

Games yield winning mix of action, fun and fitness

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

Granted, many competitors in the Monroe County Senior Games strive to walk away with gold and silver medals.

But John Van Deursen said that all participants come away winners — simply by virtue of the fact that they're exercising.

"If you look at the people competing in the Senior Games, they might be 70 to 80 years old — but they seem like they're 50 or 60," said Van Deursen as he observed table tennis action at the West Ridge Senior Center in Greece on Friday, Aug. 7.

Conversely, Van Deursen, who coordinated the table tennis event, asserted that seniors who are physically able to exercise — but opt not to — are "couch potatoes" and appear older than their actual age.

Approximately 400 people are taking advantage of the 11 events offered at the 14th annual Senior Games. Competition began Friday, Aug. 7, and was due to run through this weekend at various sites around Monroe County. The Games' final scheduled event is a softball competition Aug. 15-16 at McAvoy Park in Irondequoit. (Rain dates are Aug. 22-23.)

The Senior Games began in 1985 as a one-day competition for 130 people. With participation now triple that amount, the Senior Games have obviously gained a foothold in the community, said Tammy Chmiel, special events coordinator at Monroe County Office for the Aging.

"This will be around for the long haul," predicted Chmiel, a parishioner at St. Joseph's Church in Penfield.

Along with table tennis, Senior Games

offerings include golf, tennis, basketball, bowling, track and field, horseshoes, bocce and softball. The Games also featured such non-competitive events as bridge, and the Aug. 11 "Hike for Health" up Horizon Hill in the town of Perinton.

Chmiel noted that a single \$5 registration fee allows seniors to take part in several events; golf and bowling are the only competitions that require extra charges.

"The seniors look at this as a real bargain," Chmiel said.

The Senior Games' minimum age had been 55 but three years ago was lowered to 50. There is no upper age limit. In fact, Chmiel said, a 93-year-old man entered the tennis competition last year.

"We'll welcome people up to (age) 110," Chmiel remarked. Older seniors have developed such a devotion to the Games, she added, that organizers have created a new age category — 80-and-up. Previously, the oldest category was 75-and-up.

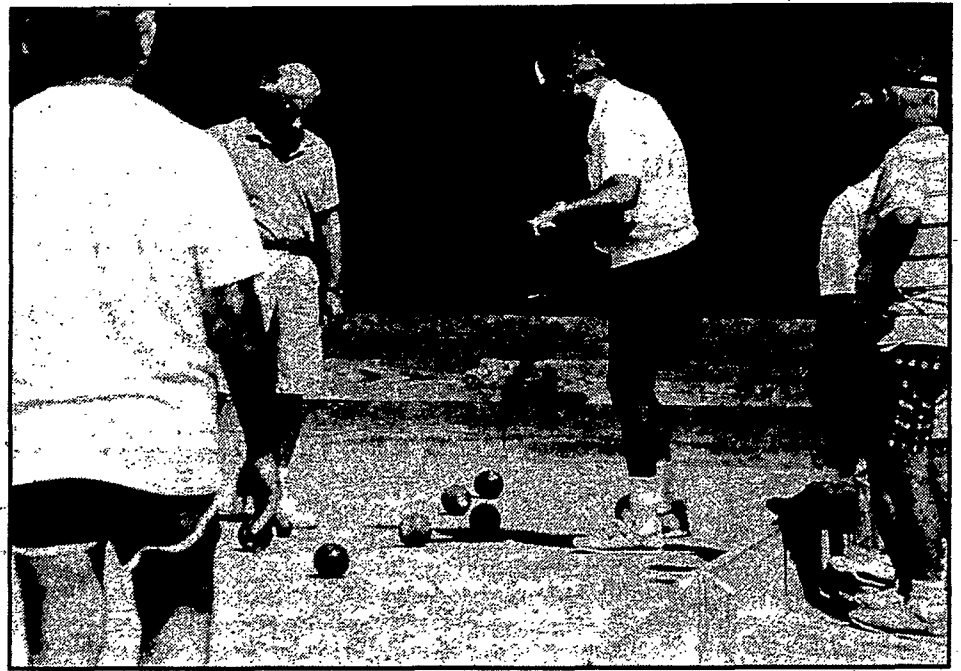
Although based in Monroe County, the Senior Games draw many entrants from outside the county. In fact, a basketball team came in from Albany this year.

Chmiel said that Senior Games are offered in other counties around the state as well. Several Monroe County competitors also took part in the New York State Senior Games held June 5-6 in Syracuse.

Monroe County's Senior Games, Chmiel said, show that athletic achievements are satisfying regardless of age.

"Face it, that would feel good to anybody," Chmiel said. "People who competed when they were younger, that desire doesn't necessarily go away."

That competitiveness fire is apparent in some of the participants, according to



File photo

Bocce competitors enjoy the action during the 1996 Monroe County Senior Games. This year's Games feature 400 participants competing in 11 events at various locations around Monroe County.

Van Deursen and another table tennis entrant, Walt Dunn.

"Oh yeah, people want to win it," Dunn remarked. "My wife (Genevieve), she's going to have a heart attack!"

"His wife is beet red after her matches," a laughing Van Deursen agreed.

However, Van Deursen pointed out, the Senior Games do emphasize social pleasure over competitiveness.

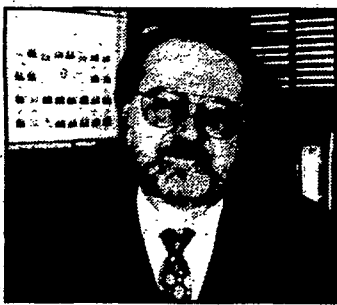
"Nobody likes to lose, but they're not heartbroken if they don't win," he said.

Van Deursen added that many athletes who take part in the Senior Games remain active year-round. One such person is Dorothy Stritzel, who placed second in her division for table tennis. She said she plays the sport at three days per week at the West Ridge Community Center.

"It's my exercise for the week," said Stritzel, a parishioner at St. Charles Borromeo Church in Greece.



Thoughts to Consider



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