

Pickleball BC Newsletter February 2020

BC Club Highlights:

The Evolution and Growth of Pickleball in Vernon, BC

The Vernon Pickleball Association (VPA) is a vibrant, growing and well-run pickleball 'club' with a current membership of just under 450 players. Not bad for a city with a population of 45,000 people to have that many playing pickleball! We now boast 12 wonderful dedicated outdoor pickleball courts which were designed, developed, overseen and funded in part by the members of Vernon Pickleball Association. (sponsored by Okanagan Wealth Advisors) How did this all come to fruition?



◀ **Bruce Simpson** is one of the founding members of the VPA and was asked to provide some background information regarding his involvement and how it all came about.

In 2011, Bruce heard from friends about playing a game called pickleball while they wintered in Mexico. When they got back in April that year they continued to talk about it and in July they mentioned that a fellow they knew, **Wally Herrmann** had just started up a group at Priest Valley Gym in Vernon.

So, with a little prodding Bruce went out one day to check it out and joined this handful of people playing. He says, "I'm sure you've heard it before but within five minutes I was absolutely hooked as it was so much fun!"

Come October that year Wally and his wife, Barbara, were gearing up to head south, and by that time their little group of pickleball players had grown larger. Someone had to run the group to keep them together, interested and to arrange the play sessions, and Bruce decided that he would step up to run things. For the next two years, Bruce and Wally ran the ever expanding group. There were initial challenges getting court time through Recreation Services, but the need was there and pickleball started to become recognized as a year-round sport.

Some two years later and with a now fairly large group, the Vernon Pickleball Club was formed in September 2013 with a full executive board which included both Bruce and Wally. Bruce says he remembers these first years as very busy what with purchasing equipment, moving portable nets to and from different venues, driving around to pay club bills, and coordinating play time and schedules.

2013 was the same year Bruce attended his first BC Seniors Games (now called the 55+ BC Games) taking place in Kamloops. He took care of collecting all the Vernon entries to drop off with then Zone 5 Pickleball Coordinator, Brian Stovell, who remarked that they were so well organized that he wanted Bruce to take over as pickleball coordinator for Zone 5. Bruce kindly accepted, and has been the Zone 5 pickleball coordinator for the last six years.

Things don't always go perfectly, as politics within the club surfaced and some members decided to splinter off from the main group by forming their own club. Fortunately, and quite some time after that, there was a resolution and both clubs rejoined and became the now-named Vernon Pickleball Association. Bruce says "That was a good thing, as everyone was then focused and starting to think about the "prize" at end of the road, dedicated outdoor courts for pickleball!"



Suffice to say, it was a long and difficult road for the VPA board during that period, as the board acted as a liaison between the club members, builders of the courts, and the city. According to Bruce, "There was much gnashing of teeth between all three parties, but in the end, we have beautiful courts of which everyone is very proud!"

After seven years of being involved and helping to run the club, Bruce decided he needed a little rest, so stepped down from the board. He is still the Zone 5 pickleball coordinator and is a volunteer host from time to time during club play sessions.

Bruce still competes in some tournaments, and says that it's always fun to play the game we all love.

Without dedicated volunteers like Bruce, Wally and others who gave the club the initial start, the current board executive members, host volunteers, social committee volunteers, volunteer coaches, line judges & referees, as well as the countless volunteers who helped make the outdoor courts a reality, the Vernon Pickleball Association wouldn't be nearly the success it is today. Indeed, it does take a village to raise a pickleball town.

Written by: Bruce Simpson & Anne Longley