

KAREN VOGTER

Life, Love, and Tennis

By Michelle R. Nickens

Tennis begins with love —AUTHOR UNKNOWN



by close friends, tennis became an integral part of their life together. “Watching the tournament was fun. We met the most amazing people,” she said. “Playing was something we could do and enjoy together. So we bought racquets, started taking lessons and played in leagues.” Karen and Mark went to more tournaments, and over the years, their support for the game, the tournament and the community grew.

As a critical care nurse for years, Karen has a passion for people and for their health and well-being. Likewise, as a neurosurgeon at the Tallahassee

Neurological Clinic, Mark was dedicated to saving people’s lives. They spent years working hard, building a family, supporting our community and playing tennis. “You have to play the game,” she said. However, some games you win and some you lose. And, unfortunately, Karen experienced the biggest loss. After 19 years of marriage, Mark unexpectedly passed away. “Mark was one of a kind. People gravitated towards him,” Karen explained. “He loved his family and his patients—he changed lives.”

Shortly after Mark’s death, friends approached Karen with an idea—a memorial that has now benefited countless individuals. The D. Mark Vogter, M.D. Memorial Endowment for the Neuro Intensive Care Unit was established at Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare. At the

unit, patients are treated for neurological trauma, stroke, brain tumors and spinal cord injuries. Like a perfect match, the tennis tournament would be the venue to raise funds. But it has done more than that. It has brought people together, educated our community, invigorated our youth and celebrated life.

This year, the 12th Annual USTA Tallahassee Tennis Challenger will be held April 9–16, 2011, at Forestmeadows Tennis Center. Next year will mark 20 years that Tallahassee has had a professional tennis tournament. Friends of Our Parks Foundation was instrumental in helping the tournament succeed. Karen explained that the strong partnerships with the TMH Foundation, the City of Tallahassee, the USTA Pro Circuit and the USTA Florida Section have helped propel the event. People from all over Florida, more than 300 volunteers, come to Tallahassee to help.

In addition to funding the endowment, the tournament supports the Sharon Ewing Walker Breast Health Center. The tournament also hosts events for the Boys & Girls Club and First Serve participants, holds free clinics for adults and children and features QuickStart Tennis. “We want our youth to engage in an activity they can do for the rest of their life.” Her face lit up when she spoke about working with Special Olympics children during the tournament.

In 2004, Karen assumed the role of Tournament Director. Her close friend Maria served as the Tournament Chair until last year when she retired. Karen stressed that many people have worked hard to make this happen and seems to downplay her role. But just as people gravitated toward Mark, they gravitate toward her too. She is the epitome of truth, honor, respect and all that’s right in the world. “We want to make a difference,” she says. And, Karen certainly has. **TW**

For more information about the tournament, visit online at tallahasseechallenger.com.

A serene and joyful smile swept across Karen Vogter’s face the moment she sat down. You cannot help but feel enlightened as she talks about her family, her friends and, of course, tennis. Someone once said, “Love is nothing in tennis, but in life it’s everything.” Karen’s story begins with love. She’s a leader in our community, inspiring people through her work with the Tallahassee Tennis Challenger tournament and through her personal journey.

One might think that Karen would have met her husband Mark while playing tennis, but they actually met while dancing. Soon after, Karen and Mark were married, and although they were both athletic, they had not tried their hand at tennis yet. After they were invited to a tennis tournament