

FULL CIRCLE

Energetic Former Fencers Dust Off Their Swords

This is a continuing series on residents who have witnessed an aspect of their lives come full circle, bringing them back to what once was.

THE VILLAGES

They grew up captivated by the clamoring swords of clever fighters.

Movies and shows like “The Three Musketeers” and “The Adventures of Robin Hood” had young boys hooked on the fast-paced, dangerous action of dramatized fencing.

“I would practice with my brother with a foil (sword) and a metal garbage-can lid,” said Rich Rech, of the Village El Cortez.

Fencing isn’t quite how it is portrayed in the movies, and it isn’t

widely offered in North America. But some Villagers managed to dabble in the art form in their early years.

It was hard to find opportunities to keep up the uncommon sport. But after several decades away from fencing, a handful of residents lunged back into it in The Villages.

Some completed Fencing 101 at The Villages Lifelong Learning College. Others jumped right into The Villages Fencing Club, formed a couple of years ago.

Fencing is an intense one-on-one duel known for its finesse and elegance in the face of lightning speed and aggression.

Please See **FENCERS, C13**



Bill Mitchell | Daily Sun

Fencers pictured are, back row from left, Rich Rech, of the Village El Cortez; Mark Ackerle, of the Village of Belle Aire; Dick Bigelow, of the Village of Silver Lake; and, front row from left, Ron McCaskill, of the Village Santo Domingo; Joe Muth, of the Village of Piedmont; and Eric Eldon, of the Village of Buttonwood.



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DAILY SUN
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FENCERS

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Fencers can compete with three weapons and with differing rules and target areas. Each touch earns a point. Participants layer in protective gear, and technology wiring the uniform registers points by buzzing the scoreboard.

Making split-second decisions and strategizing how to attack and defend forces fencers to practice total concentration and keeps their minds and bodies active.

Rech said his fencing experience began 40 years ago when a former girlfriend convinced him to join a social club in Wisconsin. On day one, he surprised the leader with a trick he saw in the movies.

"I took the foil and I swirled it around and I was flipping the sword out of his hand," Rech said.

He picked fencing up again when his girlfriend prompted him to get involved in The Villages.

Fencing sparked Joe Muth's sword about 50 years ago in a West Virginia high school.

"You just never forget," said Muth, of the Village of Piedmont. "If I'm being attacked and can parry (defend) and strike, that's a very exhilarating moment there."

Ron McCaskill, Mark Ackerle and Rick Eldon learned

fencing in college.

"It's such an oddball sport," said McCaskill, of the Village Santo Domingo. "I was surprised they had a fencing program. Bells went off. The same thing happened here."

Age may have taken a small toll, but their zest for the duels is as fresh as ever.

"I'm not as quick as I used to be," McCaskill said. "But the competition and the camaraderie never really leaves you. Even though you're 40 years older, there's still that buzz, and it still rings all your bells."

Eldon agreed.

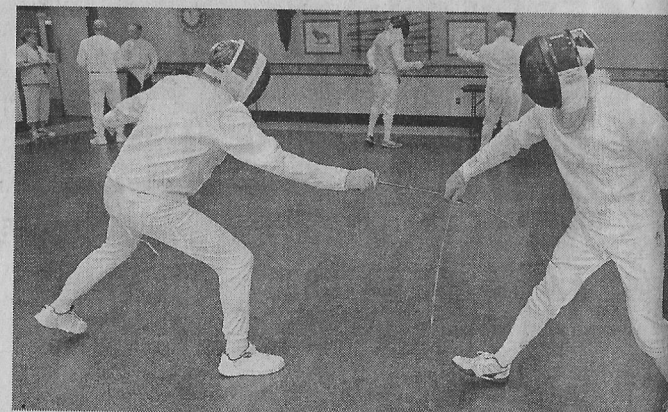
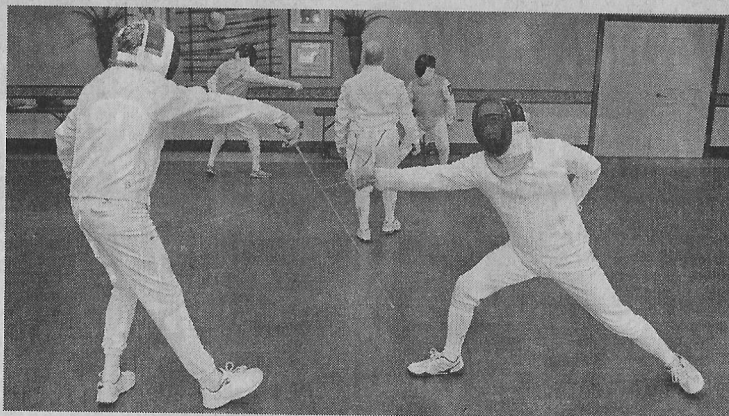
"It took a while to get used to it because of the physicalness of it, but then it comes back," said Eldon, of the Village of Buttonwood. "It gets your blood going and it's a very addictive sport."

Ackerle, of the Village of Belle Aire, elected to fence in college as a novelty between lacrosse and soccer seasons.

"I thought it was something you never get a chance to do," Ackerle said. "Fencing is pretty innovative. It's much more of a thinking game. Speed and power aren't everything. You get a better workout in more condensed fashion."

Dick Bigelow, of the Village of Silver Lake, discovered fencing in his early 40s in Texas.

"I just fell in love with the sport," he said. "It's your wits against theirs. When I got here, one of the first things I was looking for was a fencing club."



Photos by Bill Mitchell | D

Rich Rech, left, of the Village El Cortez, fences with fellow club member Ron McCaskill, of the Village Santo Domingo.

Bigelow also relishes the historical significance of the sport.

"I live in the Renaissance," he said. "I'm fascinated by 16th-century society. Our weapons are designed after their weapons."

The sport dates back to the days of ancient Egypt and Rome, originating as preparation for duels and wars. French and Italian immigrants brought it to America in the 1860s.

It's a symbol of power and glory, as well as an individual form of expression — at any age.

Have you come full-circle on an activity, hobby or interest here in The Villages? Tell columnist Kathryn Stolarz by calling 753-1119, ext. 9175, or emailing kathryn.stolarz@thevillagesmedia.com.