

## Shuffleboarders find friends, competition in NSB

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NEW SMYRNA BEACH — Butch Greene is used to hearing people joke about his favorite sport. And while it might be easy for critics to dismiss shuffleboard as a game for old people, Greene is on a mission to debunk that myth.

"People think that all this is is pushing a disc down a court," Greene said. "But it's not. This isn't easy. It takes a lot of skill and practice to play well. You never stop learning."

The 73-year-old was an athlete his entire life until rheumatoid arthritis prevented him from bowling and playing tennis. When a friend suggested he take up shuffleboard 12 years ago, Greene agreed to try it out. After a few rounds, he was hooked. Not only did the game provide an opportunity for friendly competition, it was a way to build camaraderie with teammates and stay active in his golden years.

"Shuffleboard saved my life," the Ponce Inlet resident said. "I've regained some of my confidence and I could participate to the point where I could compete and go to tournaments. I became a pro and it made life worthwhile."

Greene and about two dozen members of the Coronado/Mainland Shuffleboard Club gather most afternoons in the heart of New Smyrna Beach's Flagler Avenue. It's common for a small audience of pedestrians to stop and watch. As the president of the shuffleboard club, Greene never misses an opportunity to recruit a new member. The club has more than 100 members.

"Why don't you come and join us? It's only \$20 for a year membership," Greene calls out to an onlooker.

Most of the members agree: Shuffleboard is an addiction. The game might look easy, but its complex set of rules and maneuvers is likened to a cross between chess and golf. It's that combination of skill and strategy that Greene can't get enough of.

"It has elements of golf, chess and pool," Greene said. "Every shot has a purpose and there is a great deal of strategy."

The shuffleboard club's season runs from October to April and is a popular activity for many snowbirds who venture down from Canada and the Northeast every fall and winter. Club members gather by 1:15 p.m. Monday through Saturday, pick out a colored chip and are then matched with a partner. The process is random and means that most members will get to know each other pretty well throughout the season.

Using a cue stick, Greene moves back his left hand and pushes a colored disc down the 39-foot court. His goal is to land on a marked scoring area of 10, 8 or 7 points. But



News-Journal/LACEY MCLAUGHLIN  
Bud Barker, 90, plays a round of shuffleboard at the Coronado/Mainland Shuffleboard in New Smyrna Beach.

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the game goes far beyond scoring points. Opponents can prevent each other from scoring by knocking discs off the scoring area or blocking an opponent's chances to score. Players will also lose 10 points if their discs land into a nondesignated point area called "The Kitchen." The team that reaches 75 points first wins the game. Point leads can change in the blink of an eye and upsets are frequent. Gusts of wind and the levelness of the court can also add extra obstacles for traveling discs.

Shuffleboard is also an equal opportunity sport where men and women play on the same teams or as opponents.

"Women are just as good at this and play equal to men," Greene said.

Jodi and Joey Shebester, both 60, became members after moving to New Smyrna Beach a few years ago from North Carolina. The couple usually arrives in their yellow golf cart with their dog, Riley, in tow. Joey recently won an amateur shuffleboard tournament at the club with his partner.

"Once you start playing, you get hooked," Joey said. "It gets people out and moving around. Once you win one game, you want more."

The members also have monthly potlucks and develop deep friendships with each other. The club provides a sense of community to seniors and snowbirds who are new to the area, Joey said.

Many of the club members say that shuffleboard is a part of old Florida, and ingrained into Volusia County's history. Shuffleboard originated on cruise liners and some of the first on-land courts were built in Daytona Beach in 1913. The Coronado Shuffleboard Club formed in 1937 with the original members selecting a lot at the corner of Pine Street and Flagler Avenue to build the courts. The members pitched in to clear the land to build the courts. Earlier this year the city closed the Mainland Shuffleboard Clubhouse on Julia Street and demolished the site for a redevelopment project. At that point the Mainland and Coronado clubs merged. The newly renovated club now has 20 courts and lighting so members can play at night.

Former club president Bill Boyes said that the prominent location of the clubhouse is a big draw for members who like to enjoy the restaurants and shops along Flagler Avenue.

"This is a huge attraction for New Smyrna Beach," Boyes said. "It brings people who want to play in a pretty and quiet spot."

There are several other shuffleboard clubs in the county but Boyes said there is less participation now than in shuffleboard's earlier days. But that doesn't mean the sport is going out of style anytime soon. The Florida Shuffleboard Association will celebrate its 100th anniversary next year.

"There is no social institution that was as well attended back in the '30s and '40s," Boyes said. "To me, shuffleboard is a Florida sport."

### **If You Go**

**WHAT:** The Coronado/Mainland Shuffleboard Club

**WHEN:** 1:15 to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday

**WHERE:** 150 Pine St., New Smyrna Beach

**ADMISSION:** \$20 for a yearly membership

**INFORMATION:** 386-756-1133 or [Coronado-shuffleboard-club.org](http://Coronado-shuffleboard-club.org)

