holt, the CSG pickleball tournament director, contacted Steve and Ramona Boone, Great Plains Regional Directors, in Colorado Springs, and Justin Maloof, Executive Director of USAPA for tournament advice.

The contact with USPA was referred to David Jordan, President of USAPA, who promptly sent an e-mail to Holt. Among other things, David said we should have a sanctioned tournament. Since there was no one in Nebraska who had experience with a USAPA sanctioned tournament, the original plan was to not have the tournament sanctioned.

The e-mail was followed up with a conference phone call, during which Holt asked David Jordan why the State Games of America tournament should be sanctioned. Jordan responded that if we wanted help from the USAPA, the tournament would be sanctioned. So, we proceeded to get the 2014 CSG tournament sanctioned. Immediately after the 2014 tournament, planning started for the 2015 State Games of America tournament, including the application for USAPA sanctioned status. Jordan arranged for Pickleball Central to contribute 400 balls. Jordan wanted new USAPA nets, for all the courts, and had 16 new portable USAPA nets delivered to Omaha.

While wintering in Arizona, Holt met with Steve & Ramona Boone, Great Plains Regional Directors from Colorado Springs, made a huge contribution to the details of organizing and running the tournament.

Both the 2014 CSG tournament and the 2015 State Game of America were sanctioned and took place at the Miracle Hills Tennis courts in Omaha.

There were 68 players in the 2014 CSG, and 187 players in the 2015 State Games of America pickleball tournament with players from Florida to California.

There are now numerous tournaments around the state besides the CSG and Senior Games.

**Summary**

Pickleball is one of our nation’s fastest growing sports in the US. There is certainly evidence across Nebraska to support that statement. Pickleball is evolving rapidly as a younger group of players with a different set of skills is starting to play pickleball.

It is my hope that as more and more people learn to play pickleball that the original reasons that helped the game grow will not be forgotten. This is a sport that can be easy to learn. It is fun! It helps people get exercise. Pickleball can be a great vehicle to make new friends.