

Raising funds to replace indoor court

By **TAYLOR SCHWARTZ-OLSON**
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Members of the Lake Havasu Pickleball Association and local businesses are showing their love for pickleball by raising money to replace the court at the ARK Center, run by the Stonebridge Christian Fellowship Church.

The pickleball association has over 400 members who play at indoor and outdoor courts across Havasu, participate in special events such as Picklefest, and help raise funds for facilities.

Janie Morris, president of the association, said it is all about fellowship and making connections.

"You're socializing, you get to know people, and get



Taylor Schwartz-Olson/Today's News-Herald

The ARK Center, run by the Stonebridge Christian Fellowship Church, is open to be rented by community members and is used for pickleball, basketball, volleyball, and other activities.

through the ups and downs of life together, and support each other and hang out together, even when you're not playing pickleball," Morris said.

The association had its early beginnings at the ARK

Center, which was built over 10 years ago before pickleball became popular.

Then, members of the church brought it to the community.

"There were two people who were members

of the church, Tim and Carol Weaver, who decided to introduce pickleball," Morris said. "They found it in California and brought it here, and then they started pickleball lessons in the ARK Center."

Morris, like many, had her first experience with the sport at the center when she attended lessons with her husband.

"We heard through the grapevine about this thing called pickleball, and at the ARK Center they were teaching it," Morris said. "We came in January 2016 and took our first lesson, and that was it."

Around that same time, the association was formed.

"We had no pickleball courts outside, anywhere in

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this town, zero," Morris said. "So, we formed the Lake Havasu City Pickleball Association. Our mission is to promote the growth and development of pickleball in Lake Havasu City, which means finding places to play."

The first goal of the association was to raise money to build outdoor courts, and as of February last year, the complex at Dick Samp Memorial Park was completed.

Now, the focus is shifting back to where it all began at the ARK Center, and the association has formed a partnership with the church.

"We pay to play, just like they do at the aquatic center," Morris said. "All the gross proceeds from each session go right to the church, so it pays for the maintenance and operations of this building that we're using."

Five days a week, members use the court to play from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. Volunteers help set up, run the courts,

and take everything down at the end.

Morris said that playing at the ARK Court is challenging, however, as the floor is dented.

"We would like to replace the flooring and make it a better pickleball experience for everyone," Morris said. "And not just pickleball, they have basketball, they have volleyball, they have other things that would benefit from a better floor."

After agreeing to raise funds for the church to replace the floor, the association kicked off a fundraiser, with the goal being to raise funds by April or May ahead of the summer heat.

"This is a sport for all ages now, so you're seeing more working folks and kids playing the sport, and that means they need a place to play after work, on the weekends, things like that," Morris said

The goal is to raise \$35,000 for the project. \$10,000 has been donated so

far, half from private entities and half from Anderson Toyota.

Andrea Foote, marketing director for Anderson Toyota, stopped by the ARK Center Tuesday morning to present a check to the association.

Foote said she is excited to be involved as she and her husband play, as well as the Anderson Toyota owners.

"We're involved in so much, we love to give back, and this is such a growing sport, I don't think people really realize it unless they're in it," Foote said. "It's huge."

Going forward, Morris said they have launched a campaign on their website to raise funds and will also be working on reaching out to other businesses. More information can be found at lakehavasupickleball.com.

"I just want it to succeed, they want it to succeed, and we love pickleball in this town," Morris said.