

August 7, 2023

What is Table Tennis

The sport of table tennis, or ping pong as it is known informally, is multifaceted.

- **At the highest level, it is an Olympic and Paralympic sport.** Players train with professional coaches from a young age, and compete all over the world.
- **Below this elite level, there are amateur tournament players.** USA Table Tennis not only provides for Team USA, but sanctions tournaments throughout the country.
- **A little below this are "club" level players.** They often play regularly at facilities such as Green Lake where they can find others at their level to play with.
- **The rest of us.** At the bottom are kids who may have played at camp or school, and others who have played or currently play in basements or garages. These players are more isolated and may never have been exposed to those who play at a higher level.

Our region has several "clubs". The largest, and highest level, is the SPTTC in Bellevue. They have 16 tables and offer training for kids from visiting Chinese coaches. There are also clubs in Federal Way, Tacoma, and Everett. Seattle has two facilities that function as "clubs". Seattle's Chinatown Community Center has only 6 tables in a small room, so it is limited in the number of players it can serve. The Green Lake Community Center hosts Seattle's main table tennis facility.

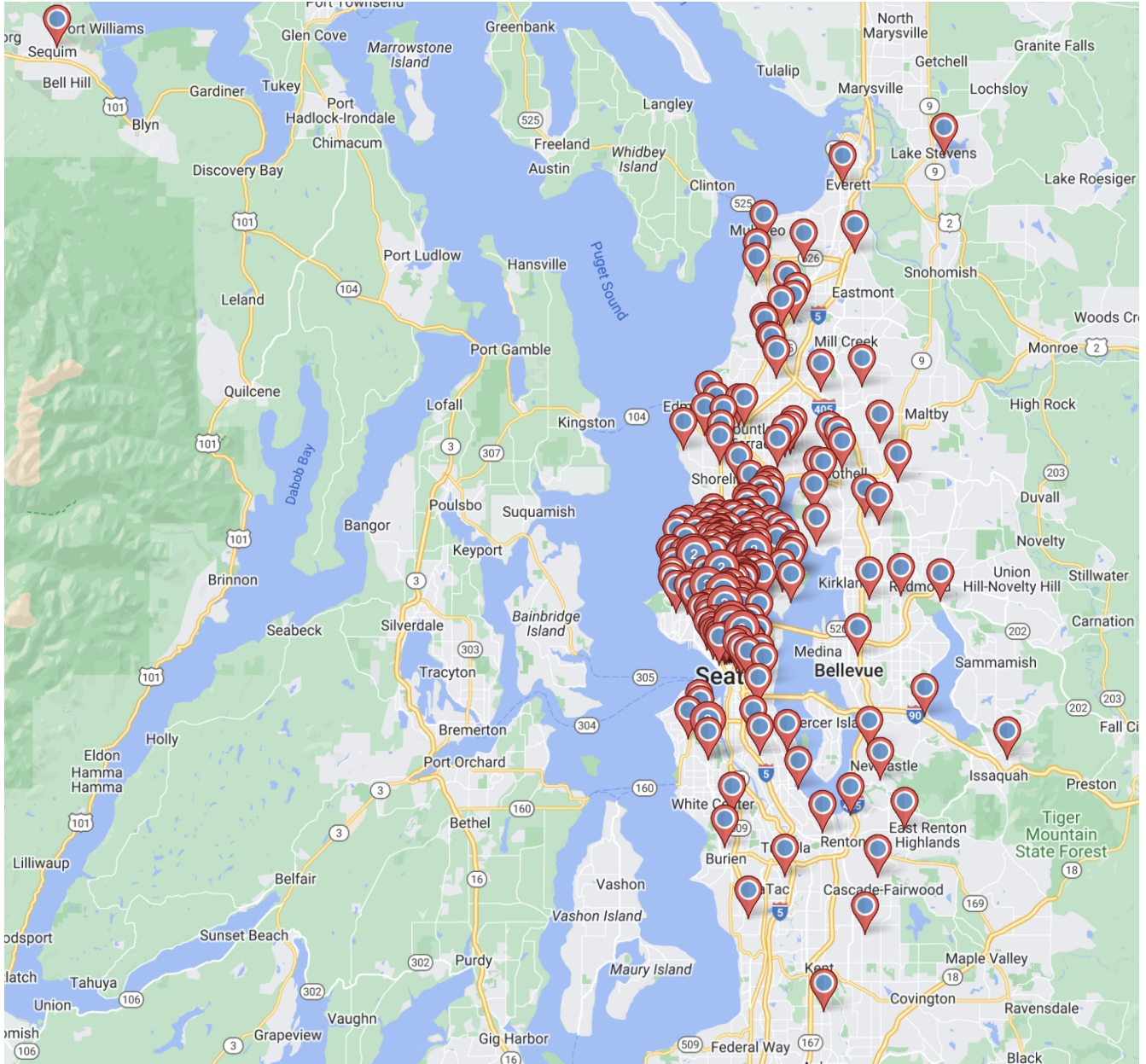
Green Lake Table Tennis Center (GLTTC)



