

## ‘Pickleball’ catching on



PHOTOS BY JOE EARLE

Ed Feldstein says he helped bring pickleball to Dunwoody and now plays about four days a week.

**BY JOE EARLE**

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It looks a bit like a game cobbled together during a slow weekend at a vacation house after the host couldn't track down all the pieces required for any single sport.

Players swing paddles that look like they came from an oversized Ping-Pong game. They hit a hollow plastic ball that's full of holes. The ball bounces back and forth over a net similar to one on a tennis court. The game moves quickly. Some regular players of the sport called "pickleball" say it can feel like playing table tennis while standing on the table.

Still, it's catching on. Just ask Ed Feldstein, a 77-year-old Sandy Springs retiree who says he helped bring the game to the Marcus Jewish Community Center of At-

lanta in Dunwoody a half-dozen or so years ago and now plays about four days a week.

"It's fun to watch. It's fun to play. It's fun to learn," Feldstein said one recent morning before he joined the crew getting a morning workout with a series of fast-paced pickleball games at the MJCCA, which calls pickleball its "hottest sport."

Feldstein remembers days when he'd get laughed at when he went into a sporting goods store and ask to buy a pickleball paddle. No more, he says, because pickleball courts are springing up across north metro Atlanta.

The city of Dunwoody has included a court in its newest city park, the Park at Pernoshal Court, which was scheduled to open April 29. That court joins more than 70 others set up across Georgia and more than 13,000 in the country, according to the

USA Pickleball Association, which is located in Surprise, Ariz.

Dunwoody Parks and Recreation Director Brent Walker said city officials decided to include the court in the new park after residents asked for it during public meetings. Walker said he'd never heard of the game before those meetings, but its fans were insistent. "There's a small but strong contingent of folks that like to play pickleball," he said.

Allan Bleich, a retired doctor, said he took up the sport after he stopped playing tennis because of knee trouble. "It's just a fun way to exercise," he said.

Nora Floersheim, a 67-year-old retired school teacher and former tennis player, picked up pickleball a couple of years ago at the Marcus Center and now teaches it to newcomers. Like other pickleball fans, she said an important aspect of the game is camaraderie among the players, who sit together and chat while awaiting a turn on the court. "It's very, very, very social," she said.

And the name? How did it get to be "pickleball," anyway?



Ed Feldstein, left, and Nora Floersheim get ready to volley during a fast game of pickleball.

It goes back to the origin of the game itself. Pickleball was invented near Seattle in 1965 by vacationing families who wanted to play badminton, but couldn't find the shuttlecock. So they combined paddles, a Wiffle ball and a badminton net to make a game that kids and adults alike could play.

The pickleball association says one story is that the original players named

their game cobbled from many parts after the "pickle boat" in rowing competitions, which uses a crew made up of rowers from different boats. Another version is that they named it for the family dog, Pickles.



Pickleball players gather in Dunwoody for morning games at the Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta.