

## Bocce...How the First Balls Got Rolling in Bermuda Greens



Poolside conversations in 2006 between Carmine DeVita, Emilio Coppola, Joseph DeVita, Ernie Guimares, Radcliffe Earle, and others proved that “talk isn’t cheap,” when you get the right people together.

“After getting approval for the court from the board president at the time, we built and completely funded it ourselves”, explained Ernie. Labor costs for construction were cut by volunteers who did much of the work themselves, and “our wives would bring pizza and cold drinks to those working on the court. We brought shovels and rakes and leveled it all by hand before getting the clay foundation laid,” added Ernie. Legend has it that Collier County donated materials they may not know about to this day.

“Emilio was the ‘straw boss’,” said Fred Demma. “Brothers Carmine and Joe knew a lot about construction, but it was always a committee effort.” Many of the core group belonged to The Naples Italian American Club and the original court was modeled after theirs.

“As for fundraising, Ernie wrote the first check for \$50 to get things going. Then, Rose and Ida DeVito, Josephine Coppola, and others hosted homemade spaghetti dinners to raise enough to buy the clay for the court. A labor of love, the bocce court was completed and dedicated in 2007 as a hand-made sign at the court proves.

In 2017, neighbors and friends gathered for a 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary court-side commemoration. Fred Demma served as Master of Ceremonies and Ernie thanked the core group. He credited the “Red Hat Club,” a group of guys that included Emilio, Carmine, Tom Dowling and Ren Morani for their vision and hard work.



Last year, a plaque was donated in memory of Carmine, Emilio, and Joe. Also, a bocce banner and a winner’s plaque were provided by bocce players. This year, Beverly Pompeani donated two benches in memory of her husband Mike, who played even while wearing his oxygen pack.

“For nearly 17 years, the bocce players were financially responsible for the court,” said Fred. About three years ago, the Board agreed to budget funds for bocce equipment and court maintenance. After a survey proved that the bocce court

is located entirely on BG property, Board approval was given to build a new court in the same location. “Like the pool, bocce is an amenity that adds value to our community,” said Bob Giese.



For the past several years, Bob has served as Commissioner, also known as “the Commish.” He manages a Steering Group that consists of Nan Voll, Fred Demma, Willis Faust, Dan Ryan, and Linda Toner. The new court will be modeled after the courts at St. John the Evangelist Church. Bob says, “work on the new court begins in April with a neighborhood dedication following its completion.”

For 20 years, bocce has united BG residents for fun, regardless of skill levels. Interestingly, the World Series of Bocce, has been held annually in Rome, New York. “They play rain, snow and 24/7”, said Fred. “Years ago, they asked us to play in the World Series thinking we were in Naples, Italy not Florida,” he added with a laugh.

In recent years, a fall bocce league, organized by Nan, offers a “fun” way for residents to learn and practice the game before the regular season begins. In the early years, Linda Toner credits Emilio for teaching her and others to play. “He would say, ‘Leeenda, throw it like this, and when I did that, it worked like magic,’ she said.

Clearly, bocce in BG is here to stay.