

HAMILTON LAKES
CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF MEMORIES

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Hamilton Lakes
SWIM & TENNIS CLUB

1962 - 2012





Hamilton Lakes

SWIM & TENNIS CLUB



The story of Hamilton Lakes Pool was, in some ways, part of a nationwide movement after World War II. From the mid-Atlantic to the West, and finally to the South, community pools became very fashionable. As part of postwar expansion during the 1950s and early '60s, Americans were in a hurry to return to “normalcy.” Through the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act (“G.I. Bill of Rights”) the U.S. government encouraged consumerism and expansion with its low interest loans for homes and businesses. Armed with lower rates and cheaper land (outside the city limits of Greensboro), construction companies and real estate agents were quick to pounce on the financial rewards of packaging pool memberships with home purchases. Crestmont was probably the largest company in the Hamilton community to offer free memberships and stock to those willing to build in the area. Spending for home construction and home purchases accelerated to unprecedented levels. Guilford Hills Pool was one of the first community pools in Greensboro. In addition to Guilford Hills was Sherwood Park, Lawndale, O. Henry, Hamilton Lakes and Friendly Park.

In the South, segregation was another motivation for community pool construction. In order to maintain Jim Crow segregation, Greensboro officials built a “black” pool (Nocho Park in East Greensboro) and a “white” pool (Lindley Park in West Greensboro). This arrangement had been in existence for years. In 1957, this practice was called into question when several black citizens petitioned the city for permission to swim at the nicer Lindley Pool. In what became known nationally as “Swim-Ins,” civil rights participants “swam-in” all over the South in order to integrate public pools. The City of Greensboro’s response was to close both pools immediately. The closure of Lindley along with the potential of integrated facilities accelerated community pool construction (just as the movement to desegregate Greensboro public schools in the early 1970s led to a boom in private school construction).

While residents of the Hamilton Lakes area may have been motivated by racial concerns, the Hamilton and Starmount communities faced a unique situation. Going back to the 1920s, residents in the area had become accustomed to swimming in Lake Hamilton. In 1957, the City of Greensboro began a major expansion of its boundaries – including the Hamilton Lakes community. According to Hamilton Lakes charter member and Grimsley historian Peter Byrd, Greensboro officials had concerns about the safety of swimming in the lake. Then in 1960, there was a large fish-kill and the Guilford County Health Department determined that the lake had high levels of mercury. Although residents understood the decision by the county, many families were upset with the decision to close the lake to swimming since it had become a popular gathering place for families – especially the younger folks. Community leaders of the area began informal discussions about the possibility of constructing a swimming pool.

On January 22, 1962, officers from the Hamilton Lakes and Parks Association – Smith Barrier, Roy Booth, Dan Gill, Claude McGill, Woody Pearce, and John Poer - met at Sternberger Elementary School to lay out plans for a new pool. The board decided that the pool membership would be limited to 600 families. However, during the early years, the number reached as high as 720 families. Faced with such numbers during the late 1960s through the 1970s, guests were prohibited from the pool on weekends, holidays, and, for a while, the entire month of June. After more than a month of intense study and discussions with various engineers, the pool committee met on Sunday March 10 at 2 pm at Chairman Dan Gill's home to hire two construction companies and set the date to begin construction. Gill told the Greensboro Record that approximately two-thirds of the \$150,000 (approximately \$1.1 million in 2012 money) construction cost had been committed from families in the Hamilton Lakes and Starmount communities. The men agreed that construction on the project should begin no later than April. The pool would be built on privately obtained land at the corner of Tower Road and Montpelier Drive. In addition to the pool, the men agreed that the complex would have a clubhouse, three lighted tennis courts, a badminton court, picnic area, and a playground. Unlike many non-profit boards of directors, the early Hamilton boards were involved with the day-to-day activities of the club. Technically, there wasn't an official club manager until the late 1980s. Former pool manager Ron Hartsook explained that if there was a problem with the pool, he went to the board member charged with pool business.

On April 4, 1962, the Hamilton Lakes pool committee was granted a permit to construct a pool on Tower Road. The permit stated that the pool would be constructed by Stanley W.

Bowles at a cost of about \$49,500 (approximately \$372,157 in 2012 money). On May 1, 1962, the pool committee was issued a building permit by the City of Greensboro to build a “bathhouse.” The facility would be built by Barker-Cochran Construction Company at a cost of \$18,500 (approximately \$139,089 in 2012 money). Also on May 1, 1962, Hamilton Lakes Pool became Hamilton Lakes Pool, Incorporated. The dues would be \$30 per family plus an initiation fee and a “stock” purchase. On May 11, 1962, Gill announced that Jack Watson would be Hamilton Lakes’ first-ever pool manager. At the time, Watson was a student at North Carolina State College, and had prior experience working for legendary Smith High football coach Claude Manzi at the Greensboro Elks Pool. Watson held water safety credentials from the YMCA, the American Red Cross, and the Boy Scouts. Watson told the Greensboro Record that he intended to make lifesaving training a major part of Hamilton Lakes Pool.

