

# Local seniors embrace table tennis

BY BOB SEIDENBERG

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Players from Chicago's Killerspin, a firm which promotes table tennis, traded smashes and spins last week as their orange ball glanced off the table and skittered along the carpeted floor at The Mather retirement community in Evanston.

Seated a few feet away from the table, Zvi and Midred Rozenn, guests from Three Crowns, another retirement community in Evanston, took in the action.

"It's unbelievable," said Mildred.

"I haven't seen better," said Zvi, equally rapt.

Mather LifeWays sponsored the table tennis exhibit, inviting residents from other local senior living communities to the showcase event.

Some attendees even had a chance to play opposite some of the Killerspin players. One, Biba Golic, is a collegiate champion in the sport.

"It was great," said Claire Wadesson, Mather LifeWays resident.

Even before the event last week, Mather LifeWays was already a hotbed of table tennis action.

Mather residents Dr. Tom Soper, a top player himself, and wife Joan have organized regular table tennis sessions fore two and half years. Residents receive instructions, bringing them back to a game some haven't played since they were youngsters.

Soper, 77, who is a retired general surgeon from Evanston Hospital, noticed during numerous cruises with his wife over the years that table tennis was popular with older adults.

Maybe that interest would transfer to Mather LifeWays, he thought. "I encouraged them to get a table," he recalled. "We had a few people right away and within six months we had 10 to 15 regulars and now we have 20 to 30. It's still growing.

"We have scheduled ping pong games a couple of days a week here and on weekends we make it a point to have tables set up so people can drop (in and) bring their families at any time."



Dr. Tom Soper, a resident at The Mather in Evanston, plays a game of ping pong at the retirement community June 12. Soper has been instrumental in bringing table tennis to his fellow residents. | CURTIS LEHMKUHL-SUN-TIMES MEDIA

The reason for its appeal?

"I guess because it's fun and almost everybody played ping pong," he responded.

Soper also has a message for those who are concerned they lost their touch after not picking up a racket in decades.

"I say 'look, it's like riding a bicycle. You never forget,'" he said. "They give it a try and become significantly better and over (a few) months become really good at it."

Soper also pointed to the potential health benefits.

He cited author Daniel Amen, who wrote in "Making a Good Brain Great," that individuals over 40 years of age are 50 percent less likely to develop Alzheimer's if they exercise twice or more a week for at least 30 minutes at a time.

Soper's efforts also spurred Mather LifeWays researcher Kathryn Brod, vice president of senior living strategic initiatives, to look at bringing table tennis to a wider audience.



Residents at The Mather enjoy a table tennis demonstration by Chicago-based group Killerspin at the residence June 12. | CURTIS LEHMKUHL-SUN-TIMES MEDIA

"Knowing we had table tennis here at the Mather in a big way, I just thought it might be fun to bring communities like this together and experience," Brod said.

Through her efforts, a number of continuing care retirement communities and nursing homes are expected to have representatives in the tournament Mather

LifeWays is sponsoring at the LeadingAge conference in Denver this fall.

Soper expects to participate.

"I hope so," he said. "We've been e-mailing back and forth with a guy from New Hampshire who sounds like he might be a real whiz-bang, so I suspect he and I are going to be up there."