



# Waterloo Tennis Club and Partners: The City of Waterloo



The Waterloo Tennis Club as a member-directed club has managed to survive one hundred years due to co-operating and working with other institutions. Right from the founding years the WTC has been tied to the **City of Waterloo**. In 1915 the club needed the permission and support of the City of Waterloo to use park land to build its first two courts. The contract stated that the Waterloo Park Board was the key party and would decide on the site for the courts. On the other hand the club was totally responsible for the expenses of building and maintaining the courts. If the contract expired the courts and fences would revert to the park without payment. In 1916 the courts were closed by the Board for an unstated reason. Eleven years passed before the club once again played on clay courts in the park.

The second partnership was formed in 1927 and ended in the 50s. In 1927 E.G. Schafer and E. Stouffer, both from **The Dominion Life Assurance Company**, were among the nucleus of players who formed a committee and then sought out the Waterloo Park Board's approval to revive the tennis club in the park. Dominion Life, rather than the City of Waterloo, provided the grant to oversee the capital costs for the clay, fencing and nets. The company also put forward the club's first trophies, the Dominion Life Challenge Trophy for Men's Singles in 1927 and then The Dominion Life Challenge Trophy for Ladies in 1929. The latter trophy still exists at the club today.

Dr. W. L. Hilliard, son of Thomas Hilliard who was one of the founders of Dominion Life and also a director at the company, became the club's president in 1927. Arthur Hoffman and Elmer Stouffer, Dominion Life employees, became presidents in 1929 and 1931 respectively. During this period Courts 3 and 4 were built and in 1933 floodlights installed on courts 1 and 2. As there was no clubhouse, meetings were held in an office of Dominion Life. To raise



**This photo captures a rare occasion when representatives of the City of Waterloo, University of Waterloo and Waterloo Tennis Club got together at the Waterloo Tennis Club. It was taken on the clubhouse balcony in July 1991. Seated are Doug Wright, President and Vice-Chancellor of UW and Brian Turnbull, Mayor of the City of Waterloo. Standing are: Peter Hopkins, Director of Intramurals at UW; Tom Litwiller, Parks and Recreation, City of Waterloo; Bob Broad, President of WTC; Whitey Kruschinski, city employee.**

*Credit: Waterloo Tennis Club*



**The ribbon cutting at the official opening of the new clubhouse, May 11, 1968. From left to right Mayor of Waterloo, Don Meston; President of the OLTA, Ross Brown; WTC board directors Sam Yuska, Ron Wagner and Gary Neff; President of WTC Ralph Tailby.**

*Credit: K-W Record Negative Collection, University of Waterloo Library*

money for the club. Six O'Clock Bridge Teas were also held at the offices of Dominion Life. To encourage tennis membership the company subsidized their employees' tennis membership.

A clubhouse was built in 1936 that included a locker room for both men and ladies, each with two showers, but no washroom. No records exist as to how the club managed this, whether it was through the city or Dominion Life support. Up to that point male players had used the locker and shower facilities provided for the baseball and cricket teams in the park grandstand, a city property. Social gatherings and annual dances were held in the park pavilion, likewise a city property, until 1938 when neighbours residing near the park complained about noise. Then they began hosting parties at Westmount or venues such as Knollwood Park.

Dominion Life Assurance Company was located on the corner of Albert and Erb Streets in Waterloo between 1913 through 1954. During that period employees could easily make the trek to Waterloo Park to play tennis. That all changed when the company moved and the major shareholder became an insurance company from Fort Wayne Indiana in 1956, eventually to be bought out by Manulife Financial in 1984.

The courts and club membership declined during the war years. Around 1947 club members again approached the Parks Board for assistance to upgrade the courts. No cash was given but good will was extended by lending trucks to haul clay. Members installed new lights and resurfaced the courts by taking on debt. In 1950 they expanded the clubhouse by building the verandah that had been planned in 1936. They received a one year grant of \$500.00 from the City. Other costs were covered by fees and the volunteer work of members.

The club continued to prosper with the support of the city. In 1958 the club highlighted the opening of the season with Waterloo Mayor Paikin hitting the first ball on the 24<sup>th</sup> May weekend. In 1960 the club president John H. Gnutzman requested a grant of \$500.00 from

the city to install washrooms, a water fountain and better drainage for the showers as conditions were close to being unsanitary. The city refused. Members pitched in and got the work done.

In 1963 club membership reached 300, far too many for the four courts. The club and the city discussed what could be done to meet the demand for tennis. The city considered taking over the courts as a municipal operation chiefly for younger players. The club would not accept this without re-imburement for the building and other equipment as it would need a new site if it was to continue to exist. The matter was resolved by the club deciding to stay in the park. So in 1964 they launched the project of building six har tru courts at a cost of \$35,000 raising the funds by taking on debt for five years and increasing fees and membership.

Success bred optimism. Club members had dreams of a new clubhouse. This dream was realized in 1968. With much fanfare the new clubhouse was opened on May 11, 1968. Here the City played a big part. “The Club proved eligible for a Winter Works Provincial Grant which helped defray labour costs but the \$80,000 mortgage money was conferred by the City at a rate of seven and a half percent over a period of twenty years. The contract included a yearly \$1.00 rental, (for 99 years, 1967-2066) with the understanding that the club keep up the park grounds and continue in its efforts to provide a community service. Besides this generous agreement, the club was exempt from paying taxes until 1975.” p. 45 *Waterloo Tennis* by Mary Elizabeth Hearn

*Submitted by Mary Liz Hearn*

*Edited by Pat Craton*

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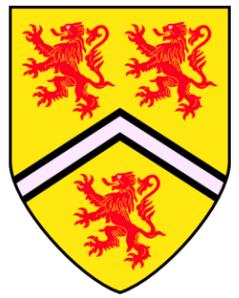


**In this photo taken in December 2010 a community group of seniors enjoyed a Christmas potluck at the club. John Bezear, club manager cooked the turkey and Chris Krokoszynski, a board member, provided a venison casserole.**

*Credit: Waterloo Tennis Club*



# Waterloo Tennis club and Partners: The University of Waterloo



**The University of Waterloo**, established in 1957, became a formal and important partner with the Waterloo Tennis Club in 1972. At that time there was interest both from club members and the university in building a structure to ensure all season play. The cost, estimated at \$28,000 per court was beyond the capacity of the club. The university proposed constructing six tennis courts for student use. As it turned out the university received a provincial grant for community shared recreational facilities. The provincial grant totalled \$160,000 which included \$50,000 for an air-supported structure covering two courts, for winter tennis. The club and the university worked out an agreement. The club members voted on the terms at a special meeting held in May 1972. The agreement gave the kinesiology students 50 percent usage of the new courts built, with the students having more time in the spring and the fall, while the club gained the benefit of extra courts in the summer. It is interesting to note that the club presidents during this period were employees of the university; Ian Dagg, Bill Lobban and John Pezzack were presidents for the years 1972-1979

In 1989 the club acquired a bubble to cover all six courts which was financed by the university. The club paid a flat rental fee for its court time and shared utility costs equally with the UW. The university also covered a portion of the club's costs of administering the facility. The court time in the bubble was shared equally by the university and the tennis club with 53 hours a week available to the public on a pay-as-you-play basis. This project was planned jointly by a UW team of Peter Hopkins (athletics department) Eugene Coburn (finance department) and Dave Churchill (plant operations), and a tennis club board of Gord MacKinnon, Gerry Malleck and Ralph Staal, a professor at the university.



**The University of Waterloo became a formal partner with the Waterloo Tennis club in 1972 with the installation of the first bubble. As a result the club changed from a summer club to an all year tennis facility.**

*Credit: K-W Record Negative Collection, University of Waterloo Library*



**The Waterloo Tennis Club is the home of the varsity tennis teams as the indoor courts where they train and host their matches are shared with the club. This photo shows the varsity team of the 2014-15 season coached by Pat Craton. The men's team finished in second place at the season-ending Ontario Universities Athletics Championships.**

*Credit: Pat Craton*

The tennis club and the university had connections prior to 1972. The varsity tennis team had access to Waterloo Tennis Club courts since at least 1963 when Gary Buckley, an employee of the university, coached the team. Gary, himself, was a top club player winning a men's singles championship as well as men's doubles and mixed doubles championships. He coached the varsity team well into the 1970s. There have been other varsity players who have taken an active part in the WTC. John Pezzack and Tracey Goldhar (Osterman) were varsity players who later became club presidents. Pat Craton, elected president in 2011, has coached the varsity teams since 2010.

Another bond between the club and the university has been the Downey Tennisfest. This was the creation of a group of tennis enthusiasts among the University of Waterloo faculty, staff and alumni so named for James Downey, the university's president (1993-1996) and great tennis enthusiast. Even after his retirement in 1999, the event continued for another ten years. It was a feature of the club's fall program for sixteen years.



**The Downey Tennisfest, a feature of the Waterloo Tennis Club's fall program for sixteen years, held its first tournament in 1993.**

**This is the group photo taken that first year. Jim Downey, UW president at the time, sitting in front with Sally Kemp.**

*Credit: Sally Kemp*

By 2005 the club decided that bubble purchased in 1989 needed replacement. The club again approached the university for financial assistance but the university was unwilling to invest in a new bubble at the time. As a result, a new contract was drawn up to reflect the changed situation. The club dipped into its reserves to make a down payment and negotiated a 12-year lease with the Farley group to acquire the new bubble. Costs of erecting the bubble in fall and dismantling it in spring, work that had been done by the university, were prohibitive so the decision was made to keep it up all year.

The club continues to work together with the city and the university. It could be said that without the partnerships the club would not exist today. It is an unique facility giving much joy to tennis enthusiasts and providing a wonderful opportunity for community and university population to learn and play the game.

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