

# pickleball

## Pickleball's Future in Lexington County

by Warren McInnis Hughes

**P**ickleball, once a passing curiosity for Lexington County resident Steve Livingston, has now become a favorite pastime, making him a major promoter, sponsor and player of the trending sport. In February, Livingston, a philanthropic Irmo businessman, organized a successful pickleball tournament in Lexington for veterans and first responders at Barr Road Sports Complex, one of several pickleball facilities built by Lexington County Recreation and Aging Commission.

As Livingston explains, his interest in pickleball was sparked when he and his wife, Sylvia, as frequent RV travelers, noticed the activity generated by enthusiastic pickleball players at campgrounds. One morning, while on one of their trips, he decided to investigate what drew participants to the game. He instantly became attracted to the friendly and lively competition and began playing. Now, an enthusiastic “pickleballer,” he has a wide network of other players as friends. In fact, the camaraderie is a chief aspect of why the sport is so appealing, he says. “I quickly discovered

pickleball is not only easy to learn and fun, but you also meet the friendliest people. Although pickleball is basically simple, you can make it as energetic and challenging as you want. It can provide a great workout,” he added.

Arriving back home after his pickleball discovery, Livingston focused on opportunities to play locally. The sport’s popularity in Lexington reflects a growth occurring across the country in recent years, especially during the pandemic when people were drawn to outdoor sports. In 2022, the Sports and Fitness Industry Association reported pickleball participation had grown by almost 40 percent, making it the fastest growing sport in the country. It combines elements of tennis, badminton, racquetball and table tennis, now has some five million players. The USA Pickleball Association is the national governing body for the sport and provides players with official rules, tournaments, rankings and promotional materials. There are nearly 10,000 pickleball locations nationwide.

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As director of tennis and pickleball operations for the Lexington County Recreation and Aging Commission, Brian Clary says he has witnessed the dramatic increase in the sport’s participation and growth. He coaches pickleball and tennis and has a certified professional coaching certificate with the Professional Pickleball Registry and an Elite Professional certification with the US Professional Tennis Association. Clary explains the similarities between the two

sports: the sports are similar in nature by using a racquet or paddle to hit a ball over a net into a designated area. However, the pickleball court is smaller in size, only 20 feet by 44 feet, whereas the tennis court is 36 feet by 78 feet long. With a considerable size difference, the ball moves much faster in tennis than in pickleball, requiring a bigger court. Tennis requires more movement since the court is bigger, but pickleball also



requires quick reactions to cover a shorter area. Pickleball can be played at all levels of skill, from basic movements at the beginner level to quicker bursts of movement and faster hands at higher levels.

Opportunities to play pickleball in Lexington have expanded rapidly, he says. “We’ve added lesson programs, open play nights, ladder play, tournaments, kids activities and summer camps.” Courts have been added at the Lexington County

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**“We’ve added lesson programs, open play nights, ladder play, and tournaments and also include kids’ activities and camps.”**



## Get Out There!

### LCRAC Pickle Ball Facilities

LCRAC.com

### Barr Road Sports Complex

213 Barr Road

### Cayce Tennis & Fitness Center

1120 Fort Congaree Trail

### Lexington County Tennis Complex

425 Oak Dr.

### Lexington Leisure Center

198 Park Rd.

### Tri-City Leisure Center

485 Brooks Ave.

### Other Lexington County pickleball

facilities include:

### Seven Oaks Park

Irmo-Chapin Recreation Commission

200 Leisure Lane

### Harbison Community Center

106 Hillpine Road

### Quail Valley Swim & Racquet Club

1336 Country Squire Dr.

### Riverland Hills Baptist Church

201 Lake Murray Blvd.

### Timberlake Country Club

222 Timberlake Dr.

### Resources:

USApickleball.org | Pickleheads.com

24hourpickleball.com

Tennis Complex and the Cayce Tennis and Fitness Center and more are planned elsewhere. If you want to start playing, Clary says. “Reach out to us at LCTC or at Cayce Tennis and Fitness Center and any of our six certified professionals can help you get started.” As for Livingston, he enjoys the courts available locally as well as those he discovers through excursions when back on the road. In fact, pickleball play has become a major feature of his travels. He says he stays in touch with pickleball friends he has met on the road.

Fellow player Pat Truesdale of Camden is an official USA Pickleball Association District Ambassador, representing the East SC region. “Pickleball appeals to all age and skill levels, because everybody can participate and enjoy it,” she says. Since 2016, the dedicated ambassador has introduced countless players to the game, from youngsters to seniors. Like Livingston, she too values the travel opportunities with plans to set off for Turks and Caicos for a pickleball event later this year. USA Pickle ambassadors are volunteers who promote the sport and USA Pickleball in the local areas they represent. Edwin Gerace and JoAnn Norelius are Lexington County USA Pickleball Ambassadors and Carlos Annrich and Marion Keller are ambassadors for Richland County. There are more than 40 ambassadors in South Carolina.

As dedicated players like Livingston, Truesdale and others quickly discover, pickleball is a social sport that instantly connects you to other enthusiastic players, not to mention providing considerable health benefits. It boosts mood, lowers blood pressure, builds confidence, burns calories, builds fitness, improves balance and enhances agility, according to Pickleball, the official magazine of the USA Pickleball Association. The popular pastime began back in 1965 when three men developed a diversion for their children. There was a

badminton court but no equipment, so the fathers improvised and started playing with ping-pong paddles and a plastic ball. Legend claims the sport got its name because it resembles the mishmash of what crew teams call the “pickle boat,” a crew made up of leftovers from all the other boats.

In 1972, a corporation was formed to protect the creation of the sport. The United States Amateur Pickleball Association, now the USA Pickleball Association, was organized to promote pickleball on a national level. The first rulebook was also published. By 1990, pickleball was being played in all 50 states. In 2005, a new corporation for the sport was established as USA Pickleball Association (USAPA). In 2021, USA Pickleball Membership reached the 50,000 milestone and ended the year with just over 53,000 members, a 43% percent from the previous year and the largest single growth year to date for the organization. The USA Pickleball Association reports it is one of the fastest-growing sports ever, particularly among older tennis players who find themselves happy not to have to cover the larger court. The sport is set to continue its exponential growth. Its expansion is attributed to its popularity at fitness centers, physical education classes, resorts and retirement communities. It is also growing worldwide with many new international clubs forming and national governing bodies now established on multiple continents.

Thanks to the internet and social media, pickleball fans can access an abundance of websites, apps, blogs and forums for engagement. South Carolina native Brandon



Mackie, now based in California, has developed a website, pickleheads.com, which is a great source for locating pickleball facilities locally and nationwide. “Pickleball is fun, social, easy to learn, and can be enjoyed by players of all ages,” he says. South Carolina ranks 23rd nationally in the number of pickleball courts available, according to his website. The platform also helps players find courts, organize sessions, and connect with local players. “Our site covers all things pickleball and we’ve been watching the sport grow like crazy in Lexington,” he says.

With Lexington’s standing as one of the fastest growing areas in the region it’s no surprise that it will be the home of the state’s first 24-Hour Pickleball complex set to open this summer. Located on Augusta Highway near Lizard’s Thicket, the development will feature 12 pickleball courts, eight indoors and four outdoors. Planned as a members-only club that will host tournament and league play, it will also have certified coaches. More 24-Pickleball sites throughout South Carolina and the Southeast are already in the works. ■