The grand opening for the new Hamilton Lakes pool was delayed for almost a month and a half. The Stanley W. Bowles construction company apparently made several serious structural errors and the walls of the pool literally caved into the bottom of the pool. The pool committee contacted Dave Meredith who had recently opened a pool construction company on Stage Coach Trail in West Greensboro. Therefore, “Master Pools by Meredith” was given the difficult task of reconstructing the pool and completing it as quickly as possible. The completed pool was 50 meters in length (285,000). A three meter and two one meter diving boards were added to the twelve-foot end of the pool. It was, and still is, the only private 50 meter pool in Greensboro. Not only did Dave Meredith’s company “rescue” the inaugural season at Hamilton, but the pool became a showcase for “Master Pools by Meredith” for years to come. More than once, Dave Meredith brought his potential customers by Hamilton Lakes to show off his company’s craftsmanship. (Most Greensboro swimmers may not know that the “Golden Swimmer Award” given annually at the CSA City Meet was originally sponsored by Meredith Pools.) On July 13, 1962 at 10 am, the anxious members were finally able to dive into the brand new pool for the first time.

Former member Peter Byrd recalls that members entered the pool through a gate that was located next to the parking lot (the current lower handicapped parking spaces). However, beginning around 1965, the membership tags were checked as members entered the main door of the clubhouse (facing Tower Road). Originally the “tags” (as they came to be known) were metal and the membership number was stamped into it. The gold-colored tags were temporarily assigned to guests, while the silver-colored ones were used by the members. Byrd recalled that

the metal tags only lasted a few years when they were replaced with plastic-covered ones – possibly around 1965. The new plastic tags were pinned to towels or pool bags; however, they faded if worn into the pool. This fading continued to be a problem for years - even after tags were laminated.

There were several changes made to the pool plans when actual construction began. For example, the wading or baby pool was placed on the left side of the building’s main entrance. Also, the concession area changed sides of the building. Originally members ordered and picked up their food from inside the clubhouse. Years later the club created an opening to the outside, thereby limiting the congestion, noise, and spills in the clubhouse. Just as today, there was a main recreational/meeting area that featured ping pong tables by 1969. There was a tiny room for lifeguards and swim coaches to stash their belongings. I remember a desk in the room, a bulletin board, and two sections of blue lockers (those lockers are used by guards today). There was a pay phone in the main area that could be used to free up the Southern Bell phone for incoming calls. PA announcements for phone calls were frequent in the days before cell phones. All calls were limited to three minutes, and I frequently remember pointing to my watch. Outside on the deck, the raised area located to the right of the clubhouse (and above the pump room) was a popular tanning and social spot for “t’weens” and teenagers – just as today. The area was referred to later as “the sundeck,” and became a choice location for bridge and other card games, as well as a great spot to listen to Top 40 music on transistor radios. WCOG (“Wonderful City of Greensboro”) was one of the popular teen stations of the day. The radio reception must have been fantastic since the station’s building and huge tower were located just south of the pool on Tower Road. Grimsley graduate and national syndicated disc jockey “Rick” Dees cut his teeth at this station as did others during the late ‘60s and early 1970s.

After passing through the sliding glass doors, many of the older members might remember that there was a short-lived shuffleboard court on the pool deck just outside the clubhouse. Just as today, storms often forced many families to retire for the day, while others would seek shelter inside the clubhouse to watch some “serious” ping pong. Surrounding the big pool was a famous line. Peter Byrd recalls that the original color was a pale green, and ten minute rest period for the kids began at the top of each hour rather than 10 minutes to the hour as today. He also remembers how frustrated the kids were when rest period ended late – some things never change. According to one story, when Hamilton Lakes Pool hired Grimsley and University of North Carolina grad Rick O’Hare to lead the swim team in 1975, the green line

suddenly became light blue. Regardless of the color, misbehaving kids would have to walk the line as punishment, and litterbugs had to pick up trash from the deck before rest period would end.

Throughout the years, maintaining a concession stand for the members was always a challenge. Owing to the small size of the original concession stand, the board/operators decided to use a “hamburger” and “hot dog” lamp to alert the members that these entrees were ready to be served. According to the Greensboro Record, one board member said that he hoped the members could sync their appetites with the light. In 1972 the concession situation became so desperate that the pool board considered inserting vending machines in the concession area. Over the years, the concessions have been operated by guards, a member of the board, members and their families (the Schmids and the Luptons), Girl Scout Troop #150, JAMS Deli, and even pool manager Larry Williamson (1999 and 2000). For the last several years the concessions have settled into a nice routine with members Tommy Starnes and Gary Bouton at the helm.

