

# Court Collaboration

For non-profit tennis organizations like Tenacity in Boston, partnering with a big event in your area could be a key to success.

BY CYNTHIA CANTRELL

Faced with a limited budget and staff, non-profit organizations often struggle to promote their good deeds while conducting the fundraising required to keep them in business. One way to accomplish both missions is through partnering with a local event.

Ned Eames, president and founder of Boston-based Tenacity, has seen dramatic results since aligning his tennis and education foundation for at-risk youth with the Outback Champions Series senior tour. Produced by Jim Courier's InsideOut Sports & Entertainment, the Outback Champions Series links each of its events to an official charity partner.

All Outback Champions Series events feature an eight-man round-robin match format with the winner of each four-player division meeting in the title match. Second-place finishers in each division play the third-place match. To be eligible to compete, players must have reached at least a Grand Slam singles final, achieved a Top 5 singles ranking or played singles on a championship Davis Cup team.

"We heard they were coming to the Boston market two years ago and immediately reached out to explore the possibility of a partnership," Eames says. "It's made a big difference for us."

Additionally, the partnership and opportunity to interact with disadvantaged youngsters forged a lasting impact on many of the eight "legends of tennis"

who participated in last spring's Champions Cup Boston tournament: Courier, John McEnroe, Todd Martin, Pat Cash, Petr Korda, Tim Mayotte, Wayne Ferreira and Pete Sampras, who celebrated his return to competitive tennis by edging Martin in a third-set match tiebreak to claim the title.

In fact, Martin consulted with Eames about the USTA/National Junior Tennis League (NJTL) program he assists in Lansing, Mich., through the Todd Martin Development Fund when the Champions Cup Boston event was being developed. "Tenacity is an incredible organization of people who do an incredible job," Martin says.

Ferreira calls the organization's commitment to improving youngsters' literacy along with tennis and general life skills "fantastic, very commendable." He adds, "It's always great playing tennis here, but raising money for such a good cause

makes it even more special."

The decision to partner with Tenacity was an "easy pick," says Courier, who notes that his own Raymond James Courier's Kids Foundation mirrors Tenacity's mission. Courier's Kids sponsors the First Serve program, which promotes positive values, healthy habits and education through tennis at the St. Petersburg Tennis Center in Florida.

"Middle school kids are at a fragile age, when they determine the path they're going to take," Courier says. "We want to put them on a good one."

The kick-off event for the last two Champions Cup Boston tournaments has been a gala and live auction to benefit Tenacity. In 2007, about 1,000 people attended the event, with tickets ranging from \$275 per individual up to \$50,000 for corporate sponsorship packages that included participation in a celebrity pro-am with the eight tournament players and former pros Rosie Casals, Mel Purcell, Bud Schultz, and Bob Green.

Eames estimates the organization's net income from the 2007 Champions Cup Boston at \$600,000, up from \$485,000 in 2006. The goal, he says, is for the event to cover 20 percent of Tenacity's annual operating budget, which also receives government funding and contributions from individuals, corporations, and foundations. "We want

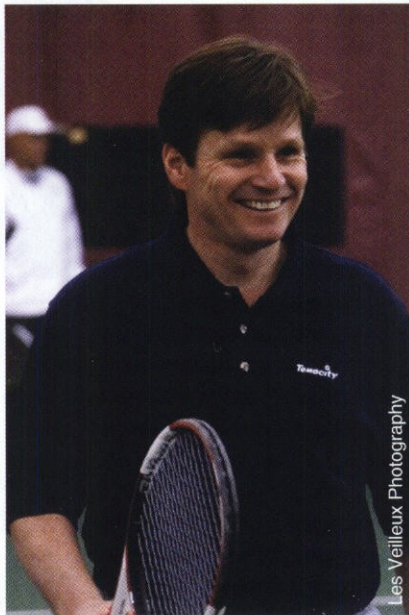


to increase our number of kids and what we do to serve them," says Eames (at right).

Tenacity Summer Program Director Andy Crane says even though Tenacity students are too young to have appreciated the pros at the peak of their careers, it was a "tremendous opportunity" for them to observe their professionalism, work ethic, and unassuming manner.

"They had the time of their lives," says Crane, noting that the students served as ball kids and additionally interacted with the players during the gala and pro-am. "It was unlike anything they had experienced before."

In its ninth year, Tenacity offers an After-School Excellence Program that provides 180 students at eight middle schools with tennis instruction and academic tutoring. Its Summer Tennis & Reading Program supports 4,000 youngsters between the ages of 7 and 15 at 28 neighborhood sites. According to Eames, Tenacity is also developing an alumni services department, whereby program graduates can continue to access services in high school including SAT preparation, college tours, and a social network of mentors and fellow graduates.



Fifteen-year-old Tutu Ekpebor of Dorchester, Mass., who attends a private prep school, says her mother suggested four years ago that she join Tenacity so she'd have something to do after school. "I didn't want to go. I didn't know anybody and I didn't play tennis. I wasn't happy," says Tutu, noting that Courier calmed her nerves during the pro-am by

good-naturedly joking about her mistakes instead of becoming impatient, as she had feared. "I didn't used to have goals, but now I want to play tennis in high school, study Japanese, and travel around the world."

Saquan Gual of Allston, Mass., also 15, has been participating in Tenacity since his sixth-grade teacher told him about the organization four years ago. "I didn't like to read when I came here, but now it's one of my favorite things," he says of the academic support he has received through Tenacity. "Now I'm working on going to college."

Courier, who responded to Saquan's challenge by rallying with him during the pre-tournament press conference, says he is continually looking for ways to improve the Outback Champions Series. Possible additions, he notes, include doubles and a women's division. One aspect that will remain constant, however, is his company's support of charity partners like Tenacity.

"I respect the business-like manner in which they conduct their programs," Courier says. "They're here for the long-term, and we're pleased to be their partner." ▶