

OPENING CEREMONIES by Jessica Luck | Managing Editor

Key Club unveils Tennis Gardens

They just couldn't wait. Almost as soon as the doors opened to the Longboat Key Club and Resort's new Tennis Gardens facility Friday, March 6, eager players hit the courts to try out the 20, new Har-Tru courts. Bob Coyne, one of the first players on the courts, said the new facilities were a welcome improvement to what they had been playing on previously.

The \$4.5 million Tennis Gardens facility at the Key Club is being touted as a premier tennis facility, which can cater to local players' needs, as well as become a destination for watching professional tennis exhibitions and tournaments. The Sarasota Open, which will be held May 9 to May 16 at the Tennis Gardens, is a professional men's tennis tournament that attracts some of the top players in the nation. Last year's Sarasota Open winner and Longboat Key resident Jesse Levine played in the third round of Wimbledon in 2008.

"This is the highest level of standard for a club of this size," said Stacey Allaster, president of the Sony Ericsson Women's Tennis Association, on opening day. "But, it also has the flexibility to adapt to professional tennis."

Michael Brody, president and COO of New York-based Loeb Partners Realty, which owns the Key Club, said the new tennis facility shows Loeb's commitment and interest in making the Key Club as first-rate as possible.

"We all agree that this product is 'spectacular,'" said Key Club General Manager Michael Welly. "And we hope to host many first-class events here."

Hundreds of Key Club players, town officials and guests were invited to see the facilities first-hand on opening day. Among the facility's amenities are the 20 Har-Tru



Photos by Jessica Luck

The Longboat Key Club and Resort's Tennis Gardens stadium seats 500 people, but additional seating can be added to an adjacent court to seat up to 2,500 people. The seating would most likely be needed for celebrity and professional tournaments.

courts, which feature a state-of-the-art HydroGrid irrigation system for optimal playing conditions, a stadium court with seating for 500 people and up to 2,500 people, five lighted courts for night play, a tennis concierge to arrange matches and organize group events, Court 21 Café and Lounge, a pro shop and more.

In addition, the artwork on display throughout the facility is courtesy of local artists. Sculptor Jorge Blanco's and Longboat Key Center for the Arts teacher and abstract, expressionist painter Bill Buchman's works are placed throughout the Court 21 restaurant and in the lobby of the Tennis Gardens.

To inaugurate the courts, the Key Club

hosted a celebrity exhibition match Saturday afternoon with Peter Korda, Jiri Novak and Ellis Ferreria, along with an inter-club tennis tournament Sunday afternoon between Key Club Director of Tennis John Woods, Key Club pro Jackie Bohannon, The Colony Beach & Tennis Resort Tennis Director Sammy Aviles and Serendipity Racquet Club head professional Samantha Ardenfriend.

But, there was plenty of action off the court, as well. When an errant tennis ball went bouncing through the crowded stadium Friday, Brody, who was chatting with visitors, casually caught the ball with one hand and threw it back to the players on the court below. Now that's a good sport.















