

Club haven for platform tennis

The Cedar Club provides unique outdoor exercise option

By Jim Cryns
News Graphic Correspondent

Cedarburg — There are some restaurants that are so popular, they don't even have a sign. You could be standing right in front of the place and still ask for directions.

That's reminiscent of the feeling I had when I was driving down Highway C in the town of Cedarburg looking for The Cedar Club, a haven for platform or "paddle" tennis just east of Wauwatosa Road. When you do find the club, nestled in a wooded enclave, you'll be immediately struck by its charm. It's a small heated clubhouse, 'man fort' or 'tree house' as it's affectionately referred to. A converted garage is the focal point of the club, where everyone congregates before and after matches.

The membership of the club runs the gamut in age from mid-20s to upper 40s and beyond. Athletic levels seem to follow the same pattern. Guys with 20 years of experience playing the game alongside relative novices.

"We've got about 56 guys in our leagues," said Don "Beany" Welch, one of the founders of the club. "We have full memberships and social memberships."

Make no mistake, it's a mainly environment. From the moment I entered, I was made to feel at home. There was a spread of food, fruit, juices and coffee. Picture the warming house at an outdoor skating rink, with a refreshment bar and pingpong tables. Tim Allen, the character from the "Home Improvement" television show, would be right at home.

Insert Tim "The Toolman" Taylor grunt here.

"We have members from all professions and all age groups," Welch said. "It's largely a middle-aged game, say late twenties on up. We've got everything from students, to tennis pros, to lawyers."

On Wednesday and Thursday nights, the courts are reserved for the men's league. Monday night is reserved for a women's league. "We chose



Photo by Mark Justesen

The Cedar Club, located at 7218 Pioneer Road in Cedarburg, offers memberships for leagues from September to April, along with social memberships.

Monday nights off so we could watch football," Welch said.

Paddle Tennis at the Cedar Club is played in conditions which rival those of mail carriers. They play outdoors in fall and winter in rain, sleet or snow. It's an ideal fall and winter sport as the court is designed to be skid resistant with a heating system below the court to melt snow.

Picture a tennis court that shrunk in the dryer and you get a pretty good idea of the size of the playing surface. Now add metal screens around the perimeter and you've got paddle tennis. The game is played like a hybrid between tennis and racquetball with play allowed off the screens.

You don't need a lot of gear to play, just a paddle (racquet) and some tennis shoes. The club even provides some racquets if you don't own one.

For years the Highland House in Mequon was

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— Don Welch, co-founder of The Cedar Club

home base for a lot of these players, but ownership of the restaurant decided to go a different route back in 2001 and left the players without a court, or up the creek without a tennis paddle. "There are some private clubs with courts but you have to be a member of that club to play," Welch said. Welch explained how the club is mostly made up of the guys who come from the Highland House days.

A core group of die-hard

players searched for a new place to play. Attempts to coax local establishments to put up a court didn't fare too well. Taking matters into their own hands, a group of guys formed a couple of LLCs to operate what later became the Cedar Club. The founding members include Eric Arnold, Brad Brogan, Tom Hayes, Woody Alverson and Welch.

"We had a few headaches with zoning," Welch said. "We knocked on the doors and met our potential

neighbors. We told them lights would be out by 10 p.m." Eventually the concerns were eased and Welch said they've never had a complaint from the neighbors.

For tournaments the club pairs players with more experience with those with those with less. "The number one player will play with the number 50 player. The number two player with the number 49 player and so on," Welch said. "While everybody has a good time, we play to win in the tournaments."

You can play on other days of the week. Welch says all members have to do is check the Web site and book a time. "There is open paddle on Saturdays at 10 a.m.," Welch said. "You can visit the Web site and book your play time."

Welch said \$550 will get you an annual league membership playing September through April. "We have a big golf outing

in September at the Mequon Country Club to kick off the season," he said. "We have social members that don't play in the leagues and they pay \$225 for a membership. More players are always welcome."

A family environment is encouraged and kids are allowed in the clubhouse until 8 p.m. Men's open paddle is on Tuesdays where an advanced player will be available for free instruction from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Men's leagues play on Wednesday and Thursday with matches at 6 p.m., 7:20 p.m. and 8:40 p.m.

"All league play is in the evening and we try to match you with players of similar abilities," Welch said. The club even has a certified paddle tennis professional instructor who is available for instruction.

For more information, visit the Web site at www.thecedarclub.net.



Photo by Mark Justesen

The Cedar Club offers doubles tournaments throughout the season, which pairs players equally based on skill level.



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