

# Courting generations in Carmel Valley — with great coaching and lots more

By ELAINE HESSER

FOUNDED IN 1970, Carmel Valley Tennis Camp used to be behind Carmel Valley Athletic Club, according to Susan Reeder. She co-owns the camp's current location in Cachagua with her husband, Steve Proulx, and their daughter, Aimee Reeder. Aimee comes back every summer from her home in Rome, Italy, which she shares with her husband and two children.

Steve and Susan met at the tennis camp when they worked there, about 30 years ago. Now in their 60s, they will celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary next year.

They have long histories with the game. Steve's been a biology teacher and was chair of the science department at Stevenson School, where he also coached boys' and girls' tennis. And back in the day, he played for Cal and was a quarterfinalist in the NCAA championships.

Susan coached Eastern Michigan's women's tennis team and was a teaching pro in Ann Arbor. And the couple brought Aimee up right. She was a camper, counselor and later head counselor.

She joined the business as a co-owner in 2009, and when she's not at the camp, she's a history teacher in Italy and mom to two children — the older of whom is 10 and ready for her first time at camp.

The couple bought the original Carmel Valley Tennis Camp in 1992, but had to close it four years later, as it was on land that was

part of the newly established Santa Lucia Preserve.

"We knew it would happen," Susan said. "One year later we went into escrow on the new property," which at the time included a home and a manufactured building that was a caretaker unit. They moved in, and added everything a kid could want for a fun summer.

There's a swimming pool, a ropes course, archery range and an art house where the kids can hang out and get creative when they're not playing or getting instruction on one of the camp's six courts.

Susan said each one- or two-week session has 53 kids, about half boys and half girls. The counselors are college tennis players who hear about the job by word-of-mouth or are referred by their coaches. Some are past campers.

Over the course of the summer, the camp will host young tennis hopefuls from the local area and Northern California, as well as from as many as 17 states and 11 countries. Before they get there, though, the staff will have five days of intensive training.

In addition to the counselors, there are two cooks — a mother and daughter who live in Cachagua — two kitchen helpers, a nurse and a registrar. The latter have been part of the camp family for 25 and 15 summers, respectively.

While Susan said, "Everybody comes to improve their tennis," she said they also work hard to keep everything fun. "We want

kids to love the game. We want it to be a sport for a lifetime," she said. Everyone gets three hours of instruction and court time in the morning.

After lunch, some kids will keep right on playing or getting extra help, while the rest will opt for a dip in the pool or one of the other diversions available. Then, match play starts at 3 p.m., with staff and owners setting up the competitions so that players are as close to each other's ability levels as possible.

While it's competitive, "Sportsmanship is a cornerstone of our program," Susan said. "We focus each time on how you want to play better. In tennis, there's always going to be someone who's better than you." She added that the competition helps the youngsters develop grit and focus.

After each match, kids and counselors work together to set goals for improvement.

Then comes suppertime, and an organized all-camp activity — maybe a campfire, a TV-type quiz game ("Are You Smarter Than a Counselor?") or a night hike. Weekends might find the kids in town, hitting the beach for an evening picnic and then returning to Carmel Valley for some night swimming before bed.

The camp is an electronics-free zone for the children. A landline (imagine that!) is available to them after the first few days, and worried parents can call the office anytime with concerns.

Susan noted that the camp quietly helps some campers every year with fees, which, according to the website, run from \$1,295 to \$2,495.

Sometimes coaches or teachers call the camp and tell Susan and Steve that they have

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a talented player who can't afford to go, and they decide to help out with their tuition. "It's a way we can give back," she said. "This is a labor of love. We don't have other jobs and

we put everything back into the camp."

They've been doing it long enough that they're seeing kids of former campers on the courts. There are also four camp kitties, and the granddaughter who's starting this year will bring her pug to the mix. He'll stay at the family's house, though. All those balls, you know.

Every morning after having a healthy breakfast, kids at Carmel Valley Tennis Camp hit the courts for three hours. After lunch and some free time in the pool or on the ropes course, they'll be back for tournament play.



Who's having fun? Carmel Valley Tennis Camp offers a lot of time on the court, but the camp's owners also make sure there are plenty of other activities, too.