



WILLIS: 80 years later, NSB club still shuffling along

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About six years ago, Al Best and his wife Joan were visiting New Smyrna Beach. They were down from Maryland and deciding where they'd go after retiring and — as seemingly mandated by law — relocating to Florida.

"We looked around here and on the west coast of the state," he says. "We were here one afternoon, walking down Flagler Avenue. There was some event going on — there's always some event on Flagler. We sat here at the shuffleboard courts and watched, and somebody mentioned to us, 'Hey it's \$20 a year, it's fun.'

"We decided then, this is the place for us to move. It was because of these shuffleboard courts."

Al Best hopes more of the same happens Saturday at the city-owned Coronado/Mainland Shuffleboard Club, which is celebrating its 80th anniversary this month and, as part of the celebration, hosting an "open house" to show off a game that ... um, let's face it ... has a bit of a demographic reputation.

"Yeah, we have one member who just turned 95, but we have some in their early 40s," says Best, who himself soon turns 69 and serves as president of the NSB club.

The Coronado club has 250 members, has games going nearly every day and on Tuesday and Thursday nights (yes, some members are working on the weekdays!). Half of the 20 courts are lighted.

"We're going to just open it up," Best says of Saturday's proceedings. "So many people in this town, they walk by here or drive by here, but they don't know anything about it. We want them to see it and know it's been here 80 years, and we hope it's here another 80 years."

Many of us always thought of shuffleboard as the game you'd tinker with as kids while visiting the grandparents or on family vacation. But like anything else with a scoring component, there are tournaments, championships and, yes, even an international hall of fame.

The Coronado courts will be host to a "Masters" event later this month. It's not exactly a tradition unlike any other, however – Florida has seven districts and they all host Masters tournaments.

In the past, shuffleboard was often the next step for those who didn't play golf and could no longer handle the physical demands of tennis. But in recent years, Pickleball has exploded and created a friendlier form of tennis for folks who want a smaller court or simply enjoy Pickleball. So shuffleboard gets put on hold a while longer.

Therefore, it seems, shuffleboard isn't what your neighborhood economist would call a growth industry.

"I've been told that back in the day here, even with 20 courts, they played in shifts because there were so many players," says Best.

The NSB courts are a historic piece of a local shuffleboard scene that is very historic in its own right. Shuffleboard was once a game relegated to the decks of steamships, a way to pass the time on ocean voyages. It was a "sport of kings," reserved for those who could afford cruise ships.

But then they put a court on dry land, right here, in 1913 at the long-ago Lyndhurst Hotel in Daytona Beach. Two years later, the first cement court was put down at the Burgoyne Casino, which was in Daytona Beach's downtown. And the rest is graying history.

Al Best and his Coronado friends hope to show visitors some of that history and, along the way, maybe grow the membership and convince folks that the courts aren't just another conversation piece on NSB's funky Flagler Avenue.

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