



Historic trophies taken from St. Petersburg Shuffleboard

By STEPHEN THOMPSON | Tribune staff
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St Petersburg - Mary Eldridge wasn't around when the St. Petersburg Shuffleboard Club was built in 1924, during a historic boom here that also saw the construction of other icons, such as St. Petersburg's first pier and the Coliseum.

But Eldridge has been an active member of the club since 1965 and is an excellent shuffleboard player, to boot. Sometimes, she glances at the large trophies at the club and remembers the great players whose names were etched into them following club tournaments.

However, the club doesn't have all those trophies anymore.

Eight of roughly 20 historic trophies were stolen in a crime that, to many, seems as pointless as it does disrespectful of the city's history. The trophies aren't worth much: You can get something similar on eBay for about \$15, said Christine Page, the club's president.

To many, however, the trophies are priceless. "It makes me mad," Eldridge said. "I saw the names of people, and I remember them. To come in and just swoop them away is extremely disappointing."

Word of the theft spread on Facebook, where shuffleboard aficionados and local history buffs expressed outrage and offered advice. Check metal scrap yards, advised one sympathizer. Check the local pawnshops, said another. Check antique shops, said yet another.

"We're livid and outraged," wrote Keep Saint Petersburg Local. "Pretty despicable to steal our history. "The trophies likely were taken late Friday, sometime after the club's weekly public game night. Club members didn't discover the theft until Tuesday night, during a board meeting, and reported it to police.

Of the stolen trophies, the oldest dated to the late 1930s or early 1940s. One was a trophy, made of sterling silver or pewter that has the Chamber of Commerce's name on it, Page said.

Also stolen were a wooden leader board from a Festival of States tournament in the 1930s and enlarged prints of historic postcards.

The club has dealt with break-ins before, Page said, but those were mostly homeless people breaking in to take food out of the refrigerator. This is the first time anything of historic value has been taken.

"They're irreplaceable," Page said. "They don't even make trophies like this anymore. They have historic value to us, and I feel like they have historic value to St. Petersburg."

After the club was built, promoters said its court was the largest of its kind in the world, although no one checked to see whether that was actually the case, said Nevin Sitler, the staff historian at the St. Petersburg Museum of History.

The '20s were historic in the city, when an array of venues was being built to entertain an influx of retirees: lawn bowling across the street from the shuffleboard club; the nearby Coliseum, where people could listen to the great big bands of the era; and the pier, which was eventually replaced.

"There were lots of opportunities to do low-impact sports and recreation," Sitler said.

The prominence of the shuffleboard club has faded over the years, but of late it has found new life. Now, players of all ages come, Page said, and on the first Friday of each month, several bands play for a young adult crowd, bands with names such as Gino and the Goons as well as Wet Nurse.

Anyone with information about the thefts can call the club at (727) 822-2083 or the St. Petersburg Police Department at (727) 893-7780