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Preserving a Community Gem - The Legend of Sleepy Hollow Continues

By Laurie Snyder



"It was, as I have said, a fine autumnal day," wrote Irving, "the sky was clear and serene, and nature wore that rich and golden livery which we always associate with the idea of abundance." Ohlen Alexander's 2012 photos illustrate how successfully SHSTC members continue to foster harmony between the natural and built worlds. His shot of the Sleepy Hollow pool, mid-demolition, was taken from a similar angle to the one used by Sunset Magazine when it captured the newly completed pool in 1958. Photos Ohlen Alexander

land owners and subdividers offered them 541/2 acres, close by, at a price well below market value, with the stipulation the land was to be used for recreational purposes only."

R.L. Kocher, former resident of 69 Lombardy Lane, was membership chairman of the Sleepy Hollow Recreational Association on March 24, 1955 when he wrote:

"Recently 54.7 acres were purchased within Sleepy Hollow for a generous pool, a wading pool for the younger children, change rooms, canteen, picnic area, sports areas, cabana-type club house and a parking area on the grounds. A competent landscape architect (C. Mason Whitney) has been retained...."

Kocher's fellow founders were: C.E. Cantrill, R.B. Dozier, R.A. Fayram, T.S. Ferguson, F.A. Gillespie, G.G. Hall, R.H. Hartsough, L.C. Lemire, H.E. Peck, C.J. Schuler, S.S. Sorem, E.S. Starkman, M.B. Sutcliffe, and H.J. Caldwell. Ernie Starkman, Bob Dozier, Hal Caldwell, and Dode Hall served as the group's president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary, respectively.

In the March 1955 Oakland Tribune article, "Sleepy Hollow Purchases Land for Recreation," Starkman called their efforts "the first step in a program to create a spot, close to home, where the children can plan and swim in safety, and mom and dad can relax in peace."

It was clear that, even then, Orinda moms and dads were already dreaming of future glory. The pool would "be of either A.A.U. or Olympic dimensions, thus assuring the membership of ample swimming space and at the same time providing us with the distance necessary for competitive meets."

The initial membership fee was \$240 with space limited to 350 families. Local newspapers reported the attendance of 600, including State Assemblyman Donald Doyle, at the formal groundbreaking July 14, and that Sleepy Hollow volunteers performing electrical and other work significantly reduced costs. By mid-September 1955, "the bulldozing [was] completed, the water line laid" with the pool "well under construction by Paddock Pools."

Sixty Years Later

Andra Berkman, SHSTC Board member and Membership Director, says 2012 revitalization measures will ensure that SHSTC will thrive for another 50 years.

Demolition of the old pool is underway, a roughly \$2 million phase that will culminate in eight lanes and 25 yards of sleek aquatic design on par with the new pool at Wilder. A second pool will enable Lamorinda's littlest ones

"Not far from this village, perhaps about two miles, there is a little valley, or rather lap of land, among high hills, which is one of the quietest places in the whole world." - Washington Irving, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1820)

It is tough to picture Washington Irving's headless horseman racing through 21st century Lamorinda on even its spookiest, barely-moonlit streets, but far easier to time warp back to the upstate Early American hamlet described above when visiting the Sleepy Hollow Swim and Tennis Club (SHSTC) - odd as this mixture of eras and settings may seem.

SHSTC's Sunnyside Lane atmosphere feels more like a nature preserve than a competitive sports complex. Old growth trees - silent sentinels to the area's rich history - blanket the land as far as the eye can see, dampening most noise. Its genesis was captured by *Sunset Magazine* in 1958:

"Behind the Berkeley ridge that screens them from San Francisco Bay lie the gentle hills and valleys of the Orinda-Lafayette-Moraga region, etched here and there by small streams and shaded by oak groves and walnut orchards. Since World War II this region, like many other parts of the Bay Area, has absorbed hundreds of new homes. Watching this process continue, one group of residents has taken an unusual step to reserve a piece of the countryside as a green belt and outdoor recreation center."

How It All Began

Orindans, wrote *Sunset*, formed a non-profit to "sell membership shares, buy some property, and ... build the facilities the members wanted.... One of the area's largest

to have fun honing their own water wings.

"We take our swimming seriously," says fellow Board member Catja McDonald. Head Coach Matt Ehrenberger has been with SHSTC since 1994, and also coaches Orinda Aquatics. The program has thrived under his leadership, becoming one of the top in the country.

Jim Coyne, SHSTC's Director of Tennis, is also a big draw. The former head of junior tennis for the United States Tennis Association (USTA) Northern California, Coyne ran Claremont Resort programs for 27 years before coming to SHSTC. He has helped little lobbers gain confidence via an innovative "peewee tennis" initiative, and also has many adult pupils who are fans. Berkman calls him an "ambassador of the sport of tennis."

McDonald, an architect herself, is overseeing the SHSTC revitalization by project managers ProPM, architects Mark Cavagnero Associates, and builders Oliver & Company. Tennis courts will be renovated as part of phase two; phase three will upgrade SHSTC buildings. Planners hope to see more recreational activities in phase four - possibly even the addition of horseback riding trails. "We have about 25 acres zoned as R-40 (recreational use) and the remaining acreage is a scenic easement," says McDonald.

A ribbon cutting is expected to be held this spring, along with a membership drive. The club, no longer exclusive to the Sleepy Hollow neighborhood, attracts members from Moraga, Lafayette and Oakland, as well as Orinda. To learn more, visit: www.sleepyhollowlegends.net/.



USTA's former director of junior tennis for Northern California heads the program at the Sleepy Hollow Swim and Tennis Club. SHSTC Board member Andra Berkman describes him as "an ambassador of the sport of tennis."

Reach the reporter at: laurie@lamorindaweekly.com

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