



## *Investing in Racquets Exceeded Expectations*

Having hosted numerous major golf championships since its inception almost 100 years ago, Medinah Country Club was always known for its iconic clubhouse and championship golf course. So, initially, the concept of building a racquets center was met with skepticism when, five years ago, the club took a deep look into the future and realized it was time to add more sports facilities. Management believed in it so members invested millions of dollars in a Racquet Center with a warming hut, four platform tennis courts, four Har-Tru tennis courts, and a Golf Learning Center.

### **RISK REWARD**

The new facilities opened to members in January 2018. General Manager Robert Sereci said, “Once

the facility opened, it changed the feeling of the club. We had a tremendous response; this place is vibrant year-round. Families feel connected to an active and robust center. The court lights are a beacon—members stop at the Racquet Center on their way out to see who is there.” The reward has exceeded all expectations. Sereci acknowledged, “People want to be part of a community and build relationships.”

### **CHAMPIONING THE SPORT**

Sereci said, “We had documented evidence from the Club Managers Association that said if you don’t have somebody championing your program, it will die. You can’t just ‘build it and they will come.’ It helps to have someone who understands the game, is passionate, and knows the value of facilitating

relationships. It all hinges on that one person and, boy, did we find that right person.”

Sereci is speaking of Anthony McPherson, Director of Racquet Sports, who created a paddle program the season *before* the courts were installed, using connections and ingenuity. “I was the Elmhurst University tennis coach for 10 years. I taught tennis at an indoor club in Glen Ellyn, too. In 2008, three Glen Ellyn Platform Tennis Club (GEPTC) board members, Pat Walker, Chuck Smith, and Scott Park, introduced the sport to me, and it was the best thing that ever happened. They sent me to get certified to teach and I ended up running their program from 2008-2011. We grew quickly. I also worked with [Hall-of-Famer] Mary Doten, and she helped me establish what I wanted to do after coaching. Coming to Medinah was a great progression in my career and has been a great fit.”

In the fall of 2017, during construction, McPherson purchased court time at GEPTC. He said, “I ran six weeks of free paddle starting in late August. It didn’t matter what level. Forty-two men came out and we joined the league then and there. The women played in our Quick Start program.” When Medinah’s Racquet Center opened, the players moved into the new facility and participation grew exponentially. They currently field six men’s and six women’s teams in the league.

## LEAVING IT TO THE EXPERTS

Sereci said, “Construction of the complex took almost one year from start to finish. We had visited a few clubs in the area and every warming hut was one big space. We are a little different here at Medinah—very casual. We created one area that is intimate with seating and the fireplace, with the bar adjacent.”

Hiring Andy Koglin at OKW Architects, Inc. was an easy decision. OKW has built numerous huts in Chicagoland, and, Sereci said, “Our main clubhouse is large and impressive, but we wanted the hut to resemble a residence. So we left it to the professionals. They understand the sport, culture, and people’s behavior.”

Sereci continued, “Inside the hut, we built a coffee center and buffet area near the bar.” The light-filled room features a tiled fireplace, leather chairs, four-

top tables, window seating, two large screen TVs, and indoor/outdoor speakers. The spacious deck holds a popular firepit area with outdoor seating. The club is so proud of their new warming hut “it is such a good representation of who we are” that they hold their prospective member events there.

## SKYROCKETING ACTIVITY

When they played at Glen Ellyn, McPherson’s goal was to get bodies on the court during the first season. He said, “The men played Southwest League Series 20 and 22 (Series 27 being the lowest then). We had two teams, and they lost their first seven matches by a large margin. It justified the need for lessons. In the second half, we were undefeated and won Series 20. It really showed our members that this is a sport you have to learn.”

McPherson offers Junior paddle on Sundays, with levels corresponding to tennis for an easy transition. It sells out. He created the Camel Cup, a three-month long club championship with two levels. It sells out. The couple’s events on St. Patrick’s Day and Valentine’s Day sell out. The Turkey Shoot-out sells out. McPherson relies on Head Racquet Pro, Eric Pohl, to help build the programming.

This year, McPherson and Mark Cunnington of Glen Ellyn are teaming up to run the first tournament on the new APTA Tour—the I-355 Cup on September 25-26. Since the racquets staff has worked in hospitality for Medinah’s major championship golf events, they are thinking big for this event. For pros traveling in, the club is offering them a way to recoup travel costs, such as teaching lessons, participating in a Pro-Am, or playing golf with members. The event will be live streamed to showcase Medinah’s “other” sport and the club’s 20’ x 30’ Jumbotron will air the tournament for the overflow crowd.

Sereci concluded, “Anthony’s mindset and entrepreneurial spirit is rewarding. His approach is to get you excited for the game and trust the results will follow. He takes consistent actions to grow the game. We are so impressed and blessed to have Anthony.” Medinah’s membership is also impressed and blessed with their new Racquet Center and management’s commitment to platform tennis. «»