

History of the East Portal Bocce Club

Okay, cue the mandolins and the clarinetto: we are now going to tell you a story of how bocce came to be in East Sacramento. Stories are important and telling those stories makes history come alive. More important, it gives each of us an opportunity to experience it and to own it and share it with others. So this is our history; “la nostra storia...”

First of all, you should know a little bit about “Little Italy” in Sacramento. That’s the name that many of the old timers would refer to the manicured East Sacramento neighborhood, bounded by J Street to the north, 58th Street to the east, Folsom Boulevard to the south, and 51st Street to the west. Located in the heart of this “vicinato” is where you will find East Portal Park and our very own East Portal Bocce Club. But we’re getting ahead of ourselves. Let’s go back to where our story begins.

It was in the 1940’s that a tight-knit group of Italian men met at this location to roll the red and green balls down the four 70’ by 9 1/2’ oyster shell lanes. If you would stop to watch, you would find them measuring the distance between balls with a twig and hear them yelling “*lunga, lunga, or corta, corta!*” When the Clubhouse was built, a group of buon amicos would meet everyday day to drink a little vino rosso and play cards for 10 cents a hand.

It was in the early 1970’s East Portal Bocce Club was organized under the guiding hand of the club’s padrino, Tony Peretti. Tony was both a proud Italian American and a veteran. In honor of all the war veterans, he started the first annual Fourth of July Tournament. By tradition, the event would start with the pledge of allegiance and listening to The Star Spangled Banner. Wives and other family members would enjoy a nice picnic while they watched the men compete for bragging rights, in form of their name on a perpetual trophy. (insert pic #2)

During those early years of the club, the courts were maintained by Tony’s brother Albert, who arrived daily at 1 p.m. to begin the tedious, but necessary process of carefully raking off all the pinecones and needles, broom, and finish with a light spray of water. This inspired Tony to lobby the City Council on many occasions for help to finance a project of building a roof covering over the courts. Tony’s persistence finally paid off in 1980. It was in that year that the roof covering designed by Ralph Vitiello, to

protect two of the four courts was completed. Unfortunately, the other two courts were removed due to vandalism and exposure to the weather—"che cosa terribile!"

So let's see, where were we...oh yeah, the club in early years. Back in 1972 the club had 80 members, all men with 98% being Italian and elderly. Yearly membership at that time was \$3, "che buon affare!" By 1982, the membership was down to 41 and continuing to decline. As the old timers used to joke, "too many visitors at Nicoletti's!" (Nicoletti's is the East Sacramento mortuary, located at 54th St & Folsom Boulevard). Founding father, Tony Peretti, realized the legacy of the club was in jeopardy and something needed to be done, and in 1990 he contacted Vic Cima for help. They recruited several men from the Piemonte Reale Club where Vic was president at the time.(insert pic of vic and three men)

In 1991, when Vic Cima became president of the club, he convinced the members that it was time to allow women and non-Italians to play. This started out with the original members playing with their wives and children. Through a series of newspaper articles, Vic informed & educated all of Sacramento about the relatively unknown sport of bocce. He created a recreational league and got the Club back to *rolling* again. "con entusiasmo!" (insert pic. #3))

By the late 1990's the Club prospered and membership had risen to over 150 members. Recognizing the logistical problems that this success was having on league play, then president Traci Malley, worked with our City Councilman Steve Cohn who approved funding for two new courts. During this time the club got involved with the Access Leisure Program. We trained Special Olympic coaches and athletes and then held the regional qualifying tournament for the Northern California Special Olympics. Traci and several board members created flyers, advertised, started our first website, taught classes, successfully reaching out to surrounding neighborhoods to educate and promote the sport of bocce.(insert pic #1)

Traci Malley's multi-faceted efforts put the East Portal Bocce Club on the "bocce map." She held a tournament in which teams from all over California would compete on our courts. She put together a team consisting of herself, John Waldron, Orlie "J.R." Pane, Tony Peretti, John Morris, Jim Fellows, and Marie Arnaudo which competed in tournaments throughout CA and Nevada. (insert pic #4)

In 2002, two new 90' by 12 ½' courts were completed, along with the roof, electricity, new fencing and concrete. Finally, after all those years, the club was back up to 4 courts. If one individual could be singled out as a key to this projects success, for his unending contribution of research, coordination and hard labor, that person is Jim Fellos. Although several club members helped, Jim took it upon himself to become the superintendent, carpenter, painter, craftsmen, and custodian. Simply put, from the day he stepped onto our bocce courts, Jim has been a source of inspiration for all members. Of course, the accuracy of his volo shot has been a source of wonder, terror and frustration to many of us, but that's a different story. (insert pic with jim & ciro)

Getting back to the courts...now we had a situation where the "original" courts were a different size and surface than the new courts and this became an issue with the league play. Hey, but what's life without a little melodrama—kind of like an Italian Opera. In 2004 the club worked with once again with City Councilman Steve Cohn (mille grazie, Steve) and obtained funding for an extension on the roof cover over the two original courts. It was in 2006 that the concrete courts were completed. Numerous club volunteers with the supervision of none other than Jim Fellos completed this project.

And that, mi amicos, is the history of the East Portal Bocce Club. In its own way, it's very much a part of the history of the Italian community here in East Sacramento. But you don't have to be Italian to enjoy bocce—you just have to appreciate this little game they invented over two thousand years ago! But you know, history is a funny thing--kinda like famiglia, each of us has our own perception and viewpoint.

If you have your own stories or recollections about the history of our club, we would really enjoy hearing from you, so send us e-mail or better yet, come on by the courts and roll some. In the meantime, Ciao e bocce con piacere!

Past Presidents

1972 - 1990	Tony Peretti
1991 – 1995	Vic Cima
1996 – 1998	Chuck LaRosa
1998 - 2003	Traci (Malley) Peters
2004	Brad Booth
1-05 – 4-05	Jack Roupp
5-05	Brad Booth
2006	Rick Wagstaff
2007	Vern Cooper