

Platform tennis players (from left) Chuck Smith, Marty Engel, Bill Giffin and Larry Page, all of Glen Ellyn

Paddling Around

Local interest in platform tennis is on the upswing

[S]hades of pink and purple smear a sunset sky as four Glen Ellyn dads dart around the village's Maryknoll Park inside what looks like a fenced-in, mini-tennis court.

On one side of the net, Marty Engel holds his paddle, a cross between a racquetball racquet and a ping pong paddle, as a rubber ball bounces inbounds on the court and shoots past him. In normal tennis, the point would have been lost. But this is platform tennis. So as the ball slams off the side screen of the court and spins diagonally toward the back fence, Engel wheels around and, as the ball ricochets back toward him, he smacks it back across the net. The spongy sphere bounces in the court and past the two men on the other side, spinning off the back screen at such an angle they can't return it. Engel and teammate, Larry

Page, have won the point.

"Nice!" shout Engel's opponents, Chuck Smith, 42, and Bill Giffin, 41. Together, the four men comprise part of the Glen Ellyn Platform Tennis Club, one of several that have sprung up in recent years in Chicago's western suburbs. Part tennis, part racquetball, and partly unlike anything else, platform tennis has been around for more than eight decades.

Though contested outdoors, it is surprisingly played almost exclusively in the fall and winter, with practices starting in September and a season that typically runs from October through mid-March. Playing in cold weather is part of the sport's quirky allure, acknowledge those who play.

"What else," says Engel, 37, "is gonna get you outside in the middle of January, when there's three feet of snow, and it's 15



degrees out?"

Players of platform tennis, or "paddle" as the sports' practitioners have nicknamed it, tend to wear multiple layers, which are quickly shed as they play and perspire.

"Just because outside it's 15 degrees," adds the 51-year-old Page, "10 minutes into it, you're sweating like you're inside on a treadmill watching ESPN."

The workout comes from the constant movement involved in platform tennis. As in racquetball, the ball is continually in play and extended volleys are common.

And neither ice nor snow will forestall a platform tennis match. One of the hallmarks of the game is a raised court of aluminum, about one-fourth the size of a tennis court, built so that heaters underneath can melt snow and ice on the court.

In Chicago, platform tennis began its

[Want To Play?]

If you're interested in learning how to play platform tennis, contact one of these local groups.

- **Glen Ellyn Park District** – Mary Defiglia, 630 858-2462, ext. 122, www.gepark.org
- **Glen Ellyn Platform Tennis Club**
Marty Engel, Club VP, mengel@thecfg.com or geplatformtennisclub.blogspot.com
- **Hinsdale Park & Recreation Platform Tennis**
630 789-7090, www.villageofhinsdale.org/pr/download/RegForm_PaddleMembers.pdf
- **Hinsdale Platform Tennis Association**
hpta.blogspot.com
- **South Barrington Park District**
847 381-2750

journey in the country clubs of the North Shore. The past decade has seen the sport spread south and west.

Bill O' Brien, 67, of Burr Ridge, president of the Hinsdale Platform Tennis Association, says, "The future is really in what we could call public facilities, like park districts, that are easily accessible to the general public and where there's no exclusivity as far as who can join."

In the past three years, the Glen Ellyn Platform Tennis Club, which coordinates its programs with the park district, has grown from 50 to 150 members. In the past decade, O'Brien has seen the number of platform tennis members in Hinsdale shoot up from a few dozen to more than 700.

The growth has been so rapid in Hinsdale, which has two platform tennis courts at Burns Field and four more at Katherine Legge Memorial Park, that the Hinsdale Platform Tennis Association is trying to get two more courts built.

While platform tennis is relatively easy to learn, it can take years to master the art of outmaneuvering opponents to win points.

"It's much more a game of strategy than power," explains O' Brien. "It takes years to mature. But it's easy to learn. Right away, you're in the game, having fun."

– Erin Chan Ding



Autumn Wishes

Nationwide Delivery.
Satisfaction Guaranteed.
Since 1923.

630-719-5200
PhillipsFlowers.com

Phillip's
FLOWERS GIFTS

HINSDALE • NAPERVILLE • WHEATON
DOWNERS GROVE • LOMBARD • ELMHURST
LAGRANGE • WESTMONT • OAK BROOK

#9H140

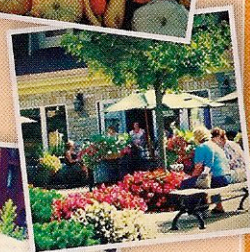
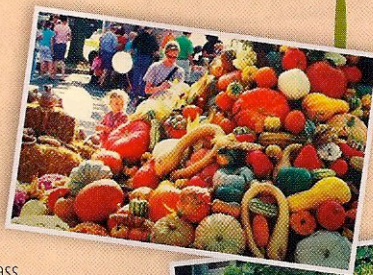
Good and Plenty

Festival of the Vine
September 10 - 12, 2010

Geneva's Festival of the Vine provides plenty of good wine, good food and good fun for the whole family! Taste wines from around the world. Sample mouth-watering specialties from Italy, Mexico and France.

Pamper yourself overnight in one of Geneva's world-class accommodations. Marvel at our incredible Gorgeous Gourds exhibit. Cheer your kids on as they drive a tractor or simply stroll through the Fine Arts and Crafts show.

Don't miss the 2010 Festival of the Vine. For events schedule and details, go to visitgenevillinois.com.



GENEVA
ILLINOIS
A picture postcard.™

www.visitgenevillinois.com
www.geneva.il.us • 1-866-443-6382