Since the club’s beginnings, swim lessons were an important part of Hamilton Lakes Pool. Beginning with first pool manager Jack Watson, and continuing to the present, the Hamilton mission has been that swim lessons and good swimmers provide a safer pool and a more enjoyable experience for all. Member Peter Byrd fondly recalls taking his first swim lessons from Dan Gill’s daughter Karen. For almost 40 years, Hamilton Lakes Pool offered free swim lessons to members.

The Hamilton Lakes swim team has always been a major facet of pool life. During the summer of 1964, the swim team unseated five-time champion Friendly Park Pool to capture the city title. This championship, along with a follow-up one in 1965, marked the beginning of what would eventually be 10 CSA City championships. After the loss to Hamilton in 1964, the Greensboro Record reported that the Friendly swim team promised its fans that next year they would recapture the title, and that the team would offer the members a spectacular water ballet program at the end of the season as a consolation. Here at Hamilton, Thad Masters was the first head boys coach, and Karen Gill was the first head girls coach. These two coaches deserve considerable accolades for the quick inroads that Hamilton Lakes swim team made into the elite swim clubs. By the way, in addition to her coaching and lifeguarding duties, Karen Gill was an honor student and a star swimmer at Wake Forest College.

From the earliest days, Hamilton Lakes issued a membership directory that members began referring to as the “Red Book.” For years, the book was narrow with small type.

However, beginning in the mid-1990s, the Red Book seemed to increase in size and the type became larger. Why the change? According to former club manger Nancy Johnson, the older she got, the larger the book became. On July 4, 1964, the club began its legendary Independence Day celebration. While many events were similar to those of today; some have faded with time. Just as today, there were family swim races, an underwater swim, and a splash for cash (except in 1964 they splashed for pennies). Similarly, the staff (coaches and guards) competed against each other while the youngsters poolside cheered on their favorite staff members. A few Independence events that disappeared were the competitions between swim lesson classes, the greased watermelon competition, and the “boat races” (this event may have involved floats).

The years 1964 and 1965 were important culturally for Hamilton Lakes. For example, in August of 1964, several Hamilton Lakes women orchestrated a “Back-to-School” fashion show at the pool. The members of the swim classes served as the models while Tommy Booth provided the organ music. For many years to come, students entering Sternberger, Kiser, and Grimsley learned about the latest styles and fashions. Who would want to go to school looking like a square? The showstopper of the ’64 event was a performance by the Merry Maids. This group of Hamilton ladies wowed their audiences with their precision water ballet performances. Their 1965 presentation drew rave reviews as they concluded their show with a water ballet based on the currently popular film “The Pink Panther” starring Peter Sellers. [By 1969, the Merry Maids were so popular that they asked the pool to purchase underwater speakers]. Another cultural event at Hamilton in 1965 was a performance by the Rolling Stones. Not the famous British rock group led by Mick Jagger, but the Greensboro dance troupe led by Mrs. Raoul Pratt. They impressed their audience at the clubhouse with several Hawaiian numbers. This name confusion led the ladies to choose the name “Lamplighters.”

Tennis has always been an important part of the club since its inception. As mentioned, originally Hamilton Lakes had three lighted hard-surfaced tennis courts. The first courts were constructed by Hartco Inc. of Greensboro. According to the Greensboro Record, these courts were some of the first in town to be two-toned. There was a green color for the playing surface, and red for the boundaries. There was a short delay on the courts, but they were playable by July of 1962. After talking to the “old timers,” the name “Mac Jones” always comes up. Through his leadership, planning, labor, and love of the game, he was the heart of the tennis program for many years. He consistently pushed for a tennis pro or director – year after year – until he was successful. In 1973, the members built a tiny tennis building for the tennis pro to get out of the

weather. According to former club manager Nancy Johnson, the tennis players referred to it as the “tennis shack.” The original shack was approximately 16x18 feet. It was so small and lightweight, that in 1975, it was picked up by members and turned around to face the tennis courts. A small concessions area was later added to the tennis shack. In addition to the buildings, the club began to invest in composition courts. Three were constructed in 1975 with three more added in 1978. In 1982, Mac Jones, Harold Pitts, Brooks Haworth, and Jim Collins led the movement to replace the tennis shack with the current tennis building. This new tennis center featured a pro shop, meeting area, restrooms, and a tennis/club office.

