



Steve McKellar (above), along with Mark Conti, are the new owners of the Court House and Racquet Club in West Bloomfield. (Staff photo by Charlie Kidd)

Club's sale sparks personnel changes

By JUDITH BERNÉ

Just who's on center court is not always clear at local tennis houses. Courthouse Tennis and Racquet Club was sold last week to Mark Conti of Birmingham and Steve McKellar of West Bloomfield for a figure reportedly over \$1 million. The club is located at Farmington near Maple roads in West Bloomfield.

Conti, 29, and McKellar, 27, are both former employees of the Racquet Clubs, the indoor tennis giant which includes Franklin, Square Lake and Centaur.

Conti left the Racquet Clubs two years ago to form the Oak Park and Royal Oak Bubble Clubs. McKellar, who started out selling in a Racquet Club pro shop, managed Centaur until last winter when he left over policy differences with Racquet Club owners Seymour Brode and Marshall Greenspan.

As McKellar and Conti moved in to Court House, the Racquet Clubs made Courthouse manager Mike Mehas, of Walled Lake, an offer he couldn't refuse. Mehas is now manager of Centaur, Court House's head-to-head competitor in the West Bloomfield tennis market.

Meantime, Mehas' wife, Diane, who worked for Conti at Oak Park last year and with her husband at Court House this summer, has elected to remain to direct tennis leagues and tournaments at Court House.

"MIKE LEAVING was a disappointment to us," McKellar says. "We wanted him to stay."

And Mehas admits, "I'm taking a gamble," by breaking away from his friends, Conti and McKellar, and going to Centaur at a time when the club is trying a new concept to draw members. (See related story) But the Racquet Clubs offered Mehas more money and the chance to improve Centaur's standing as the weakest link in the Brode-Greenspan chain.

Mehas is no stranger to his new affiliate, having managed Franklin before its expansion and as a pro at Square Lake alongside Conti. "There's room for both Court House and Centaur, especially with West Bloomfield growing," the mild-mannered Mehas says. "I think there are enough tennis players to go around."

Mehas freely admits he is soliciting some of Court House's players to come to Centaur because "they bought the building but they didn't buy the people."

At the same time, McKellar believes he will draw some who knew him at Centaur to Court House.

And, McKellar plans to bring in a bevy of junior players with the announcement that Mark Reznich, the Junior Davis Cup coach who has been working out of Rochester Hills Racquet Club, has been hired to take over the juniors program at Court House.

ONE RESULT of the changes has been to thoroughly upset West Bloomfield tennis circles.

Where are you going to line up now the question of the hour, instead of expecting the same faces to line up on Court House and Centaur courts.

At a Friday night Metro League clash between the two clubs, one of Centaur's top players informed her Court House opponent, "I'm joining Court House this fall."

"Oh," said the Court House number-one seed, "I'm joining Centaur."

New owners base Court House deal on 'good business' ideas

By JOHN BOZZO

If there is a feud between tennis club owners, the bad feelings are on one side.

In any case, the recent purchase of Court House Tennis and Racquets by the Bubble Clubs had nothing to do with any feud. It was just good business.

"There was no animosity between the bubble clubs and permanent facilities in the purchase of Court House," said Mark Conti of the Bubble Clubs.

"I don't think anyone would spend that kind of money (over a million dollars) out of bad feelings," Conti said. "It was a situation which provided a good business move."

Conti's Bubble Clubs include the Oak Park and Royal Oak Racquet Clubs. A bubble covers the courts during winter time. During the summer the bubble is taken down and local municipal governments run the tennis courts.

THE INDOOR TENNIS ASSOCIATION, the other party in the so-called tennis

feud, is also happy that the Bubble Clubs have obtained Court House.

There are three local clubs owned by the Indoor Tennis Association: Centaur in West Bloomfield, Franklin in Southfield and Square Lake in Bloomfield Hills. All are permanent, year-round clubs.

"My reaction to the sale is very positive," said Seymour Brode, an owner of International Tennis Association. "Indoor tennis is a competitive, sophisticated industry now. People with know-how can do nothing but help the industry."

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between the Indoor Tennis Association and the Bubble Clubs they stem from a law suit which held up construction of the Royal Oak Racquet Club in 1977.

The Michigan Indoor Tennis Association, an industry group composed of many different tennis club owners, filed the suit against the city of Royal Oak.

There were two main charges in the suit. One was that Royal Oak had violated its own zoning laws, and the second was that Royal Oak had guaranteed a note to the bank from the developer of the project.

"All of this was straightened out and corrected by the city, so the suit was dropped," said Brode. "I was a member of the Michigan Indoor Tennis Association, but I was not personally involved in the suit. It's long gone now. I really have forgotten about it."

"THERE IS NO VENDETTA on my part," Brode said. "I have no dislike toward Mark Conti. He's a good, honest capable businessman. There are no bad feelings from myself or the Indoor Tennis Association toward Mark. In fact, I welcome him. I'm pleased he bought the club. It's unfortunate that Mark was the victim of the law suit."

Conti remembers the event as the law suit which tried to prevent him from building the Royal Oak Racquet Club.

"They (the Indoor Tennis Association) have a lot of animosity toward me," Conti said, "and my feelings toward them are the same. They cost me a large sum of money in legal fees."



As McKellar and Conti move in to take over control of Court House, the Racquet Clubs made Mike Mehas (above) an offer he couldn't refuse. Mehas was Court House's manager. Now he's manager for Racquet Clubs' Centaur facility. (Staff photo by Charlie Kidd)

Club drops fees, hikes membership

By JOHN BOZZO

After one week of promotion, Centaur Racquet Club's owner is happy with their new no court fee program.