The Green Lake Community Center table tennis program began 28 years ago when a group of players donated money to buy tables. The Green Lake Advisory Council also contributed and supported the program for years. Those first players formed an entity, the GLTTC, that describes both the players' group and the facility. Table tennis was originally offered only on Saturday and Sunday evenings with player volunteers collecting daily fees and paying monthly rent. The rent covered the cost of a single recreation attendant. The center ended the Saturday/Sunday rental arrangement 14 years ago and replaced it with a punch card system with card sales and admission fees going directly to the Green Lake Community Center. Tuesday and Friday regular-hour drop-in playtimes were later added, and then made to be free due to City equity goals. These two remaining evening time slots are now drawing 50 to 65 players each.

Green Lake attracts both "club" level players and curious "garage" level players. The international nature of the sport is strongly represented at Green Lake. Our players are 70% – 80% people of color or immigrants. They come from all over the greater Seattle region and beyond.

The following map shows where some of our players come from.



The player/volunteer led nature of the GLTTC has persisted since its inception in 1995. Below is a list of some of the table tennis program's highlights and accomplishments. All of these things have been done by player/volunteers.

- The GLTTC maintains a website, glttc.org, and a 400 person email list to help promote the center's table tennis program.
- Players set up, and put away the tables and ball barriers, unlike the Chinatown Community Center where staff performs this role. This has been the case for all 28 years.
- Players have repaired nets, tables, and barriers when needed.
- The Advisory Council purchased netting that players used to create a full gym divider system.

- Five major all-day Saturday/Sunday tournaments were held between 2008 and 2012. The 2011 tournament featured an exhibition match with Mayor McGinn, his daughter, and SPR management. We also held a wheelchair event that was won by high school student, Eric Pattison. Eric continued to train at the GLCC, and in 2014 won the US Open wheelchair event and joined the US Junior Paralympic Team.



- In 2012, we presented a "Table Tennis Showcase" with the SPTTC.
- In 2010, we started offering a free Kids-Pong coaching class on Saturday afternoons.

- In 2016, the GLTTC collaborated with Seattle Adaptive Sports to create one of six "Opening Serve" para table tennis programs in the nation.



- We created our unique "kanban" league in 2018. The league uses a smartphone based system that was written specifically for the GLCC's open drop-in model. Players can come late or leave early as they choose. Everyone gets equal time to play, and the system matches players with partners at their level. Roughly 1000 hours of development time since 2018 has gone into creating and enhancing the app.

- We held a fundraiser in late 2019 to purchase new ADA tables and barriers. The \$6,876.85 raised was spent last December.

My Personal Involvement

I first started coming to Green Lake in 2007, and immediately saw the potential for improvement. I envisioned and designed the gym divider net system, coordinated equipment purchases with the center and Advisory Council, and led efforts to maintain and repair tables and nets. After witnessing the international wheelchair competition in Las Vegas, I pushed to include a wheelchair event in our 2011 tournament. I envisioned our league system, and wrote all the software. I served as a liaison between the players and the community center, and was on the Green Lake Advisory Council from 2016 until last year.

I realized 2019 that our old non-ADA tables needed to be replaced. The Advisory Council no longer had funds for this, so I worked with ARC to create our "New Tables" fundraiser. My pitch to the players to donate included statements to the effect that after years of support from SPR and ARC, it was our turn again to contribute. When it was announced during the pandemic closure that weekend play could not continue as before, I felt responsible, realized it was up to me to find a way to restart weekend play.

Post Closure Discussions

- In October of 2021, while the center was still closed due to the pandemic, Chris Easterday let us know that weekend table tennis could not continue as it had with punch cards and cash collection because it violated cash handling rules. He said we would need to become a rental. I was initially amenable, since the GLTTC had been a rental organization when I first started volunteering 16 years ago. It soon became apparent though that this would mean fitting into the standard SPR rental system. On Wednesday, November 3, 2021, Chris sent a proposal under which we would pay appropriately \$80/hour. This is approximately 3 times the amount that SPR was collecting.
- I was still on the Advisory Council at this time. The council spent several meetings discussing the problem until it eventually became clear that neither the council nor ARC could help in any way.
- Several of us met with Barb Wade in April of 2022. At this meeting, Barb suggested the rental amount could be reduced based on our volunteer efforts. This meeting led to our application to become a fiscal sponsoree of the Seattle Parks Foundation and a proposal for making table tennis free on weekends, just like on weekdays. We proposed to collect donations from players in order to pay the \$30/hour fee for the recreation attendant. Our proposal was sent to SPR and others in June and July. Here it is for reference:
 - The GLTTC (Green Lake Table Tennis Center) will pay for table tennis on Saturdays from 5 pm to 9 pm, and Sundays from 4 pm to 9 pm. We will pay the \$30/hour cost of the recreation attendant during those hours and during the required time before and after. Table tennis will be free to the public just as it is during regular community center hours. We intend to bring in funds through player donations, grants, and corporate matching.
 - As outlined above, the City will be providing the gym at no cost. In exchange, the GLTTC will perform the following.
 - **Provide table tennis for free to the public on weekends.**
 - Set up and break down tables, nets, barriers, and equipment before and after play times. This will happen both during regular center hours and on weekends.

