

Midland Community Tennis Center

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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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MIDLAND, MICHIGAN: It was time to high five 1,300 passionate and celebrating supporters of Midland, Michigan as this Midwestern community celebrated its newly-won status as America’s Best Tennis Town with a free celebration for everyone, hosted by the Midland Community Tennis Center.

The MCTC was robust with energy as a community came together to celebrate their accomplishment. Food, free commemorative t-shirts, and tennis for kids was taken in by all. The event saw five tennis courts converted into a huge auditorium of over 1,300 cheering and giving standing ovations to the accomplishments that were attained during the BTT run and for a community rich in tennis history.

The USTA named Midland “The Best Tennis Town In The US,” following a nationwide ballot that saw the community win against 56 other cities in the competition.

Midland representatives led by Mike Woody, executive director of the MCTC, accepted the award on behalf of the city on the biggest stage in tennis—Center Court at the US Open in New York.

The town received \$100,000 first place prize money with second place winner, Ojai, California garnering \$75,000, and Independence, Kansas, \$25,000.

The USTA guidelines require the expenditures to provide community impact; enhance local programming and facilities; promote and develop the growth of tennis, and impact sustainability and retention.

Expenditure breakdown:

#1. Provide equipment in the form of racquets, balls and portable nets to all levels of education in the Midland Public Schools and the four area community centers—North Midland Family Center; Railway Family Center, Coleman; Midland Community Center; West Midland Family Center.

“All of our elementary schools, middle schools and high schools will have new equipment to teach tennis,” Woody said. The goal is to get every kid exposed to tennis at a young age, so that they have a healthy game they can play the rest of their life.”

#2. Convert available playground space, primarily at elementary schools into small courts where kids can play tennis. “The idea is to get court space that’s equivalent to the kid’s size and age,” Woody said, noting that the USTA is encouraging the use of smaller tennis courts for younger kids. “The kids will be playing in an environment that’s comparable to their size.”

#3 Purchase two or three “sports chairs” which are wheelchairs specially designed for playing tennis or other sports and offer beginning wheelchair tennis clinics.” One of the roadblocks for teaching wheelchair tennis is that not everybody has a sports chair,” Woody said. “I’ve taught numerous people wheelchair tennis and it’s not an enjoyable experience if you don’t have the right equipment.”

#4. Fund and reinstitute competitive middle school tennis programs at Jefferson, Central and Northeast Middle Schools. The programs had been eliminated due to budget cuts. “It should cover the funding of the programs for two to three years- this no-cut program for middle school kids provides a positive team experience,” Woody said.

#5. Offer free tennis programming in the summer at schools around the city. “The perception out there is that you have to belong to a club or center to learn to play tennis,” Woody said. “But tennis is easy if you just go out and play in a modified format... we need to get back to the grass roots where people just go out and experiment and just play.”

#6. Resurface the four city-owned courts at Central park. “We’re going to make two of the courts modified (to a length of 36 feet instead of 78 feet) for younger kids,” Woody said. “We also want to get the lights back working on these courts. It’ll be a great space for kids and families to play tennis.”

Paul Oreffice, former CEO, Dow Chemical Company, and founder of the MCTC, spoke at the event and received an award as “the father of the tennis center.” Paul shared how the Midland Community Tennis Center came to be and it’s impact on the community. Other speakers included Andrew Liveris, CEO, Dow Chemical Company and Stephanie Burns, CEO, Dow Corning Corporation, and Mark Saunders, Executive Director of the USTA/ Midwest Section.

“The idea was to duplicate the excitement from the US Open so our supporters could feel what it was like to celebrate it, Woody said.

“Anytime you accomplish something this extraordinary that brings national prominence to Midland, you’ve got to celebrate and recognize the community that made success happen.”

Woody and MCTC staff were instrumental in developing the case and national campaign for the town. They created a first place video, statistics on participation, and endorsements from community leaders.

The Midland case cited 10,000 players annually competing on 80 courts in the city, while the video was a fast-paced presentation of the town’s famous “Play To Win” style that originated with the MCTC.

“This took a community effort,” said Woody. “We gathered community input and went through the criteria that the United States Tennis Association (USTA) required, and most importantly, how this money can impact the most people. We want to make it stretch out as far as we can.”

As for those who asked what’s next, Woody said Midland is a town with the heartbeat of a tennis champion.

“We’re gonna throw deep and surprise everyone, again! Watch out!