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SPECIAL EDITION
The Official Newsletter of the Santa Fe Tennis and Swim Club

BOB MCLAUGHLIN To Retire After 42 YEARS



In 1977 I was in the right place at the right time and was offered a job by Dick Mechem, founder and then owner of the Club. I met Dr. Mechem at the College of Santa Fe. He was teaching a course on psychology and I was in his class. We became friends. A few

years later he needed someone to manage the tennis club and asked me if I wanted the job. I graduated from CSF with a business degree and had a few years of experience as the business manager of the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival. Dick offered me the job with one condition, he said to me “Bob, I want you to stick it out for two years”.

Dick Mechem was my mentor, friend, and a tennis legend. He showed me how to run a tennis club and how to play tennis. Whenever Dick had a few minutes to spare he loved to get on the court and practice hitting tennis balls. Of course he needed someone on the other side of the net to hit with and someone who was available without notice. I didn't know how to play tennis when I started at the club. When I did learn how to hit a ball over the net I became someone on the other side of the net who could hit the ball back and I was here and I was always available. Over the next couple of decades I hit a lot of tennis balls with Dick.

BOB, cont.



Left to right, Bob, Rod Mechem and, Songbird Ortiz

The Club was a family business back then. Dick's teenage children and their friends worked at the club: in the snack bar, on the grounds, as lifeguards. "Worked" is a misnomer for what they actually did, which was to work as little as possible, have as much fun as possible, and play practical jokes on me, some of which were outrageous (and not suitable for print here). They drove me crazy sometimes but they were good kids full of high spirits and I enjoyed having them around.

I learned to play tennis and I played a lot, club members became friends, times were good. I had a job I loved.

In 1987 Dr. Mechem put the Club up for sale. It was purchased by an ad hoc partnership.

There were three partners, Fred Tiberi, Mary Bush, and Jackie Grab. Jackie's brother, Jay, was a realtor and he needed one more person to enter into the partnership to make the sale. He asked Jackie, who had been a special ed teacher, to be partners with Fred and Mary, both of whom had business experience. After a few years Fred and Mary left the partnership and Jackie Grab became the sole owner of the club.

The 80's and 90's were boom years for tennis. American men and women dominated professional tennis. Tennis was popular, club membership grew and the club prospered. Rocky Royer, a top 100 in the world ranked player was hired by the new owners. Rocky had a cachet and connections to professional tennis. He brought Dennis Ralston, a top professional tennis player in the 1960's and 1970's, to the club to run week-long tennis clinics. A high point of that era was a Pro Am tournament held at the club with tennis greats: Roy Emerson and Rod Laver. In the dining room next to the fireplace there is a picture of them taken at that tournament.



Left, Roy Emerson, Sunny Nixon, Bob and, Rod Laver

BOB, cont.

Owner Jackie Grab was personable and charming. She drove an old beat up Chevy Suburban, owned 34 dogs, most of which she packed into the Suburban and brought them to the Club every day. She was great at setting up tennis games for members. Also she could fix you up with a date, help you sell or rent your house, find you some place to live, mind your pet, bring you soup when you were sick. As she would like to say “we were a full service tennis club”!

The club had many good years in that era until it didn't and it began a long slow decline. By 2013 it was in serious financial trouble and foreclosure on the mortgage was imminent.

David Garcia and Assel Kussainova were members. They learned of the club's financial troubles and were determined to save it from bankruptcy and destruction. They took ownership in December of 2013. The club was renamed the Santa Fe Tennis and Swim Club.



Ribbon cutting ceremony, July 2016. David Garcia, right of middle; Assel Garcia, third from left (back)

There was a legal dispute on the transfer of ownership of the property and found myself giving testimony that favored Jackie. Nonetheless David offered me a job. I was very pleased to be part of the Club's revival.

David and Assel's plan was to transform the property into a premier tennis facility. Renovations began right away. The courts were repaired and resurfaced. The swimming pool was gutted and re-plastered. The club house was closed for renovations and a fence put up around it. The Club stayed open for business during the work. A portable office trailer in the parking lot served as the office and Rocky, Victor and I operated the club from the trailer for ten months while the clubhouse was renovated. There were many more improvements .

David and Assel's commitment to “save” the club and create a first rate facility was realized as a labor of love. In the summer of 2016 the club celebrated with a grand reopening ribbon cutting ceremony and party. Hundreds attended including many local dignitaries .

In 2017 the club was recognized by the USTA Southwest Section and received the *Section's Organization of the Year Award*.

Today the club is a vital part of the New Mexico tennis community and an asset to Santa Fe and the neighborhood and treasured by those who have been a part of it over the years.

The club has been in my life every day for almost 42 years. I will miss that very much.

I will retire at the end of the year but I will still be around as a life-long membership granted by the new owners of the Club. I'll see you on the courts!