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The Cynwyd Club, Community Hub

A premier destination for recreation and socialization for more than 110 years, **The Cynwyd Club** embraces continual change to enhance the quality of life for local residents.

by **Matt Cosentino**

If the founders of The Cynwyd Club were able to visit today, they would see a much different institution than the one they opened in 1913 as a place for Bala Cynwyd residents to socialize and pursue recreational interests. One thing that has not changed, however, is the club's ability to form meaningful connections with members of the surrounding community.

While most people associate a country club with a certain air of exclusivity, The Cynwyd Club prides itself on its approachability and accessibility.

"When you mention *country club*, people roll their eyes and have a certain expectation. We're not that," says Shane Coleman, general manager. "We're just an oversized backyard facility where neighbors love to catch up and socialize with each other, and I think that's why we've been so successful. It's more about relaxation here."

"Our staff doesn't just stand in the corner and say, 'Yes sir, no sir,'" he continues. "It's kind of like the bar from *Cheers* in that everybody knows your name, and you're not just a membership number."

Nestled in a quiet residential neighborhood with serene surroundings, The Cynwyd Club has reinvented itself several times over the course of its storied history. It has

adapted to its members' needs during monumental events such as the Great Depression, World War II, and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the constants throughout the years has been its reputation as a premier club for tennis and squash.

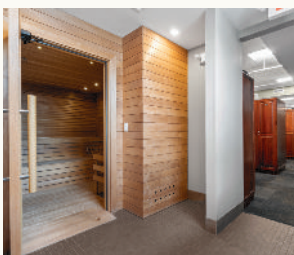
Tennis legend Bill Tilden taught youngsters how to play the game on the grounds in the early years, and its membership at one time included Vic Seixas, who went on to become a Wimbledon and U.S. Open champion. Countless national squash champions have also called the club home; in fact, The Cynwyd Club has produced more members of that sport's hall of fame than any other club in North America.

Both pastimes remain in high demand to this day. The Cynwyd Club boasts eight Har-Tru tennis courts, hosting everything from members-only round-robin tournaments to clinics/lessons for kids and adults, thanks to a partnership with High Performance Tennis Academy, also based in Bala Cynwyd. Indoors, the club has five international softball squash courts and two doubles courts, which are heated and air-conditioned for year-round play.



Throughout its history, The Cynwyd Club has been a premier club for tennis and squash.

Ballroom and Exterior photos and ballroom photo courtesy of The Cynwyd Club; other interior photos by Jody Robinson



We're an historical club that is going through a vibrant change."

— SHANE COLEMAN,
THE CYNWYD CLUB

Yet the club has evolved into so much more than just a haven for tennis and squash players. The 2017 addition of a half-sized Olympic pool and a wading pool for toddlers was a game-changer.

"That basically reconnected us with the community," Coleman says. "I've been with the club since 2004, and when I took over, the majority of the ZIP codes for our members were actually places like Wayne and Newtown Square. Seventy percent of our membership now lives within a mile and a half of us, so we've become that community club again. I like that we've gone back to the original mission, which was to serve the immediate residents.

"Adding the pool also allowed us to become inclusive for all family members," he continues. "Instead of just being one-dimensional and catering to one individual in the family, we suddenly became a family destination where every member of the family could do something they liked."

Unlike most community pools that operate from Memorial Day to Labor Day, The Cynwyd Club's saltwater, fully heated, and fully staffed pool opens in mid-May and remains so until October. Coleman characterizes September as one of the best months for swimming, given the likelihood of 85-degree days with low humidity.

Other athletic pursuits for members include golf—courtesy of The Cynwyd Club's affiliation with nearby Bala Golf Club—and exercise. A fitness center offers state-of-the-art equipment, personal training, and massage therapy,

with physical therapy soon to be added.

The Cynwyd Club offers members opportunities to do much more than sweat in the gym, work on their back-hand, or lounge by the pool. The Tudor-style clubhouse also features a Members' Bistro, with a menu focused on fresh ingredients, and a Members' Bar. Both are frequented year-round. "On snow days, we get a lot of people who walk here and have a drink with their neighbors," says Lauren McDowell, the club's assistant general manager.

The Cynwyd Club's ballroom underwent a major renovation in 2020. The original chimney from 1913 was removed, opening up the surface area and creating a more visually striking space. Since then, events for both members and outside businesses have grown dramatically, with the club becoming a popular destination for bar and bat mitzvahs, sweet 16 parties, sports functions, and intimate weddings.

Further strengthening its ties to the community, the club serves as home court for the squash programs of 11 schools within the Lower Merion School District, as well as the upper and middle school teams from Friends' Central School.

This spring and summer have been more highly anticipated than any Coleman can recall in his two decades at the club. New members or existing members who may be returning for the warmer months will be able to take advantage of a significant offseason project—namely, the additions of a new kitchen, thereby doubling the size of the previous space, a new member

entrance, and an expanded members' deck for outdoor dining.

"We're always updating our amenities," McDowell adds. "We also just did a huge renovation to our locker rooms and put saunas in there for our members. We're trying to change with the times but still look back at where we came from."

Honoring the past while embracing the future is a perpetual theme at The Cynwyd Club, where the overall mission is to offer the community an enjoyable gathering space for the entire family.

"We're an historical club that is going through a vibrant change," Coleman says. "While we fly under that country club banner, we do things a little bit differently and cater more to our membership and their needs.

"While we still have that veil of secrecy that comes with a country club, we've tried to be more approachable and accessible than anybody else. I think that has resonated. If you come here, it's more of an authentic experience." ■



The Cynwyd Club

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