

SANTA CRUZ BOWLS CLUB

Lawn bowling finds a niche in Santa Cruz

By JENNA BROGAN

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SANTA CRUZ — Tucked in the back corner of San Lorenzo Park resides what Christine Palochak calls Santa Cruz's "best kept secret."

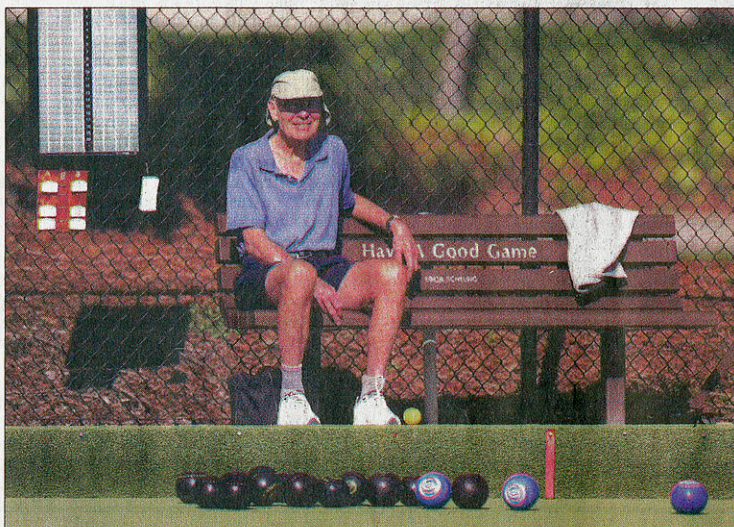
Just to the right of the pond is a gated 120-foot by 120-foot patch of artificial grass that Santa Cruz Bowls Club has called home for the last 40 years.

While the artificial grass is a recent development within the last three years, the club has provided generations of locals with the opportunity to learn the sport of lawn bowling.

"It's good family fun, plus it's good exercise," said club president Palochak, who compares the sport to yoga in its reliance on muscle control. But with all the strategy involved, Palochak believes "your head is going to be hurting more than your body."

The sport, which looks a lot like bocce but with oblong balls that must be rolled in a curved trajectory, is popular in the United Kingdom, South Africa and Australia, but membership numbers in the U.S. are estimated at a low 4,000-5,000, said club Vice President David Sievert.

Today, Santa Cruz Bowls Club has 36 full members — including one who commutes from Richmond — who pay \$100 per year in dues, which includes the use of club equipment, a key for anytime access to the field, a membership card that enables them to play any bowling green in the world, and ensures the upkeep of the



Bill Fieberling awaits the start of play at the Santa Cruz Lawn Bowling Club's Saturday gathering at San Lorenzo Park.



Hands cradle a bowl before a shot Saturday on the Santa Cruz Lawn Bowling Club's green.

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IF YOU GO

SANTA CRUZ BOWLS CLUB

WHAT: Learn the sport of lawn bowling
WHEN: 12:30 p.m. Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays; Lessons by appointment only
WHERE: 137 Dakota Street, Santa Cruz
INFORMATION: 275-0028 or www.sclawnbowls.org

field. The club also has around 20 dual members who are based at other clubs but use the San Lorenzo Park field.

While the club offers free lessons to newcomers of all ages that make an appointment, Palochak believes the club's positioning at the back

of the park is one of the reasons so few people know about it, and why she and so many of its members stumbled upon it accidentally.

"I came to San Lorenzo Park when I was supposed to meet my wife downtown and I just happened to see it," said

Sievert. "I hung on the fence and the president of the club at the time asked if I wanted to play and showed me how."

For Sievert, the fresh air and the camaraderie keep him coming back year after year.

"The least experienced play with the most experienced; that's how you learn," he said.

One of four clubs in California with an artificial playing surface, the Santa Cruz Bowls Club has been the preferred location for the Pro Bowls Playdown Tournament in mid-August, during which professional lawn bowlers compete to qualify for tournaments around the world, for

the last few years.

For eight-year member John Lyons, lawn bowling was an easy transition from golf and came with a few perks.

"You don't have to get a tee-time," joked Lyons. "And a couple rounds of golf would cover a couple years of dues

here."

Though Palochak appreciates the loyalty of her current members, she hopes more community members will come check out the club.

"We want to become a community resource, rather than a secret," she said.