

Playing Locations

Location	Address	Years
NCR	3718 N. Rock Road, Wichita, KS 67226	1987 - 1989
Salvation Army	743 S. Hydraulic, Wichita, KS 67211	1990 - 1991
Edgemoor Recreation Center	5815 E. 9 th Street North, Wichita, KS 67208	1992 – 1995
Sunset Banquet Hall	1407 E. Harry, Wichita, KS 67211	1996 – Present
All Seasons Banquet Hall (Temporary Location)	3202 W. 13 th Street North, Wichita, KS 67203	May 2025 – July 2025

History of the WTTA

Date	Milestone
Pre-1986	There was a regular table tennis league at a bowling alley near Kellogg and 135 th Street West, in what is now the Paramount Antique Mall. We think it was sometime in the 1970s, but we're not sure exactly when; if you know, please let us know. Also, Don Bassett opened a short-lived table tennis facility at the southwest corner of Hydraulic and Mt. Vernon in a building that now houses Communications Technology Associates. Again, we don't know exactly when that was, but we think it was in the late 70's or early 80's. Finally, there was a dedicated group of players at Wichita State University who played regularly in the lower level of what was then called the CAC (now RSC). John Potochnik played in his first ping pong tournament at WSU during his undergraduate years sometime between 1974 and 1979.
1986	Several NCR employees participated in the ping pong events of the Greater Wichita Sports Challenge (GWSC), a multicompany, multisport competition held in Wichita at that time. The NCR team fared poorly, most notably getting trounced by the Firefighters Team who played regularly at their fire stations.
1987	Determined to be more competitive in the next GWSC, John Potochnik, David Worley, and Dick Landkamer convinced the NCR Employees Club to purchase four Stiga Privat Roller tables and started an NCR-only ping pong league. Players purchased real paddles, watched video tapes, and developed rudimentary skills. This allowed NCR to dominate the 1987 GWSC, winning 5 of 6 events. To further the cause, John sanctioned the Wichita Table Tennis Association with what was then known as the United States Table Tennis Association (USTTA). At a later point in time, the name was changed to USA Table Tennis (USATT) to be consistent with other USA Olympic sport organizations.
1988 – 1990	NCR dominated the GWSC to the point that it was no longer a challenge, so the better players lost interest in playing. John Potochnik began running the ping pong events because the GWSC organizers did not understand the rules of the game. During this period, players from outside of NCR (like Richard Catlin and Gordon Beehler) began playing with us.
1990 – 1991	About 1990, NCR kicked us out of their facility; we were using an open space in their manufacturing floor to set

	up our tables and they needed the space for expansion. Plus, it was difficult to get outside players in through Security. We finally found a place to play at the Salvation Army. It was less than an ideal situation; we had to roll up our tables onto a four-foot-high stage to store them. However, while we were in that space, we had our first ever training camp led by Christian Lillieroos (from Oklahoma City at that time) who would eventually become the U.S. Men's National Team Coach. Unfortunately, we had a difficult parting of the ways with the facility when they kicked us out and took all the money in the joint account we had with the Salvation Army.
1992 - 1995	We were able to make a deal with the Wichita Park Board to play at the Edgemoor Recreation Center on Tuesday and Friday nights. On Tuesdays, we shared half the gym with basketball players with only a four-foot-high cardboard barrier between us. We got to be very good at drowning out the noise of 20+ raucous basketball players and learned to duck quickly when one of them screamed "INCOMING!". We collected \$2 per player per night and paid the Park Board only a dollar, so we were able to build up several thousand dollars over the four years that we played there. It was at this venue that we ran our first (non-sanctioned) interstate team tournament between players from Wichita and Oklahoma City.
1996	John Potochnik ran our first USATT sanctioned tournament in Derby, KS in May of 1996 as a benefit to the Polycystic Kidney Research Foundation. We were only able to do this because Cliff Metzger of Salina transported his tournament quality tables and let us use them for free. He also served as the Tournament Referee. For those of you who don't remember Cliff, who passed away years ago, he was considered to be the Grandfather of Kansas Table Tennis, having helped many clubs in their formative years.
1996	One of our Edgemoor players, Les Ruthven, wanted us to have a full-time place to play. Working with Potochnik and others, he found and purchased the building that we now play in at 1407 E. Harry. He named it the Wichita Table Tennis Center (WTTC); he wanted it to be a full-time table tennis venue. (Note that many of us still refer to it as the "Center", even though it hasn't had that formal name for a very long time.) The building was originally built in 1954 as the Sunset Theater and remained a movie theater until about 1971. Senseney Music owned the building from about 1971 until Les purchased it in the summer of 1996. Les spent approximately \$80,000 fixing up the building with lots of sweat equity donated by our players. Our first event in the building (before it was even officially opened) was a Coaching Clinic held by Christian Lillieroos in the summer of 1996 where about 7 or 8 of our players were certified as Club-Level Coaches.
1995 – 1996	Christian Lillieroos recruited John Potochnik to work at the Control Desk at the 1995 World Team Cup competition in Atlanta, GA. This was viewed as a practice tournament for the 1996 Olympics. Potochnik was unable to work at the Olympics due to work commitments but convinced Les Ruthven that he should go to the competition. Not only did he go, but he purchased all of the barriers used at the 1995 World Team Cup and 1996 Olympic competition for \$2000. We still use those blue barriers almost 30 years later. In terms of tables, we standardized on the Stiga Expert Roller; the WTTC purchased one, Les donated one, John donated one and we bought three from money we had saved when playing at Edgemoor. We started with six (which we still have) and added a few more through the years when we could afford to.
1997	When we originally opened the WTTC, Les wanted us to be open seven days a week, with Don Bassett as our

	paid manager. After a few weeks, it was obvious that we didn't have enough players to support that business model, so we went to an all-volunteer organization being opened only three days a week, which we do to this day. In addition, Les rented space to a church on Sunday mornings and began marketing the venue as the Sunset Banquet Hall for weddings and other (wilder) events on Saturdays. This arrangement existed for several years until Les decided that he was tired of the Church complaining about beer bottles in the parking lot on Sunday morning, so he stopped the event business. After the Church left (around 2012), we began offering the Sunset Ballroom for events again (which continues to this day).
1997 – 2005	During this period of time, the WTTA ran on average three or four sanctioned tournaments per year. Most of those tournaments were either Davis Cup format team tournaments or Giant Round Robin tournaments. At that time, there were hardly any clubs in the regions running tournaments, so many of the WTTA tournaments were complete sell-outs. We had a group of about 8 to 10 serious tournament players who played in many tournaments in the region and who sometimes attended national tournaments like the U.S. Open, U.S. Nationals, or the Baltimore Teams. Note that the WTTA ran the first sanctioned 40mm Tournament in the United States on June 3rd, 2000.
2006 – 2012	Around 2006, our operating paradigm changed. Instead of collecting fees and funneling all proceeds directly to Les Ruthven and the accountant in his real business (Preferred Mental Health Management), the WTTA began processing all the incoming funds, remitting 80% to Mr. Ruthven, and keeping 20% for the operation of the WTTA. Because of this, we did not have to run as many tournaments to generate revenue for the WTTA to be used for things like equipment, USATT membership, etc. We owe an eternal gratitude to Les for funding table tennis in Wichita; without his willingness to bear the bulk of the financial burden, we would not have been able to sustain our club in the manner that we have.
2013 – Present	Our operating paradigm changed again; instead of paying 80% of the gross revenue to the owner of the building, we began paying a fixed monthly rent. At first, our rent payment was \$500/month; eventually it went to \$550 and is now \$650/month. We supported this, understanding that paying a fixed amount would be more appealing to any future owner of the building.
2012 - Present	A very positive milestone happened in about 2012 when the Wichita State University (WSU) table tennis club joined the National Collegiate Table Tennis Association (NCTTA) and began training at the Center. This brought an ever-replenishing supply of young, enthusiastic collegiate players that have become the lifeblood of our organization. PJ Phachantry, who started playing at the Center at the age of 12, was one of the founding members of the WSU team and is now its long-time coach. Early on, many of the NCTTA matches were played at university gyms within our district. But since John Potochnik became the Director of the Central Plains Division (CPD) in 2014, most of the Division tournaments are now played at the Center due to the facilities and central location within the CPD. The Division currently has Wichita State, University of Kansas, Kansas State University, the University of Nebraska (Lincoln), and the University of Oklahoma as members. Division Tournaments are typically held in early November and mid-February every year. WSU has won the overall Division title about ten out of the last twelve years (and finished second the two years it didn't come in

	first place).
2015	Sometime in 2015, the person responsible for running the events at the Sunset Banquet Hall was out of town. His 18-year-old nephew was in charge of the facility when a Mariachi band leader asked if there were any portable stages. Not knowing any better, he let the band use four of our tables as a stage for several hours. To this day, one of our tables has about a 15-inch circle of scratches from that epic mistake.
2019	After owning the WTTC (aka the Sunset Ballroom) for 23 years, Les Ruthven sold the building at auction to James Riley who owns a construction company amongst other endeavors. John Potochnik was at the auction and assured Mr. Riley that the WTTA would like to continue playing at the facility. We had already begun looking for another place to play and were relieved that Mr. Riley wanted us to continue using the building.
2020 – 2021	The COVID years were tough for us, as for most organizations like us. Our membership dwindled significantly, although we never really stopped playing completely. The 2020 NCTTA post-season and the entire 2020/2021 season was canceled. Eventually things returned to normal, but our club lost a lot of momentum during that time.
2025	In April of 2025, thieves broke into the Sunset Ballroom with the intent to steal as much copper as possible. They were interrupted mid-theft and only absconded with about \$50 worth of metal. Unfortunately, they did an estimated \$25,000 in damage. The Sunset was without power for the three months it took to fix all the damage, during which time we played at a temporary location on north 13 th Street at a venue owned by James Riley, the current owner of the Sunset (now known as the All Seasons Banquet Hall). Because of the initial uncertainty of whether or not the building was going to be repaired we had begun looking for an alternate place to play.