Locals lead program for tennis & education

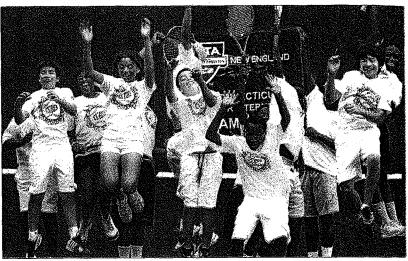
by Michael Catarevas Managing Editor

Michael Crafter was living an innate love for the game, in the hardscrabble Roodner but tennis wasn't a popular in Norwalk, it wasn't easy to he had to be careful." get to the four tennis courts

of the first Grassroots tennis program in Fairfield County,

and who has helped launch the four-year-old Connecticut Alliance for Tennis & In 1995, when 13-year-old Education (CATE). "He had Court public housing complex sport with kids back then, and

Crafter, now 32 and workthat were right across the ing for the Norwalk Housing Authority, agrees those days "He would come to play were a little dicey. "Kids with his tennis racquet hid- would pick on you if they den under his shirt," explains saw you with tennis stuff. The



Silvia Hosokawa, SilviaHosokawa, smumug, com.

Arthur Goldblatt, the founder courts were kind of set up Kids in the Norwalk Grassroots tennis program show their enthusiasm. The Connecticut Alliance for Tennis & Education (CATE), spearheaded by several New Canaan residents, has See TENNIS on page 10A added structure and fund-raising to several such organizations.

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NEW CANAAN ADVERTISER, NEW CANAAN, CONN., THURSDAY, JULY 3, 2014

Tennis:

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behind some woods, so once I got there it was cool."

There are no such worries now, as tennis has hit the mainstream, and CATE has blossomed into an organization currently reaching over 4,000 children in Norwalk, Bridgeport, Danbury, New Haven and Stamford. The tennis programs provide a path to success above and beyond the obvious benefits of exercise and teamwork.

By engaging youth with tennis in their neighborhoods, CATE also provides funding for academic support, life skills coaching, nutritional education, field trips and college and career counseling.

"The individual programs in the five cities used to do their own thing," says Alex

a 'mothership' concept to condiscuss the best practices and impact." fund-raising methods to maximize benefits for all."

managing partner of Stadium tance. Each of the five pro-Capital Management, is joined by several others with connections to New Canaan who are event is an annual pro-am impacting CATE.

Harlan Stone is president is executive director, and Amy position. All are town resi-

Anne Worcester, president of the New Haven Open ten- McEnroe, Mats Wilander and nis tournament, and a member legendary Stanford tennis of the CATE board, also lives coach Dick Gould. in New Canaan, as does board member and USTA executive "It's a very competitive event, Bill Mountford.

Seaver, a New Canaan resi- through tennis. I chair the on the pro circuit. There are tive director, New Haven dent and founder of CATE. organization, and we meet two divisions, with \$2,000 to Youth Tennis and Education. "Art (Goldblatt) came up with to discuss what the five city the winner and \$1,000 for rungroups are doing, what they ner-up." nect them. Now we're able to need and how we can make an

Raising money to pay for coaches, equipment and Seaver, the founder and more is of primary imporgrams has its own fund-raising, while CATE's major Tennis Tournament and Gala. Scheduled this year for Sept. of the Alliance, Mary Stichter 12-13 at Darien's Woodway Country Club, former tour Sheffield holds an executive pro James Blake, who attended Fairfield High School, is the featured speaker, following past luminaries Patrick

As for the tournament, with sponsors and teams." "All of us are tennis play- notes Seaver. "A lot of teach-

All proceeds are funneled back to the kids in the five cities.

"The Alliance takes a collective approach, as all of us are dealing with the same subset of kids to make sure the support is used in the best way," says Carl Bailey, also on the CATE board, and a founder of the Danbury program. "The kids eat well, they're exercising, they're playing tennis and they're getting good grades. your own children to be and to graduated high school (play- that goodwill." have, and it's the goal of this ing four years on the tennis program."

plug them into a broader con- Norwalk Community College. munity leader as an adult. Seaver. "We're giving back with players who have been Christian McNamara, execu- and psychology."

for college.

example of how an organiza- relationships I developed." tion like CATE can make a difference.

stellation of programming that After two years there he went

Now back in Norwalk. Crafter has a busy work sched-Adds Osby McMillan, who ule, but "I still try to help out works with the Bridgeport when I'm able to make my program, "At the end of the way over there. When I first day, what we're trying to do is started it was strictly tennis. take our kids to the next level But as the years went by the and try to get them prepared program became something more. I benefitted not just Crafter, who long ago had from the game, but from the to hide his racquet, is a shining people I met, and the positive

Goldblatt concurs. "Tennis." players know how much ten-\$\square\$ "He was good in school, nis can do for you, by way;" but had serious family issues." of health, friends, self-conreveals Goldblatt, a retired fidence and having fun in lawyer. "He and his mom had life," he says. "We started this." It's everything you'd want to move out of their place. He Alliance to sort of crystalize

And, he admits, there's team) but had no money for no better feeling than seeing "Once they're exposed to college. I helped him with the someone like Crafter, who the game, once they're inter- paperwork and applications for went from an embattled youth ested, we then use tennis to financial aid, and he enrolled at from a broken home to a com-

"The tennis and education involves tutoring, life skills to Fairfield University, where program transformed his life," ers who love the game," says ing pros come to play, along mentoring and more," says he got a degree in sociology said Goldblatt with a proud smile.