"People were sort of skeptical at first," said Seymour Brode. "After we sent out brochures explaining the program the results have been gratifying."

"We have firm commitments from 200 members within the first week of our promotion."

Centaur's no court fee program is a departure from the way indoor tennis clubs have been operating. Previously all tennis clubs charged a small membership fee plus a certain amount per hour of court time.

New to the Detroit Metropolitan area, Centaur's program charges a larger membership fee. There are, however, no charges for court time.

"I thought we would cater to the better players who play a lot," Brode said, "but we're also getting a

large group of B-level players who figure that by playing more it will improve their game."

Brode said that if a person plays once a week, Centaur's no court fee program is cheaper.

MARK CONTI owner of Court House Tennis and Racquets Club, is also happy with the no court fee program at Centaur. Both Court House and Centaur are in West Bloomfield.

"We're getting a lot of new members from Centaur," said Conti. "The new membership policy there is helping us out. Basically, we're keeping strong players and getting B-level players because they don't want to make that kind of financial commitment."

Centaur is charging \$190 for master membership. It is also payable in 12 installments of \$15. Spouse and junior memberships of \$70 and \$50

respectively are available with the master membership. There are no court fees with any of these memberships.

Previously, Centaur charged an \$85 yearly membership fee. In addition, members had to pay \$10 per hour for non-prime court time and \$14 per hour for prime time.

Another reason for the switch in members between Centaur and Court House are recent personnel changes. Mike Mehas recently moved from manager of Court House to Centaur. Steve McKellar, a former manager at Centaur, is one of the new owners at Court House. McKellar will be general manager of that club.

Brode said that the change in ownership at Court House will have no effect upon his Centaur club.

"We are operating the opposite way that they are," Brode said. "They are charging for court time, we are not."

Is squirmy red creature man's best friend?

By LISA GERBER
Special writer

Breeding worms is a rapidly multiplying business.

And almost anybody can raise worms successfully, according to a trio of Sylvan Lake vermiculturists (worm raisers). It doesn't cost much to start, requires little time and effort, and can be very profitable, says Michael Beaudoin, his twin brother Daniel and Fred Fry.

They are partners in Sylvan Worm Farm in Waterford Township. Housed in a boarded-up warehouse, hundreds of thousands of squirmy red worms are raising money for them 24 hours a day.

The demand for worms is great, said Mike, a sociology teacher and basketball coach at Mott High School in Warren.

THE USE OF earthworms for fishing bait is a familiar one, but there are other possibilities.

The earthworm may turn out to be man's best friend, Mike says.

Worms are being used to consume industrial waste, garbage, landfills, and sludge. Not only do the worms get rid of unwanted waste, but they turn it into something of value—fertilizer.

"They eat anything organic and

don't excrete pollution," Mike said. "In fact, worm castings are the purest organic fertilizer there is. A jar of worm castings sells for about \$1.50 at any nursery."

Zoo, aquariums, frog farms and fish hatcheries use worms for food. The creatures are 70 per cent protein and are being investigated as food additives for poultry, cattle and other livestock because of their naturally high protein content, Mike said.

The company from which the worm breeders bought their worms sells five tons a month to Japan for feeding shrimp. In the European market, worms are used as a protein supplement in flour.

Mike, Dan and Fred expect their first harvest in August. "If the market is as good as they claim, this is a tremendous business," said Fred, a math teacher at Beecher Junior High in Hazel Park.

The partners were looking for a sideline, bought 16 beds of worms (about 20,000) from a farm in Ohio for \$1,500. They now have more than 400,000 worms and hopes for 20 million more this time next year.

"Raising the worms is so simple it's ridiculous," said Dan an industrial arts teacher at Beecher Junior High.

The men spend about 20 minutes every day feeding and watering the worms. They live in an organic fiber

and eat a ground mixture similar to mesh. It costs about \$1 a month to feed a bed of worms.

"They don't eat much, there is no noise and there is no smell," Mike said.

"It's a crazy set up," Dan added. The worms even stay put in their beds.

The little beasts breed more rapidly than rabbits, doubling their population every 60 days. "They're a fantastically prolific type of livestock," Mike said.

The worms that they raise are short, slender red worms. The red hybrid is a crossbred earthworm, which is bisexual and lays an egg after breeding every seven days. In 14 to 21 days, the egg, smaller than a kernel of popcorn, hatches from 2 to 20 baby worms.

When the partners start to harvest, S & R Farms will buy back the worms for \$3 to \$4 a pound. Each bed is supposed to produce 10 pounds of worms a month. "We anticipate a profit of \$1,000 to \$10,000 a month," Mike said.

Their first crop probably won't be large, but it should prove whether their ideas about raising worms are right, Mike said.

The three vermiculturists were a little naive at the inception of their sideline career, so time will tell. In fact, the men were so naive that when they encountered their first baby worms they threw them all away.

"We thought we were being infested

with bugs," Fred said, of the little white creatures that they were throwing out the front door.

The men were skeptical at first about the seemingly get-rich-quick scheme, but after writing to govern-

mental agencies and universities, they decided it was a sound investment.

"Right now people think we're crazy because we all have specialized degrees. But it's an interested crazy," Fred said.

"Experimenters are just raising

the worm's potential. If it turns out to be true, it's going to be a gold mine," Mike said.

Besides "it's fun," he said.

"It's weird," Fred added. "But it's so stupid that it might work."



Worm farmers (from left) Mike Beaudoin, Fred Fry and Dan Beaudoin got into the business as a sideline to teaching. (Staff photo by Charlie Kidd)