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PICKLEBALL IS THE NEW SPORT ON THE VERGAS BLOCK

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By Heather Rule

Vergas is the latest Otter Tail lakes area town to have its own pickleball courts. Located near the Vergas baseball field, four courts are under construction. With neighboring Perham and Detroit Lakes being area favorites, local resident Shannon Charpentier lead an effort to get pickleball courts in Vergas.

Charpentier started playing pickleball four years ago and has played in MN as well as in Arizona. But she noted that “you can’t get enough pickleball courts” in the area. “It’s the fastest-growing sport in the United States,” Charpentier said. “And it’s funny because it was developed in the 1960s.”

Charpentier thought the sport was new when she first tried it. The popularity of it has taken off so much that she’s one of a five-person committee which has worked to bring the courts to Vergas with plans of having the entire project completed by the end of this summer (2022).

Construction and phase one of laying the dirt and concrete started in October 2021. Phase two will lay the special court surface with colors and striping, similar to a tennis court. The plan is to lay that surface as soon as weather allows in the spring. Phase three will install fencing around the courts. Charpentier said they can use the courts to play pickleball even before the fencing is put in. “We can get the nets up and we can show people what this game is all about,” Charpentier said.

Beyond the fenced-in courts, the group’s dream is to play pickleball under lights someday, too.

With the pickleball courts popping up in Perham, Detroit Lakes and Vergas, it’s also a goal to start round-robin tournaments involving the various communities, Charpentier said. They’d also like to have lessons at the Vergas courts, she added.

Along with bringing pickleball courts to Vergas, Charpentier and her committee members also want to educate the public on the game of pickleball. The sport can be played as singles or doubles on one court, and it offers a combination of badminton, tennis and ping pong skills. The court is smaller than a regular tennis court and paddles are used, not racquets.

“It certainly is for all ages,” Charpentier said. “It doesn’t matter if you’re 6 years old or 106, you can come out and play pickleball.”

Pickleball is also an affordable sport, Charpentier said. A paddle might cost in the \$50 to \$100 range, with a sleeve of balls costing about \$10, she said. Grab a pair of sneakers or

tennis/court shoes, and you'll all set.

Of the many sports Charpentier has played, she dubbed pickleball as her favorite. As much as it is about the sport, Charpentier sees the benefits of pickleball in getting together with others, playing, laughing and having fun together.

"I rarely see anyone on the pickleball court getting mad," Charpentier said. "They just are hitting great shots and laughing and hitting bad shots and laughing. Camaraderie is amazing. You're smiling the whole time you're playing."

Community members broke ground last fall for the new Vergas pickleball courts, set to be completed this summer (2022).