

Sarasota Lawn Bowling Club

A New Location and seeking players, fans and supporters

Remember driving down US41 near the Sarasota Municipal Auditorium and seeing men and women playing that smooth and easy game of lawn bowling on those manicured grass courts?

The original Sarasota Lawn Bowling Club (SLBC) opened in 1927, but closed in 2022 due to Sarasota's Bayfront project and they lost their long-time home. So where did they go?

Well, they managed to resurface at a new location, much more tucked away on property near the Bobby Jones Golf Course after an anonymous donor came through with a donation.

The reimagined Sarasota Lawn Bowling Club opened in its new location on December 6. There were no amenities and they had to start with and convert a weedy patch of sand. But this is a determined group despite setbacks like losing their original location, going dormant for two years and then COVID.

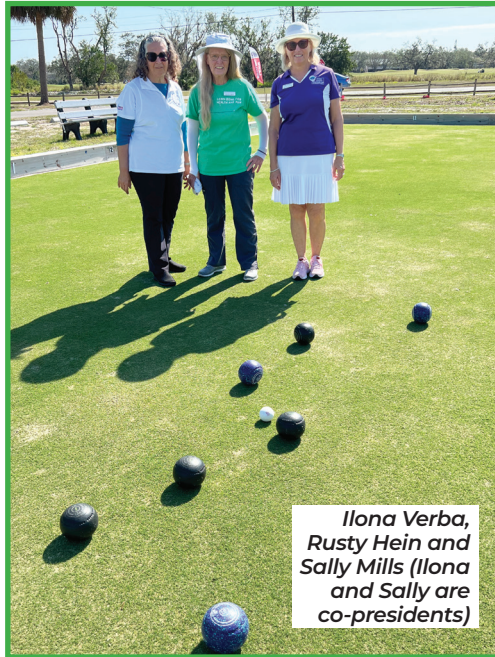
In 2024, construction costs, hurricane delays and other obstacles pushed the club's opening from March to December. The all-volunteer club then had to add water, electric and parking. Next up are restrooms and a clubhouse to help with providing shade.

Good news is that they now have lighting which will allow play of Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 6-8pm. Their number one goal now is "building membership" according to Sally Mills, Co-President of SLBC and an avid bowler.

To support that goal, they offer learn-to-bowl classes on Saturdays from 9-11 where you can try the sport for free. And no, you don't have to wear all white to play.

And there's the game itself, it's a bit like bocce, the traditional Italian game, but requires more strategy. At times it resembles curling in that it involves careful placement to score, but also to block. Cost-wise it's much cheaper than golf.

Since it takes awhile to master the game, they're offering a series of four lessons for \$80 that includes a one-month membership. The cost of the classes can then be applied to a membership that is \$295 and allows you to come anytime to play. The first lesson typically has lots of information so newbies typically want to come back to play and by the fourth lesson, "They're hooked," Sally notes.



Ilona Verba, Rusty Hein and Sally Mills (Ilona and Sally are co-presidents)



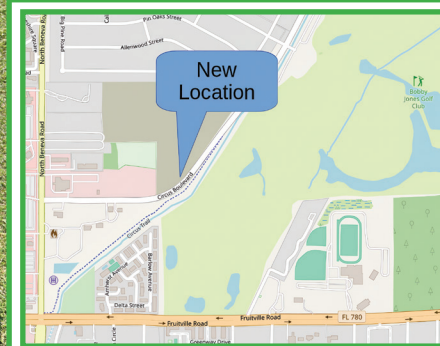
Rusty Hein, a veteran, competitive bowler show how to set the ball in motion



Don't like to bend over? Rusty is using a tool for scooping up the ball



Lawn Bowling bowls. The bowls are shaped, so that they follow a curved path when being rolled



As for gear, it's minimal and when you're learning, they provide the equipment and the coaching is "top notch," according to Sally. People are discovering the sport. "We get lots of 'walk-ins' - people riding their bikes stop in," Sally notes.

There are currently about 55 club members and, Ilona Vrba, also a co-president notes, "We had 28 students in a recent class. Of that it was an even split male/female. Half of the students were couples; half people on their own."

Get good at the sport and you can travel to tournaments and, as a by product, make new friends. The social spect of the sport is another thing that makes it so appealing.

It's also ideal for people who want an outside sport and want to get some exercise that's not too strenuous. It keeps your body moving and is great for any age, any disability. They recently had someone play who was in a wheelchair play.

It's also low impact and it's important to note there's no shouting and it's not ruthless. In fact, you applaud when your opponent makes a good shot, according to Rusty Hein, an

experienced bowler. Rusty has played all over the U.S. and found people "all warm and welcoming." She is also a SE Division "at large" rep.

As you may have noticed, unique to this club is that they have two female presidents. Iona joined 5 years ago and adds she "didn't find it cliquish." This in spite of the fact that the sport was once played by nobility in places like England and France.

And then there's the game. Lawn bowling, is a sport in which players try to roll their ball (called a "bowl") closest to a smaller ball (known as a "jack"). The bowls are shaped (biased), so that they follow a curved path when being rolled. The game is played either in teams or one against one.

The game was first played in the 13th century and is played on grass, although other surfaces are sometimes used. Matches are held either until one player gets to a score, or when a number of ends are played.

And, if you're seeking another easygoing sport, they offer croquet, playing two croquet sessions each week, Sunday afternoons, and Thursday mornings.

About Lawn Bowling

Lawn bowling is played on a 120-foot green grass square as smooth as a golf green. Matches typically last 1 1/2

to 2 1/2 hours.

The object is to roll the bowl closest to a small white ball called a jack. It's a gentle sport that requires no running or lifting. Just gentle rolls of the ball. But it does involve strategy and a big benefit is the social aspect.

The aim of the game is simple. Get your bowls as close as possible to a small white ball called the 'jack'.

A jitney is a casual game of bowls where whoever shows up 15 minutes ahead of playing time will be put on the roster. They are non-competitive and the teams are random, providing an excellent way to get to know and socialize with fellow members, enjoy the game and improve your skills.

About

Sarasota Lawn Bowling Club (SLBC)

The Sarasota Lawn Bowling Club
951 Circus Blvd., Sarasota (@Fruitville and Beneva)

More information about the club, the sport and the program can be found www.sarasotalawnbowlingclub.com.

Sarasota Lawn Bowling Club is a member of Bowls USA – South Eastern Division. All full members are also members of Bowls USA and Bowls USA S.E. Division, and therefore, World Bowls.

President: Sally Mills, Laurie Holder and Ilona Vrba (co-presidents)

Coming Up

- **Come by for an "open jitney" most weekdays, at 10 a.m.** (Be sure to check their schedule). New bowlers welcome. Arrive 30 minutes prior to start for setup and team draw.
- **On Saturdays, they have a Drop In Coaching Session, 9-11 am** that is free for first time bowlers.
- **Croquet Mini-Clinics are on Thursdays, March 6, 13, 20 and 27, 9:30-10 a.m.** This clinic will focus on shot making and basic rules. Saturdays

Lessons are a great idea - the game has lots of rules not just rolling a ball. It also involves a lot of skill and finesse. A good coach will help you get up to speed faster.

STORY and IMAGES: Louise Bruderle