

Petworth newcomers hit courts with enthusiasm, lesson plans

By IAN THOMS
Current Staff Writer

On New Year's Day, Aaron Devine and Rachel Sandler took advantage of the unseasonably warm weather and went to play tennis at a local park.

The two, both members of a Jewish service organization called Avodah, had recently moved into a house in the Petworth neighborhood. Devine, 22, had moved from Minnesota, and Sandler, 23, from Iowa.

When they arrived at the Raymond Recreation Center at 10th Street and Spring Road, Devine and Sandler found the tennis courts littered with glass from broken bottles. A net was draped across one of the two courts.

As they wondered what to do next, advisory neighborhood commissioner Peron Williams called out from his back yard, across the alley from the park, saying he was glad to see tennis players back on the courts. Williams lent them a broom to sweep away the glass.

"That's when the dialogue started," Sandler said in an interview at the courts Monday.

What followed was an idea to hold free, informal clinics for the children who frequent the park and otherwise have no experience with tennis.

"I used to teach youth lessons back home in Minneapolis. And I always thought it would be fun to do something like this at tennis courts that didn't get a lot of play. ... We said we would come out here and hit with whoever wants to come. Anybody who wants



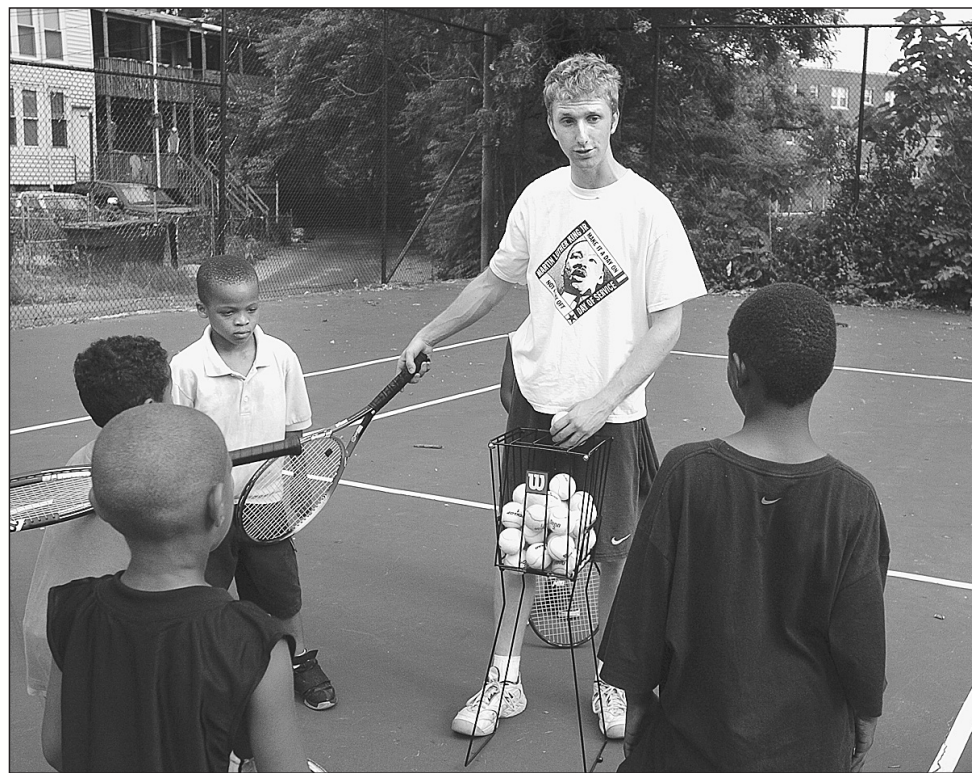
to play can play," said Devine.

In only the second week of the Monday evening clinics, roughly 20 children ranging in age from 6 to 14 filled the courts. Those same courts, which had been abandoned to everything but debris, now receive the same amount of attention as the basketball courts they border, at least for the hour and a half that Devine and Sandler are there each week.

