

OPEN COURT



A City of Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation Publication

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Greetings, City of Atlanta Tennis Community

Happy Women's History Month! My name is La'Shawn Dudley and I serve as the new Deputy Commissioner for Administration, Strategy and Innovation for the Department of Parks and Recreation.



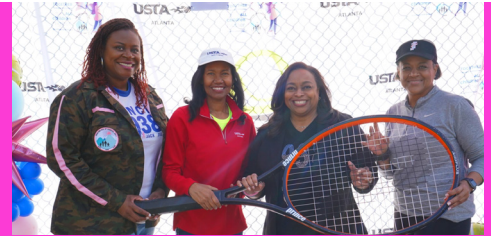
I am excited to work with this phenomenal department where I will oversee administrative, financial, and operational performance. I previously served as the Deputy Chief Equity Officer for the City. In my new role, I will continue my commitment to improve the health and well-being of Atlanta residents as we Move Atlanta Forward.

I am a long-time tennis enthusiast, having played varsity tennis in high school (doubles). Recently, I picked up the racket again to teach my children about the sport. I am also an avid dancer with formal training in ballet, tap and jazz and informal experience in African dance, hip hop, house, and step.

As we observe **Women's History Month**, we acknowledge, lift-up, and recognize the contributions and accomplishments of women trailblazers in the tennis profession. From Althea Gibson to Billie Jean King to Serena Williams as well as local talent including the Senior Divas. We also pay homage to one of our own, the late Sharon Lester. We thank and salute women around the world for their amazing contributions.

As a friendly reminder, we have transitioned our online services to PlaybyPoint for court reservations. Thank you for your participation at our tennis centers. We hope your experience this Spring will be incredible!

Enjoy the March issue of *Open Court*!



Jack & Jill of America Team Up with USTA

We're sending a special shoutout to the **Greater Metropolitan Atlanta Chapter of Jack and Jill of America, Inc.** for hosting their first tennis session at Joseph D. McGhee Tennis Center!

A total of 15 youth and 10 adults participated in their first beginners' tennis session through USTA's Adult & Junior Tennis Apprentice program. Players were taught the fundamentals of tennis by professionals, Shadisha Robinson and Erik Graves.

Thank you USTA Southern for spreading the love of tennis to our youth and adults!



Women's Senior Players Grand Slam with Atlanta History

On a warm and sunny afternoon at Joseph D. McGhee Tennis Center, our Community Affairs team caught up with the Senior Divas. The group of vibrant, senior players invited us to join the fun in Southwest Atlanta and quickly, it became a history lesson on Atlanta tennis facilities.



Captain Gladis Harris tells us the USTA 55 & 65 group have played on our courts for more than 30 years. Harris and other players vividly remember the segregation of restrooms, water fountains, and public transportation in Atlanta.

The Divas also shared a moment in history when Atlanta parks and facilities were all-white and how Black Atlantans cherished Washington Park, historically known as the first and only recreational park for black residents.

Today, you can still catch the Divas lighting up the courts at McGhee. The 65 & over players recently placed a finalist during a tennis tournament.



Meet the Atlanta Student Movement Leaders Who Desegregated Atlanta Tennis Facilities

During the late 1950s, Black Americans continued to fight for equal rights as the United States Supreme Court ruled in favor of integrated schools. **Brown vs. Board Court Decision** is widely known as one of the most important court decisions of the 20th century.



The City of Atlanta's recreational spaces such as parks, concession stands, swimming pools, golf courses, swimming pools, and tennis courts were still segregated, though city officials claimed the facilities were integrated.

On May 13, 1961, four students, Miss Herschelle S. Sullivan, Benjamin Brown, Charles F. Lyles, and Lonnie C. King, from the Atlanta University Center (AUC) attempted to use Atlanta's Bitsy Grant Tennis Center. When the four players arrived, the courts were full of white players, including Georgia Tech football coach Bobby Dodd. The Morehouse and Spelman players were told they needed to reserve a court. As the players proceeded to sign-up, management closed the tennis courts for repairs.

Three days later, on May 16, 1961, the young Spelmanite and collegiate Morehouse men proceeded to federal court and filed a lawsuit.

On August 27, 1962, court officials desegregated all Atlanta recreation facilities.

Because of the profound leadership of four black tennis players, Atlanta parks and facilities are open to everyone to enjoy.



Remembering Sharon Lester

In honor of Women's History Month, the Department of Parks and Recreation remembers the life and legacy of Ms. Sharon E. Lester.

"We spoke on the phone a lot, but this particular time, she came in person, and sat down with her list of work orders for Piedmont Park," Bompuku Iyayi explains, "She was the sweetest person, but she meant business."

Lester started playing tennis at Atlanta Public Schools' Sammie E. Coan and continued playing the sport through her undergraduate years at Tuskegee University. She later graduated with a degree in Political Science with the aspirations of becoming a lawyer.

She was employed with the Office of Recreation for 20 years and managed Piedmont Tennis Center for 11 years. At Piedmont, she supervised over 900 adults and 500 youth players monthly.

"She embodied everything about Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs in the community and her personal life. She put her heart and soul into what she did for the Atlanta community. It took me by surprise when I found out she passed away," shares Bompuku.

The beautiful spirit known as Sharon Lester passed away at the age 44 in 2007.

Sharon Lester is the first Black woman to have a tennis facility named in her honor by the City of Atlanta.



Photo Credit: Piedmont Tennis Association

TENNIS COURTS OPEN DAILY

DAILY 6 a.m. – 11 p.m.
All COA tennis courts at our parks across the city

MONDAY - FRIDAY 9 a.m. – 9 p.m.
Bitsy Grant, Chastain Memorial and Sharon Lester @ Piedmont Park

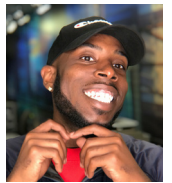
MONDAY - FRIDAY 1 – 9 p.m. Joseph McGhee
5 – 9 p.m. Washington Park

SATURDAY 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.
All Tennis Centers

SUNDAY 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
All Tennis Centers

SEND US YOUR STORY!

If you have a tennis story, accomplishment, celebration or picture you'd like featured in *Open Court*, we want to hear from you! Email Phillip Smith at pesmith@atlantaga.gov.



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Contact Us

We're here for you and happy to answer your questions! Email our friendly staff or call 404.546.6788

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