



April Volunteer of the Month – Jackie Keller

By: *Tori Townsend*

Survivor. Champion. Leader.

Jackie Keller of St. Petersburg is a Breast Cancer survivor, USTA League Tennis National Champion and General Manager of the St. Petersburg Tennis Center. Residing in St. Petersburg for the past 20 years, Jackie has served as Tennis Director and Pro Shop Manager at Treasure Island Tennis & Yacht Club and Isla Del Sol Yacht & Country Club, while teaching professionally for more than a decade. Her road to success is paved from her past, which includes playing basketball in college before Title IX ever existed and playing a game that has simply saved her life. For this, USTA Florida acknowledges Jackie Keller as its April Volunteer of the Month.



Following college, Jackie picked up tennis after playing with her brother while teaching school in Pittsburgh. Shortly thereafter, she joined a club and started playing seriously - taking lessons and playing tournaments in the USTA Middle States Section.

"I played a lot of singles early on," she said. "Coming from Pittsburgh, we played indoors and when I moved to Florida in 1982, it was quite a transition to the clay and being outside. But now, I love it."

Transitioning to USTA League Tennis in the late 70s, when the program was called the USTA/Michelob Light League, Jackie said she loved the team concept.

"It just seems like the camaraderie is great and you are not alone. You can lose a match and your team can still pull it out. There is just a great sense of community there and I think everyone should play team tennis."

Since then, she has volunteered for years as a team captain and has become the anchor that holds many women's league teams together in the area. This includes captaining a senior and adult women's 4.5 team, along with assisting other captains with line ups, recruiting players and talking team strategy. One of her most memorable tennis moments was in 2007 when her team captured the national title at the USTA League presented by Chrysler 4.5 Senior National Championships held at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden in Palm Springs, Calif.

"We only had six players," she said. "We all had to play every match and we did it. It was fun; it was six women dedicated to doing their best and we had a blast."

Jackie has had to take time off from the competitive women's senior circuit due to her busy schedule managing the St. Petersburg Tennis Center. However; with more than 300 kids registered for programs and dozens of league players on the courts, she has plenty to be proud of. Especially considering that the tennis center was on the verge of destruction only years ago.



"We went from almost being demolished to coming back, getting new courts and currently, they are starting construction on our new building," she said. "We went from almost devastation and being torn down to being the busiest club in St. Pete."

When the city decided to tear the facility down, a group of concerned citizens formed a foundation, came together and convinced the city to turn the reins over to them.

"We got a couple of grants from the USTA to start First Serve, hired a director to do a kids program, and before you knew it, we had 30 kids out there and now we are registered with well over 300 kids," she said.

Jackie has been a staple in the tennis industry for years. As a manager, director, teacher and a player, she has impacted individuals of all ages in different aspects of the game. Now, nine years in cancer remission, Jackie is stronger than ever. Talk about tennis for a lifetime – there it is.

"I honestly think, and this is with all sports, it shows you who you are and how you handle yourself," she said. "It is not about winning or losing – really it's not. It is a vehicle to develop principles and to live a quality life."

***PHOTO 1 CAPTION:** Jackie celebrates her team's win at the 4.5 Senior National Championships

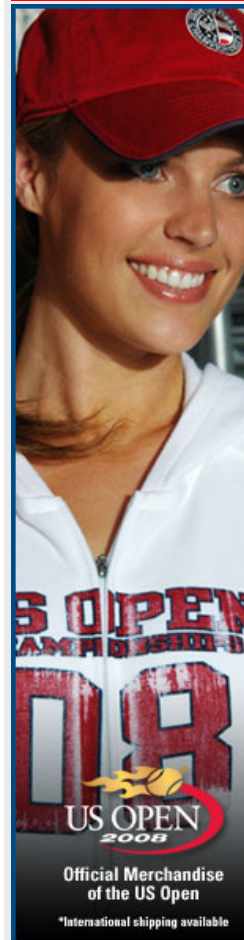
***PHOTO 2 CAPTION:** National Champions: (l-r) Lisa Grattan, Andrea Martin, Elizabeth Leigh, team captain Jackie Keller, Leslie Godwin and Sharon Benson



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