

# Serving up



# ACES

*Boise Racquet & Swim Club has a proud history and a successful strategy for the future.*

By Michelle Juergen

IT MIGHT BE BOISE, IDAHO'S BEST- AND WORST-KEPT SECRET: The city is home to one of the most vibrant tennis communities in the American West. And Boise Racquet & Swim Club (BRSC) is at the heart of the fervor.

"We're this great little club in the middle of nowhere," said Tab Roper, general manager for BRSC. "And the thing is, we get people from the entire western U.S. who come here and are surprised at what we have—and then they end up moving to Boise because of what they found."

In fact, BRSC is mostly responsible for turning the City of Trees into a racquet-happy hamlet.

In 1952, Barbara Chandler—one of the top-ranked female tennis players in America at the time—moved to Idaho from North Carolina with her husband and made it her mission to spread the tennis gospel far and wide in Boise. Not only did she lobby for the school district and city hall to build some 30 courts at school and city parks; she also created the Idaho Tennis Association and helped found BRSC in 1967 as a member-owned social club.





## The Legacy Lives On

Known as “the first lady of Idaho tennis,” Chandler championed the sport and spotlighted her club as an affordable place where friends and families could gather to develop their skills and deepen their relationship to the community. And although Chandler passed in 2019 at age 96, her legacy lives on.

The club continues to foster the connections Chandler built between members, the city and the tennis community beyond Boise’s borders. BRSC has played host to everything from local high school state championships and U.S. Tennis Association league games to the Davis Cup, along with hosting the Barbara Chandler Junior Open every summer. The club also hosts charity events throughout each year, including the annual Camp Rainbow Gold



fundraiser, which rallies support for the nonprofit organization that serves Idaho children diagnosed with cancer.

There’s still a healthy flow between the club and those courts Chandler helped establish with her outreach back in the ’60s, too.

“A lot of people play here at BRSC, then they go play with their neighbors at the city parks,” Roper said. “A number of people who manage the resources of the parks and recreation department are also members of our club.”

Of course, as a 501(c)(7) social and recreational club, BRSC keeps a sharp focus on members, cultivating a space where all ages and skill levels can assemble for friendly games, tournaments, lessons and more on



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its seven outdoor hard courts, two outdoor clay courts and 14 indoor hard courts.

“In this area, the quality of tennis at the club is above anything anywhere around,” Roper said. “We’re about helping people make connections, have fun and enjoy time with each other.”

Private, semi-private and group lessons—taught by a roster of eight tennis pros—are available to both members and non-members, and a robust junior program offers classes, clinics and summer camps to younger players, who often go on to play college tennis.

### **Advantage Server**

Since the club’s beginnings, it has provided amenities beyond tennis, including an outdoor pool, fitness classes, a weight room, personal training, a snack bar and locker rooms with showers and saunas. Operating May to September, the pool is a huge draw in summer months, offering pool parties, a swim team, swim lessons and even a developmental swim program for ages 5 to 12. While the fully equipped gym and classes are obviously a boon for any member wanting to get a sweat on, they’re particularly focused on helping players improve their tennis fitness, such as enhancing strength and mobility or recovering from an injury.

While many club-hosted events naturally center around tennis, there are a number of activities offered every year that aim to develop relationships between members, like mixers, socials and trivia nights. There’s even a bridge club every Friday at noon.

### **A Grand Slam**

As might be expected, a club that has been around since the ’60s will need a little love now and then in the form of improvements, and BRSC is working on just that. Along with making their way through a list of deferred maintenance items, Roper and his colleagues are in the midst of the club’s largest expansion, which will add two indoor courts, more parking, a clubhouse grill and a larger weight room—remodeled with new equipment and facilities and touting a new fitness director.

The pair of new indoor courts is especially crucial, as winter is BRSC’s busiest time of year. During the season, members can reserve courts on a block system: pre-paid court times scheduled weekly on the same day and time and acquired through a lottery.

“It gives people a chance to come together with their friends and the people they like to play tennis with and be active and play in a controlled, warm environment,” Roper said. “From a club business perspective, it’s also nice because it guarantees revenue and it makes it easier on staff because the booking is already done.”

Currently, just less than half the club’s revenue comes from dues, while one-third is derived from instructional income like tennis lessons and personal training. Fees (e.g., court, maintenance and block fees) make up about 15% of revenue, and a small percentage comes from food and beverage. The remodel will shift some of those percentages, which the club has

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anticipated through highly detailed financial modeling Roper helped facilitate. Once the current construction is complete, BRSC can move on to its running list of future-focused developments.

In a testament to the club’s roots, all the new additions are in direct response to member feedback. Via multiple surveys, the BRSC board requested insights from the club’s 652 sharers (equating to around 1,100 members) to determine precisely what changes were desired, along with ensuring that adding a maintenance fee to membership dues was acceptable.

With overwhelming support from members to green light the enhancements and add value to the club, BRSC is also further solidifying its recently reimagined mission statement.

### **Family Matters**

BRSC’s refined mission statement is another expansion, of sorts, as well as an example of the club’s efforts to modernize. While the club was founded on pillars it still holds true—to be an affordable, family-friendly social spot—about five years ago, Roper noticed that BRSC’s demographic had aged, and that there were more members over 70 than under 40. To bring the establishment back to its original mission, he created and executed a strategic vision to draw in more families and younger players. This involved building business practices around keeping membership more stable, such as changing how members can buy and sell their shares; creating a wait list for new members so existing members could have more court time; and training staff to recognize members when they walk in and greet them by name to foster that family atmosphere.

It also entailed coming up with a vision, mission and values list, which is detailed on the club’s website. These foundational statements include tenets from a





commitment to excellence and participation in community-oriented activities to financial accountability and transparency in governance, management and communication.

The endeavor to revitalize the club's demographics has paid off: About half of BRSC applicants are people who have moved to the Boise area and are looking to meet new tennis friends, Roper says. Many newcomers are also friends of members, who are enticed by the club's dedication to fostering lifelong relationships.

One lesson Roper imparts to other clubs seeking to hone their purpose: "You can't be all things for all people."


"You've got to have a good set of operating values and, along with that, a very good set of policies and procedures—and adhere to them," he added. "Then, having a board that is consistent and supportive."

### **A Look Behind the Strings**

Bringing the fruits of the club's labors to fruition is due, in large part, to Roper and the strategic vision he brought into BRSC when he joined as general manager in 2019. After a long career in technology, Roper saw an opportunity to try something different.

"I had never worked in hospitality, but I knew business, and you have to operate as a business first," he said. "It was kind of an experiment; could you take a non-tennis person and have them operate the club?"

With the full support and encouragement of BRSC's board, he dove into a transformation plan that would better focus the business goals of the organization. He likes to describe his time at BRSC as such: His first year was spent on risk mitigation (namely, COVID-19); his second, on strategic planning. After that, it was on to the development of tactical, long-term actions. In his fourth year, he focused on developing the expansion plan. This year, the construction project took precedence, and once 2024 concludes, Roper will move on to his next venture, as his contract comes to a close.

"I didn't come after this with the perspective of a club manager; I had to learn some of that," he said. "But I was able to put structure into the club, and now, the next person coming in has a club manager and food and beverage background, so he can take what we've started and really expand it." 

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