On Monday, Devine and Sandler appeared at ease commanding their audience's attention, as they gave basic instruction and led their pupils in various games. Even those girls whose job it was to pick up the loose tennis balls were enthralled.

At one point, a girl crushed the ball with her racket, nodded her head, and turned to say to anyone in earshot, "I'm going to go on tour. I'm going pro."

Devine and Sandler said garnering interest for the clinics only took showing up.



Matt Petros/The Current

Aaron Devine gathers young tennis enthusiasts at the Raymond Recreation Center for some informal lessons. Devine is organizing a tennis day for July 17.

"They're just always here. There's kids crawling all over the place," Devine said. "The recreation directors were saying how they would like to have an extra outlet, especially for the girls to play organized sports and learn a new one."

Sandler said, "When we showed up today, there were a couple kids that were playing across the street, and they said, 'Oh, it's time to play tennis!'"

Devine and Sandler have planned a "play tennis day" for July 17. Early that morning, volunteers will build a practice wall on the

courts so the new enthusiasts can practice whether they have someone to play with or not. Around 1 p.m., a mural will be painted on the wall. Then the U.S. Tennis Association will have a professional player come to the courts.

The day will end with the Howard University tennis team playing a match. The afternoon events are open to the public.

Devine said July 17 will just be the start of the work, noting he hopes the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation will help renovate the courts further.

Amherst College recruits accidental Cathedral athlete for lacrosse squad

By IAN THOMS
Current Staff Writer

When Caroline Gignoux left Washington at the end of fourth grade with her family, bound for Cairo, Egypt, she had no desire to play sports.

Gignoux returned to the District four years later with a new outlook on athletics, and after competing in three sports at National Cathedral School over the next five years, she was recruited to play lacrosse for Dartmouth College, Amherst College and Yale University, among others.

"I hated sports before I got there [to Cairo]. Or, I was just too shy to play them. ... But sports were really big there. Everyone always played sports. It was just what you did," Gignoux said in an interview on Monday. "There weren't movie theaters or any of the other things there are to do here."

From the lack of options grew a successful athletic career at

National Cathedral, where she played lacrosse, ran cross country and swam. In Cairo, she had played soccer, basketball and softball.

"I accidentally signed up for field hockey one time. And on the first day, I was really shy, so I was too shy to say I signed up for the wrong sport. I ended up really liking it," Gignoux said.

The chance encounter with field hockey led to lacrosse by way of Jane DeGrenier, who coaches both sports at Cathedral.

"I had never heard of lacrosse before seventh grade. ... At first, I thought it was really annoying. But I liked catching the ball so I kept playing," said Gignoux.

"I'm glad I encouraged her," coach DeGrenier said Tuesday. "She is just such a great kid, really a great person to have on the team."

Gignoux's reputation as a team player and strong student - academic all-American at Cathedral - helped her garner interest from a number of elite colleges.



Bill Petros/Current File Photo

Caroline Gignoux never intended to play sports, but she wound up with a notable athletic career and just finished a year of lacrosse.

Her decision came down to whether she was to play for a Division I Ivy League school or a Division III school.

"I didn't want to play straight Division I because ... since I played so many sports in high school, I was ready to branch out and do something else and not commit so much

to one single sport. There's so much other stuff besides sports in college," said Gignoux.

Basing her decision on the overall campus feel and not just the lacrosse team, Gignoux last fall chose to attend Amherst College. She joins a team that won the national championship for Division

III schools in 2003.

According to DeGrenier, the addition of Gignoux will boost Amherst's defense. "I would say she is one of our best team defenders. She is really good at knowing when to help."

Gignoux will not be alone among her Cathedral teammates to continue lacrosse in college. The team boasts five total collegiate recruits, one of whom is Maurine Graham, who Gignoux introduced to the sport of lacrosse. Graham will play at Princeton next year.

"She is a natural and amazing athlete," Gignoux said of Graham. "So I started playing field hockey and lacrosse and she started playing because I told her, 'These are really cool sports.'"

This summer, Gignoux will fill part of the time before school — which she said she is excited about — with the monthlong Outward Bound program she left for yesterday. She is mountaineering in Colorado.