

# Advantage, Belleville: Westhaven brings tennis, pool back to community

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

A pair of longtime friends are behind the reopening of an iconic club in the south of Belleville.

Phil Kammann and Greg Stiehl, both natives of the community, purchased Westhaven Pool & Tennis Club, 115 S. Illinois St. in January from Belleville Elks Lodge 481. The club is set to open this month after renovation — just in time to celebrate its 85th year of operation.

“It’s the right thing to do. The right thing for Belleville,” Kammann said. “We won’t get rich doing this, but it will make a whole lot of people happy.”

The men already had plenty to do. Kammann has spent years as an account manager at businesses. He still lives in Belleville. Stiehl, an engineer, now lives in Austin, Texas, and designs computer chips for Apple.

The two men have been friends since their schooldays. They graduated in 1984 from Belleville West High School. They had long talked about going into business together, and each of them was long familiar with Westhaven, which the Elks organization closed in 2019. Stiehl swam at the club a lot as a young man, and Kammann started what became a lifelong love of tennis.

“It made me very, very sad,” Kammann said of the closing. “It’s a gorgeous club, a really pretty setting.”

He added: “The Elks deserve kudos. They’ve been stewards of the club many, many years.”

The first owner of the property, Arthur Buesch, built a golf course on site in 1935. A pool was originally built in 1937. Ownership of the operation then went to Joseph Goodall and Charles Hammel. The Elks bought the property in 1965.

Along the way, the former golf course was sold off for development of the nearby Westhaven subdivisions. The former Elks lodge was split off and sold to Quality Rental.

With the latter transaction, only three of the original six tennis courts were left for club use at the 3.19-acre site. Those courts have been repainted, as have the pool and the upstairs bar.

“Our plans are to put six pickleball courts on those three tennis courts for dual-purpose use,” Kammann said.

Because a pickleball court is roughly half the size of a tennis court, you can put two pickleball courts end to end on one tennis court.

“Our plans are to be continuously improving. We’ll have a nice facility now, and an even better facility in year two and even better in year three,” Kammann said.

They will be adding new decking that will overlook the pool, and Stiehl envisions a nice beer garden with a fireplace setting that would help extend the club’s season.

They are also thinking about constructing a pavilion and remodeling the bathhouse.

The multiple future plans are “hindered only by time,” said Kammann, who stresses the setting.

“Many 100-year-old trees encircle the pool and the grounds, and they are just stunning. Oak, sweet maples and pines.” The location is south of Illinois Route 15.

The reaction of neighbors has been extremely positive.

“Unbelievably, overwhelmingly enthusiastic,” said Stiehl. “The day we closed I was out at dinner and the waitress overheard the word Westhaven. She was literally jumping up and down. She’s been helping with the project since then.”

Kammann shared a story of his own.

“We had an 84-year-old woman stopped by and she said she had been a member since she was 2 years old. She was all smiles. I’ve had a lot of tales like that but not with that longevity,” he said.

Since they acquired the location, a local pool, King’s Point, closed when it was sold to Belleville Township High School District 201.

That swim team has come over to Westhaven, Stiehl said.

Scott Air Force Base, which is rebuilding its own pool facility, is also showing interest in use.

People will need to join as a member to use the pool and tennis courts.

The beer garden may be run separately, as a public facility.

Interest in the club was waning before the Elks sold it. One stipulation for membership back then was becoming an Elk member.

The men expect to hire around 20-30 people for lifeguarding and operations, most of them part time.



The new owners of Westhaven Pool & Tennis Club with their mothers, from left, Nan Kammann-Judd, Phil Kammann, Greg Stiehl and Sheron Meyers. Kammann’s mother did the reliefs on the walls around the pool (shown) at Westhaven. Stiehl’s mother laid out colors and did interior design.



Maebree Koch, of Belleville, has been hired as manager to run Westhaven.

Their families — particularly their mothers — played a crucial volunteer role. Nan Kammann-Judd created the reliefs in the pool area. Stiehl’s mother, Sheron Meyers, used her interior design business experience to lay out color schemes and concepts.

For more information go to [westhavenclub.com](http://westhavenclub.com)

## Incubator names longtime business consultant as exec director

The Metro East Business Incubator has named regional business leader Kevin Riggs as executive director for the three-year-old agency.

A resident of O’Fallon, Ill., Riggs has broad experience working with both the public and private sectors through past employment with the Dentons Law Firm, the St. Louis Regional Chamber, East West Gateway Council of Governments, the Illinois State General Assembly, and the U.S. Census Bureau. Riggs began work April 25, succeeding Amy Determann, the MEBI’s first paid contractor.

“We’re excited to have Kevin leading the charge to help the MEBI expand services and grow its client base so



Riggs

that Metro East entrepreneurs can grow their enterprises where they’ve started,” said Michael Holmes, executive vice president for Workforce and Economic Development for the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis and president of the MEBI Board of Directors.

Programs of the MEBI are geared to support underserved groups within the community, especially entrepreneurs of color, “encore” entrepreneurs, veterans and women.

Riggs serves as a board member for the Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois. and continues to lead grass-roots advocacy efforts of the Illinois Public Affairs Committee (IPAC), a coalition of business leaders and organizations. He holds a Bachelor in Political Science from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale and a Masters of Public Administration from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville.

Under Riggs’ direction, the MEBI

will continue to provide a free virtual hub that will link local small-business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs from across the Metro East with resources specifically curated to support their success. The MEBI Hub on Startup Space serves as a one-stop-shop virtual location for aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners to find vetted local business resources, discussion boards, training and education, grant and technical assistance programs, curated community events, and more.

Local entrepreneurs can access the MEBI via its website (<http://www.themebi.org>), through the Startup Space online portal, or by downloading the mobile app from any app store (<http://startup.space.app>). Any organization interested in supporting the platform or listing resources for local entrepreneurs is encouraged to get involved by contacting Kevin Riggs via email: [executive@themebi.org](mailto:executive@themebi.org).

The MEBI’s most recent initiative is to commission a comprehensive Feasibil-

ity Study under the direction of the U.S. Economic Development Administration that will show the need and feasibility for an incubator, align goals of the Metro East sub-region’s innovation centers, and provide guidelines for future operations of the agency in accordance with the determined need and goals.

About the Metro East Business Incubator: A consortium of organizations and agencies across St. Clair County has been formed to establish a business incubator to provide an environment that fosters business development and sustainability through education, mentorship, networking and support services. The resulting program, known as the Metro East Business Incubator, will facilitate economic growth and revenue potential through the generation of income, creation of jobs and ensuring opportunities are inclusive of disadvantaged groups and individuals.