

VOLUNTEER GROUP KNOWS HOW TO CLEAR THE COURTS

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They're known as the "No Heavy Lifting Group."

"But we do a lot of heavy lifting," said Fran Kelley, 79, of Delray Beach, who is the leader of eight volunteers ages 55 to 79 who keep the tennis courts in order during tournaments in Delray Beach.

Kelley and the Court Crusaders -- as they were known last year -- include Terry Holly, Jay Lawless, Dick Leeds, Bob Merrill, Gus Pinelli, Gus Spyriden and Don Zide. They volunteered their time most recently at the Millennium International Tennis Championships at the Delray Beach Tennis Center Jan. 31 to Feb. 6.

"It's about camaraderie," Kelley said.

The group has worked the Millennium ITC tournament since it came to Delray Beach six years ago. They also help out at other tennis tournaments in the area including the annual Chris Evert Celebrity tennis tournament.

"We meet a lot of nice people and the management here appreciates what we're doing for the club," said Kelley, who's been volunteering for 12 years.

This year all eight men could be seen with yellow walkie-talkies to stay in touch.

"We know what has to be done," said Kelley. "We don't feel like we're working that hard.

"We're also so involved in tennis. We play on Tuesday and Thursday. We watch these guys, pick up a few pointers and go out there and we think we're better."

Before the qualifiers of the tournament even begin, the men gather at their shed across from Court One, which contains all the supplies they need from towels and drinks to the players' name cards. They setup the chairs including the umpire's seat and take care of whatever the players' desire.

"Fran Kelley and his group are probably the hardest working individuals at the tournament," said Linda Lieberman, coordinator of the children's program with the Delray Beach Tennis Patrons. "They give it their all. They keep the courts in great condition for the players. They're an asset for the tournament and for Delray."

Terry Holly, 71, of Delray Beach, who has been volunteering for five years, doesn't mind putting in the 12 to 14 hour days.

"We put in a few hours, but it is part of the enjoyment," said Holly, who retired to Florida from Connecticut where he worked for IBM for 36 years.

"It's a fun thing to do and it's for the city. It beats sitting home and talking to my Yorkie all day long."

Zide, who turned 71 on Feb. 6, shared similar sentiments.

"I've been having a ball here -- playing tennis, playing golf and particularly working for the tournaments," said Zide, who moved to Boynton Beach from Manhattan in 1996 after retiring from the manufacturing and importation of women's fashion shoes out of Italy. "We just love watching tennis and watching all the young players.

"We all enjoy doing it and will continue doing it as long as the event is still in town."

Although Boca Raton's own Vince Spadea fell short once again, Xavier Malisse defeated Jiri Novak 7-6-(6) to win the \$355,000 ATP tournament.