

# OTTAWA TENNIS AND LAWN BOWLING CLUB

## Newcomers welcomed at the OTLBC

By Janet Uren

Mariane Arrage and Tracy Turnbull are two relatively new members of the Ottawa Tennis and Lawn Bowling Club (OTLBC). Mariane joined five years ago and Tracy in 2018.

Tracy was aware of the club long before she joined. As a student at Carleton University, she used to walk through Brewer Park on her way home. “It reminded me of summer camp from my childhood, and I always yearned to go in.”

In fact, Tracy was already a tennis fan, if not a player. She had travelled to many tournaments and had been “ogling” Björn Borg for years. “I figured it would be awesome to watch local tennis from the balcony of the club and have lunch away from the hustle and bustle.” In 2018 – after quitting smoking and feeling that she needed to get in shape – she took the plunge, literally. “I started with a pool membership because I had not touched a racket in 30 years or so. Then I took a bunch of beginners’ clinics. I loved Colin McAlpin, the club pro, and the way he embraced new players. In 2019, I became a full-fledged tennis member.”

In Mariane’s case, she was already a tennis player when a friend recommended OTLBC to her. She was attracted partly because of the club’s high-quality clay courts – the club has more such courts than any club in Canada – and partly because of convenience, as she lives just 10 minutes from the club. That is why she decided to try OTLBC; she has stayed mostly because of the warm welcome she was given.

“People are so friendly,” says Mariane, and she got involved right away in a system of “ladders.” “Depending on your level,” Mariane explains, “you work through a list of players at the same level over a couple of weeks. If you win, you move up and get to meet new people. It’s great at first for someone who doesn’t know anyone.”

For Tracy, the “ladders” were not her “thing.” She preferred lessons and the

more social context of round robins, bringing a lot of people together to meet and play. “Colin also introduced me to some fabulous players who shared my mindset – fun, laugh-our-heads-off tennis – and Maria and Morgan and all the people on the management side made it easy too. You can contact all sorts of folks through the email and phone numbers that the club keeps.”

The club also has a New Members Day, where long-time members greet the new arrivals, show them around and answer questions. “These members are like ambassadors. They welcomed me and invited me to play with them,” says Mariane.

Since joining the club, Mariane has become an ambassador in her own right, bringing some of her friends and family on board. “My husband is a hockey player. He didn’t want to play tennis, but this year with COVID-19, there was no hockey, so he took up tennis instead. Now he is committed, really passionate,” says Mariane, “and has already enrolled for next year. Hockey is coming back, but he says he has to find time for tennis as well.”

In Tracy’s case, it is horseback riding that competes for time, and she divides her recreational life between the club and a farm where she keeps her horse. These are the two pillars, she says, of a happy, healthy lifestyle. “I’ve become much more confident in my game in the last two years, and I am a lot healthier too!”

Tracy has found a new social life at the club, and, as well as the tennis lessons, clinics and games, has thrown herself into all kinds of activities – the end-of-the-year fashion show, for example, the silent auction and lunch or dinner on the verandah.

As for Mariane, when not on the court, she is an active volunteer. The OTLBC has professional managers in place, working under Executive Director Maria Pierre-Noel. It also depends, however, on volunteer services provided by engaged members. In just five years, Mariane has become one of these, even serving on the board of directors. “I had an



Mariane with two of the club’s welcoming ambassadors.

PHOTO BY MORGAN JOHNSON-DUGAY

opportunity there to see what an excellent job Maria and her team are doing and how committed they are to making sure that the members are happy and safe, especially during the pandemic, when they introduced a really great online booking system.”

Mariane and Tracy are both supporters of the club’s current restoration project, which is working towards renovation of the OTLBC’s century-old clubhouse in time for the building’s centennial in 2023. “I want the building, but also the

sport of tennis, to survive for future generations,” says Mariane. “This is such a wonderful place to be outdoors, to be active. I’m inspired to see such diversity at our club – ranging from youth, students, professionals and retirees – and to see how playing tennis builds valuable connections, keeps all of us connected and helps us to stay healthy!”

Janet Uren is a professional writer living in Ottawa.



Tracy Turnbull celebrating the conclusion a safe and fun 2020 season.

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