- Purchase new tables and barriers (money already available from 2019 fundraiser).
 - Maintain and repair tables and equipment as needed.
 - Promote table tennis at GLCC and other SPR community centers through our website (glttc.org), our email distribution list, and social media.
 - Provide free coaching to kids and adults.
 - Continue our para program for persons with disabilities.
 - Conduct special activities such as our unique drop-in kanban league and occasional tournaments.
 - We will be available to help in other ways that the City might identify in the future.
- Table tennis will be suspended occasionally on some weekend days if the GLCC has a rental from another organization. This will eliminate any opportunity cost for the program.
- A meeting was held on November 30, 2022 led by Jacqueline Oaksford with SPR, SPF, and GLTTC players. SPR did not respond to our proposal, and instead laid out a framework under which the standard gym rent would be reduced by 50% and then further to as much as 100% based on our volunteer work and the contribution (\$6,877) from the 2019 fundraiser. We were initially enthusiastic. The staffing fee that we had suggested paying had increased from \$30/hour to \$34/hour, and we would have to pay the 10% SPF overhead, however we thought we could make it work. A follow-up meeting was scheduled for January 12.
- Several hours after the November 30th meeting, Barb Wade wrote back that what Jacqueline had said about the reduction past 50% was probably wrong, and she would need to get clarification from management. We never heard back about this, and the January 12 meeting was postponed twice until April 5
- Jacqueline Oaksford was replaced in the discussions by LaShawn Street. LaShawn spoke with me some months later at the center for an about an hour. She explained that SPR management needed to fully understand the value of a community partnership.
- I wrote back to Barb Wade, Chris Easterday, and LaShawn Street on January 19, including our original proposal in the attachment. I explained that the GLTTC is not an independent organization like those referenced in the "partnership" paperwork. (EarthCorps and Sand Point Sail). I ended by

reiterated that in spite of this, the community partnership arrangement might be workable.

- Barb Wade wrote again on March 6. She mentioned some SPR grants we (the GLTTC) could apply for, and attached the standard SPR rental rate document along with a new formal application form for community partnerships.

It was at this point that I realized that we were not making progress in these discussions. Together with my contact at the Parks Foundation, Shava Lawson, we launched an advocacy campaign. The first step was an online petition, signed by 275 of our players and former players. Their comments were sent directly to AP Diaz and their Seattle City Council representatives.

This was followed by our attendance at the July 13 Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners meeting where we made public comments, presented our petition, and learned of the July 19 "listening session".

The listening session did not touch on the past year and a half of discussions, however it was made clear that our proposed collaboration with the SPF has yet to be fully discussed or considered by SPR upper management. I hope that this will now happen. It also seems that SPR feels that there is enough table tennis at the Green Lake Community Center, perhaps more than other sports. However, the GLCC is not a local resource for table tennis as other community centers are for other activities. While dodgeball or basketball might be offered elsewhere, Green Lake is the only center within SPR that offers what we have.

The Future of the GLTTC

It has been stated multiple times that SPR is open to having weekend table tennis as an ordinary rental, so we know that it is not an issue to have a single recreation attendant. With our proposal, the Parks Foundation will handle all financials, and has the level of insurance coverage that SPR has requested. I'm willing to work with the Parks Foundation to raise the money from our player community to get this started. The current hourly cost for a recreation attendant is \$34/hour. With the SPF's 10% fee, and the 10.5 hours/week, we would need to raise \$20,000. This is about 30% more than the GLCC brought it in 2019 through the \$5 per day fees and punch card sales. I'm optimistic that we can do this.

I'm also optimistic that with the SPF collaboration, and our weekend hours back, the GLTTC can be even better than it has been for the last 28 years. I'm hoping that the Parks Foundation can help us build a stronger community, that we can invigorate our para program, get free coaching for kids back, and offer opportunities for more of the diverse demographic we already serve.

Our proposal is but a starting framework. I hope we can follow up with an open discussion where I can address any concerns, goals, and ideas that SPR might have.

Kim Goldov, GLTTC Volunteer

kgoldov@gmail.com

206.979.9752