



Dear Gates Tennis Center Community,

Based on recent events involving pickleball at Gates Tennis Center (Gates), The Park People (the non-profit that oversees the management of Gates) would like to provide some information on the state of Gates and the goals of Gates moving forward.

History – The 1975 Agreement to the Present

On February 21st 1975, William H. McNichols Jr., then the Mayor of Denver, and Sue Cannon, then the president of Denver Parks and Recreation Foundation, Inc. (now The Park People), entered into the agreement that created Gates Tennis Center. This agreement, which created a novel public and private partnership, was only possible through the foresight and generosity of Charles C. Gates and the Gates Family Foundation. Mr. Gates, a generous and philanthropic pillar of the Denver community, donated the money to build the Gates Tennis Center on the condition that the construction and operation of the tennis facility would be run by The Park People and the facility would be the property of the City of Denver. The goal was to create a public facility with the oversight, attention, and quality typically reserved for private clubs. Over the past 46 years The Park People, the concessionaire, and the City of Denver have been committed to making Gates an exceptional public facility. Since the original construction of Gates, the City of Denver, the Gates Family Foundation, and the generosity of the local community through fundraising efforts led by The Park People, have contributed millions of dollars to the Gates facility to replace all the courts, build a new club house in 2008, construct courts specifically designed for children, and for various other capital projects, all for the purpose of maintaining and pursuing the best public facility that we can. These efforts have resulted in Gates earning national recognition multiple times, the latest being in 2016 when Tennis Industry Magazine named Gates as the *Municipal Tennis Facility of the Year*. Today, Gates is run by Hitman Sports Management, the current concessionaire who handles the day-to-day operations of Gates, and The Park People, in coordination with Denver Parks and Recreation, who coordinate and provide oversight of the concessionaire and handle decisions that fall outside of day-to-day operations.

Through this public-private partnership and with the inputs of an innovative concessionaire, Gates has developed great programming and events in service of our community. For example, Gates grew the Colorado State Open from a small tournament in the mid-1970's to the largest sanctioned tennis tournament in the country by 2019 (pre-Covid), according to the United States Tennis Association. Gates has run unique events and programs, including Tennis for Kids, which has provided thousands of dollars and hours of free or deeply discounted lessons to all children ages 5-18, as well as local tennis leagues, ladders, a memorial tournament, wood racket tournaments, charity events and other special events all geared towards serving the needs of the Denver-area community. Gates has also been the proud host of Colorado High School Activities Association's Boys and Girls 5A state

championship, and Gates has also had the privilege of hosting local National Collegiate Athletic Association events as well.

Introduction of Pickleball at Gates

Due to significant community requests for pickleball over the past several years, Gates, with the approval of The Park People and the City, launched a pilot program at the beginning of this year to explore pickleball at Gates. East Center Court was selected for the pilot program because the width of the court supports four pickleball courts and because East Center Court is frequently not playable in winter and early spring due to ice and snow buildup on the south wall. This buildup of snow does not affect the north half of the court which allows for two pickleball courts to be used when the court would otherwise not be playable for tennis. Further, East Center Court only has one adjacent court and is isolated from the rest of the courts at the facility, so this would minimize noise and disruption as the program was launched.

From January 1 until August of this year, East Center Court has been exclusively pickleball, with taped pickleball lines. In August, Gates had the opportunity to host the 2021 Rocky Mountain Championships, a pickleball tournament produced by the Pro Pickleball Association. In preparation for the tournament, East Center Court was repainted into 4 pickleball courts, and other courts at the facility were taped with pickleball lines. More than 1,000 participants and spectators enjoyed Gates and the tournament, and ESPN 3 televised some of the matches. The feedback that we received from the tournament and pickleball this year has been overwhelmingly positive. However, there has been some feedback that has been negative as well.

After the pickleball tournament, Hitman Sports Management received complaints that primarily revolved around two issues. First, there was a residue left on the courts when the tape from the pickleball tournament was removed. The residue has been exceedingly difficult to remove without removing the paint on the court. Gates staff had been assured that the tape would not leave a residue on the court and the same tape had been used with no residue issues the week before for another pickleball tournament in Colorado, so we did not anticipate this problem. Regardless, the residue left on the courts is below the standard of Gates, and we are working on remedying the situation. Second, after the tournament there have been some in the Gates community that have voiced their displeasure with Gates allowing pickleball at the facility. Given the novelty of pickleball at Gates, The Park People wanted to provide the community with insights into what decisions are being made and why.

Pickleball and the Future

The Park People's role at Gates is to help run an excellent public facility that serves the needs of our Denver community. The Park People believe strongly in inclusivity and want to foster an environment that is friendly and open. With that in mind, here is what pickleball has meant for Gates this year. Pickleball has brought at least 3,000 new active participants to our public facility. That is 3,000 additional people now utilizing and enjoying the Gates facility who hadn't before. In addition to multi-racquet sports enthusiasts, Pickleball has attracted a wide range of people, including families, players who use wheelchairs, the full breadth of age ranges from young children to older adults who can no longer play tennis, and individuals who previously may have been intimidated by tennis. The inclusion of pickleball at Gates has allowed Hitman Sports Management the ability to increase employee pay, essential to retaining staff during this challenging time. Pickleball was also a key factor that

enabled us to delay raising court fees in 2021 (court fees have not been raised since 2008, but we had been anticipating an increase due to the rising costs for goods and labor). Further, we recognize that each of our precious parks and recreation resources needs to “do double duty” to help meet the needs of Denver’s growing population and to serve the increasing number of people seeking to support their physical and mental health with outdoor activities, particularly since the pandemic. That is a significant but worthy challenge, and we know that Gates needs to be part of that solution.

The Park People has consulted with the City, the Gates Family Foundation, former donors to Gates, and other community members, and the feedback we have received has been overwhelmingly supportive in our effort to adapt Gates to serve the needs of the community. Gates is a public facility, not a private club, and it is our duty to strive to be inclusive and make Gates feel open and welcoming as well as to adapt to the growing and changing needs of the community. We are excited to see current pickleball players become future tennis players and current tennis players become future pickleball players; we know the potential synergies between these two wonderful sports is great.

To our pickleball players, we are excited to welcome and grow with you and to provide the Denver community with a vibrant public facility that supports this sport that offers an important, accessible pathway to a healthy lifestyle. To our tennis community, we want to assure you that we are aware and proud of the history and tradition of tennis at Gates, and we intend to maintain that tradition and excellence that has been the backbone of Gates for the last four and a half decades. We are aware that some in the Gates community may be upset with our decision, and we are sorry if our decision has disappointed you.

In the upcoming weeks, Gates will administer a survey to gather input and help improve the experience of everybody at Gates. Please watch for that survey on the Gates website and in outgoing communications from Gates.

Thank you for being a part of this wonderful community facility.

Sincerely,

The Park People
Board of Trustees