

Horseshoe team energizes Villagers' competition by encouraging newcomers or those who haven't played in a while to give the sport a try or watch others play at an event.

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With winning on the brain, The Sanctioned League Horseshoe Club is practicing horseshoes for The National Horseshoe Pitchers Association tournament in Clearwater this winter.

The Horseshoe Club put together two groups of six horseshoe players to compete in the tournament. The tournament will provide an opportunity for Villages horseshoe players to improve their game day performance with 20 pits.

"This is the big event for our club coming up," David Wietrzak, The Sanction League Horseshoe Club President said. "People come from around the state to play. With the pandemic and everything, who knows who will actually go. But from what I've

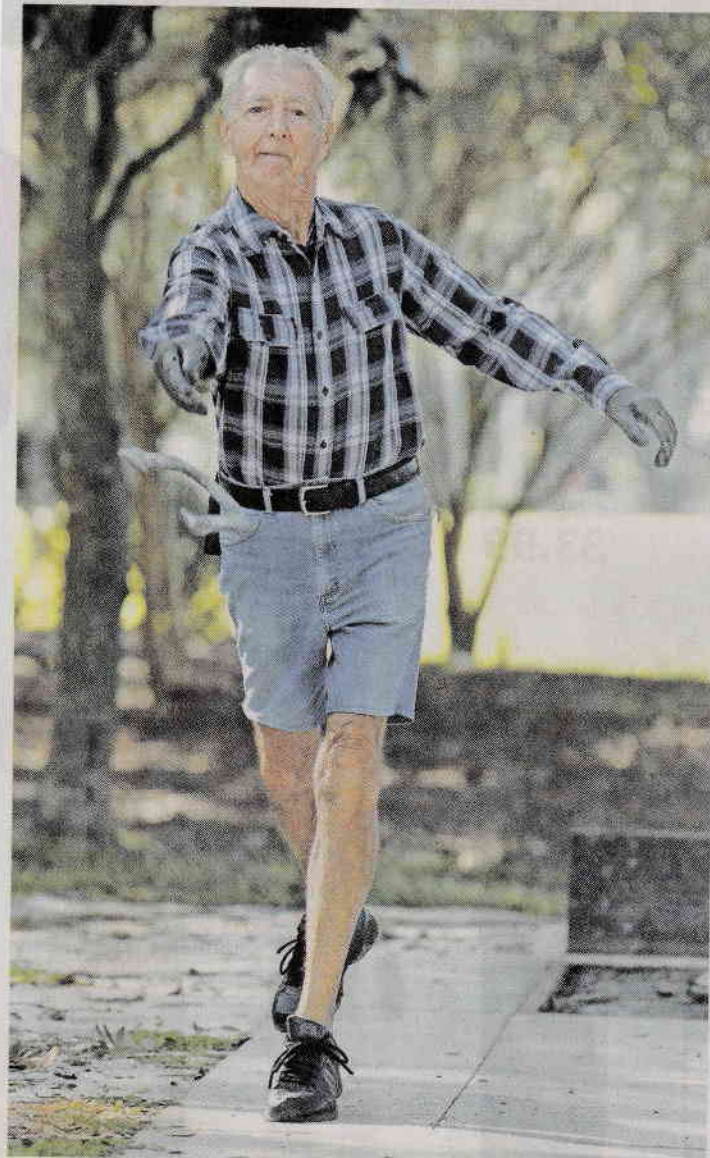
seen, I don't think the pandemic's stopping anybody. It should be a good turnout."

The NHPA will host the tournament Jan. 29 at Ed Wright Park, 1326 S. Martin Luther King Junior Ave. in Clearwater.

Members of the club focus on muscle memory, accuracy, grip, stance, and swing skills during practice.

"Players have to be able to hit the pin or hit the stake," Wietrzak said. "You gotta be able to turn the shoe or flip the shoe. The stake is about an inch-and-three-eighths thick, and you only have a three-and-a-half inches opening at the end of the shoe. You have to be able to throw that shoe 40 feet around that stake."

During practices, 40 Villagers play horseshoes. About half of The Villagers who attend practice are club members, and the other half are walk-ins. Either way, all of



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Bones Scott, of the Village of Tall Trees, pitches a shoe Nov. 2 at Paradise Regional Recreation Complex.

the attendees play three matches.

"There's good camaraderie," Wietrzak said. "We warm up with probably 20 or 30 shoes; we'll throw, and then we start playing. Whatever happens happens. Everybody plays against each other. It takes skill."

Villagers started The Sanctioned League Horseshoe Club in 2003. In response, horseshoe pits made of Kentucky clay, rather than sand, joined the offerings at Paradise Recreation Center.

"The Villages was very successful at helping us," Wietrzak said. "They really helped us get started. And so far, so good. The Villages put in beautiful pits with the layout, the concrete work and everything."

The main purpose of the Horseshoe Club is competition and socializing, according to Wietrzak.

"All humans — or most humans — like competition," he said. "The club is a good form of competition and exercise. You have to like horseshoes, and you have to want to compete. You also get to see old friends. So it's also a good form of socializing. Overall when you play horseshoes, you have to be focused and pay attention. Pay attention to what you're doing to throw the shoe the correct way. Golf is the same. You swing the club the right way and hopefully hit the ball. In horseshoes, you take the shoe, look at the stake, pitch the shoe 40 feet and hope you get it the right way."