

FOR THE JOURNAL

Keowee Key residents attend a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the community's new pickleball courts on Thursday in Salem.

Fast-growing pickleball makes its way to Keowee Key

BY JAMES SHIRLEY
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SENECA — One of the fastest-growing sports in the nation, even if many people in the area aren't familiar with it just yet, pickleball has made its way into the Golden Corner.

Combining elements of badminton, table tennis and tennis, the racquet sport is played with a wiffleball, with four people on a court one-third the size of a tennis court and a 36-inch net.

Richard Webster, a pickleball enthusiast, hosted Keowee Key's inaugural Pickleball Capital Project, which took place on Thursday in the Keowee Key community to raise awareness of the sport.

"We had a large number of people and a lot of interest," Webster said. "The objective of the open house was to expose the community to this new venue and possibly recruit some new players."

Pickleball attracts players of all ages, and the amount of growth the sport has seen over recent years has been astonishing, according to Webster.

"I would say I think it's growing because it's quite

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easy to learn and it doesn't have a difficult learning curve," Webster said. "At the same time, it can be played at various levels.

"We have people that play at a fun level that have a great time, and then we have the more competitive people who go to tournaments. So you get the full range."

Since pickleball courts are one-third the size of tennis courts, it provides players with constant action without wearing them down physically.

"I like the sport because there is a lot of close-to-the-net type play," Webster said. "There is a line that is seven feet from the net, and a lot of play happens there, and that ball is flying back and forth."

"That's the fun part for me, and it's not stressful either. With it being one-third the size of a tennis court, there's not as much ground to cover."

Webster believes that it is only a matter of time before the sport is all over the Upstate. There are not any official public pickleball courts in the Oconee County area, but there is room for them.

And for communities like Keowee Key, pickleball also provides an additional activity to attract residents.

"You can get two or three courts in one tennis court, and some of these communities that have tennis courts are underusing them," Webster said. "It gives them an added activity to do.

"There are a number of people asking about getting a program started, and hopefully with Clemson having a plethora of tennis courts, someone will get one started."

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