In 1986 under the leadership of Charlie Sikes, Bill Landrum, and Al Atwell, the big pool, the wading pool, and the entire pool deck area underwent major renovations. The most noticeable differences were the insertion of the pool’s gutter system, and the enlargement of the wading pool. The wading pool pump and filter were housed in what looked like a doghouse on the pool deck. Going inside was impossible, rather pool managers simply leaned in to work on the filter or pump. Unfortunately, a casualty of the 1986 renovations was the removal of the kid’s “sitting wall” which was a two foot wall located on the west side of the deck near the parking area.

During the late 1990s, the Hamilton Lakes board of directors and the staff met several times to determine the feasibility of major renovations to Hamilton Lakes Pool, Inc. While the benefits of a new modern building, more courts, and other amenities would please current members and attract new members, it was also a fact that the original clubhouse was literally falling apart. As pool manager in the 1990s, I can vouch that there were holes in the ceiling, a leaky roof leak at several places, restrooms that were dimly lit, and a concession area that would not pass health department inspections. But the final straw was the collapse of the building’s foundation on the main sewer line leading from the building. If I remember correctly, the women’s showers would not drain and there were other restroom issues. The board, led by Chairman Dan Hayes, held several town meetings and informational sessions to determine the mood of the membership. It was decided that the vision would go forward at a cost of about \$1.2 million dollars. The renovations began in the spring of 2000 with an enlargement of the wading pool to approximately 2,500 gallons. The wading or baby pool featured a beach-type entry and lemon drop sprinklers for the kiddies. After the pool closed in the fall of 2000, a 25-meter utility or lap pool (77,500 gallons) was built on almost the exact spot as the old clubhouse. There were two more composite tennis courts added (bringing the total number to eight soft and three hard

courts). There were also upgrades made to tennis lighting, and an underground court watering system. The most visible addition was the new clubhouse. The entire structure was approximately 5,000 square feet. It featured a modern kitchen, meeting room, and a huge activity room for ping pong, foosball, and even air hockey. The staff (guards and coaches) and the club manager each had their own air conditioned offices. Some observant “old timers” might recognize the large sliding glass doors as those from the old clubhouse.

The most recent major project was completed in 2010. The board faced the problem of getting rid of the filters backwashed water from the three pools. For years, the pools in town had been allowed to dump their dirty backwashed water into the city’s storm water sewers. However, by 2008-2009, this was no longer an option. Faced with the huge expense of putting in a de-chlorination system (as some area pools did), the board created a subcommittee that included members Rick Cockcroft, Steve Lukachyk, Bobby Suggs, and Larry Barnes. The answer was not to dispose of the backwash water, but to use it to moisten the composite tennis court. Also, the fact that the water was partially chlorinated helped to fight algae growth in the tennis watering boxes. The plan involved installing two water tanks (near the pump room) to hold the backwashed water. To supplement the “used” pool water, the committee contracted to have a well drilled on the property. This self-sufficient system not only negated the need for a de-chlorination system, but it also significantly reduced the club’s need to purchase municipal water – saving the club thousands of dollars per year. It is assumed that this system is the only one of its kind in the nation.

No story of Hamilton Lakes Pool would be complete without a brief discussion of the misbehavior and high jinks through the years. Teenagers will be teenagers. In 1968, a board member reported that the tennis lights were being shot out on an average of three per week. In 1969 the new menace was mini-bikes. They were being ridden on the tennis courts by “intoxicated” teenagers. One board member said he picked up two garbage cans of beer bottles and cans after a parking lot party. In 1969, vandals threw a ladder, the diving board, garbage cans, and rocks into the pool. During a 1970 board meeting, it was reported that neighbors were complaining about beer parties, racing in the parking lot and leaving behind “tons” of litter. In 1970 and 1972, the board purchased “no mini-bike” signs and “no trespassing” signs. In both cases, the signs were soon stolen. In 1976, a neighbor complained to the board about those “wild” adult parties. In the late 1990s and into the early 2000s, many members can remember the police visiting a few adult parties – sometimes more than once. In 1996, a trick or treat prank

resulted in a concrete table top thrown into the deep end of the pool (it took hours to get it out). While there have been a few break-ins and some vandalism over the years, most of the trouble has been mischief (chairs, trash cans, kickboards tossed into the pool). Still today, folks jump the fence at night for “unofficial” parties of one kind or another. The development of the Hamilton Lakes area since 1962 has definitely improved security and decorum at the pool.

The ups and downs of the economy and the overexpansion of community pools have caused most pools in town, including Hamilton Lakes, to struggle financially in recent years (some have had to close their doors). Hamilton Lakes is emerging from the malaise and is solidly moving forward into the 21st century.



HAMILTON LAKES SWIM AND TENNIS CLUB