TENNIS PROVIDERS

High Impact

Whether an individual or an organization, each USTA Section has standouts that continue to influence communities, inspire others and advance the sport.

COMPILED BY JUDY LEAND



CARIBBEAN

A Life Dedicated to Tennis

> Born in 1936, Rubén Guadalupe Luna, like many Puerto Rican children of his era, aspired to be a pro baseball player and played the game day and night. The ballpark was close to the Río Piedras Tennis Club, and one day, on his way to the diamond, he saw a sign that the tennis club would be offering free clinics and holding a tournament. The winner would travel to St. Thomas and represent the club in a tennis tournament.

This was his chance to travel for the first time in his life—he just needed to win the tournament. He found some discarded racquets, took the clinics, competed in the tourney—and won. Then he won in St. Thomas. And it sparked a lifelong love of tennis.

Guadalupe Luna became a national collegiate champion in the late 1950s. Later he helped develop a tennis club, then in the 1980s started a tennis project in Guaynabo, where he still lives. Now, at 90 years old, he still teaches free classes at the Guaynabo courts four days a week.

In the 1980s and '90s, Guadalupe Luna led the new Tennis Training and Development Program, created by the Caribbean Tennis Association and the Puerto Rico Department of Recreation and Sports, developing tennis in communities and schools across Puerto Rico. His contributions to the game also include leading and developing the wheelchair tennis program for three decades.

This past January, Guadalupe Luna received the Lifetime Achievement Award from USTA Caribbean. "His championships as a player, his triumphs as a manager, and his work as a program administrator make Rubén an immortal pillar of our sport," says USTA Caribbean Executive Director Rosa Martinez. "Rubén is an iconic figure."

PHOTOS COURTESY USTA SECTIONS



EASTERN

More Than a Family Affair

> Harlem Junior Tennis & Education Program (HJTEP) Director Simone Spigner knows a thing or three about being a kid learning to play tennis in New York City. Growing up in the Kensington neighborhood of Brooklyn with parents who loved the game, Spigner says she can't remember a time in her childhood when she *wasn't* hanging out on a court in the city—or something like it, at least.

"My father used to drive around with a net in his trunk," recalls Spigner. "And if there were poles, he would put the net up and we would just practice anywhere."

After a standout junior career and a tennis scholarship to South Carolina State University, Spigner now works to share her family's preferred pastime with other young people across the five boroughs, overseeing programming for the 165 students in HJTEP classes. "I want them to enjoy it," she says of her instructional philosophy. "I always tell them, 'Tennis is a game. Have fun.'"

And her tennis-loving family continues to stand alongside; her brother Brian coaches for HJTEP, while her mother and father serve as volunteers. Both of her children, Shayna and Donovan, developed their games through the organization and, just like their mom, received college scholarships.

"We owe a lot to tennis, and to HJTEP," Spigner says. "My kids have gotten to go all over the world playing. And to this day [staff from HJTEP] check in on them. So, [tennis] is home. And it's a great place to be." —*Scott Sode*

FLORIDA

SPECIAL OLYMPIANS SHINE

> Four Florida tennis athletes won six medals—two gold and four silver—at the 2026 Special Olympics USA Games held in June at the Baseline Tennis Center at the University of Minnesota.

Kiera Phoebus (Orlando) and Lizanne Viplav (Lake City) both struck gold in singles, while Garrett Lanier (St. Cloud) and Alexander Polodna (Oviedo) rounded out the medal haul with silver performances across singles and doubles. The four athletes were part of a 73-player tennis field representing delegations from across the country. Florida was one of more than 25 states with tennis athletes competing in the Games.

Held every four years, the Special Olympics USA Games is the largest national multi-sport event of its kind, uniting thousands of athletes with intellectual disabilities from all 50 states for a week of competition that showcases skill, courage and dedication at the highest level. The 2026 Games in Minneapolis spanned more than a dozen sports across traditional and unified formats, building on the legacy of the 2022 Games hosted in Orlando. —***Jaret Kappelman***



HAWAII-PACIFIC

A Class Act

> Lauren Conching has built an accomplished career as a college tennis coach, athletic administrator and national leader in coach education. A former collegiate player at Collin College and Stony Brook University, she spent 17 years at Hawai'i Pacific University (HPU), where she helped build one of NCAA Division II's premier tennis programs. As Head Women's Tennis Coach, she earned two ITA National Coach of the Year honors while leading the Sharks to more than 200 victories, six NCAA DII Final Four appearances, and consistent Top 10 national finishes. During her tenure, she also served as HPU's Assistant Athletic Director and Senior Woman Administrator.

In 2023, Conching transitioned from collegiate coaching to join the Intercollegiate Tennis Association (ITA) as Director of Coach Education, where she leads the organization's coach education strategy and creates programs that support the growth and professional development of college tennis coaches nationwide. Beyond the ITA, she serves as a co-lead coach for USTA Sectional Camps, a lead coach for 10 & Under Tennis in the USTA Hawaii-Pacific Section, Chair of the USTA Hawaii-Pacific Nominating Committee, and a member of the USTA National College Recruiting Pathway Committee.



"I'm so fortunate to work in an industry that I love," says Conching. "I hope my service can inspire others to get involved and become active in their local tennis communities."



INTERMOUNTAIN

COURTING SUCCESS

> Cedar City, Utah, might just be the next big tennis town, thanks to the passion of Southern Utah University student Fernanda Pérez. Pérez came to Utah from Peru in 2024 to pursue her higher education and got involved with tennis during the summer of 2025.

"Tennis was mostly a summer hobby for me, something I did to pass time with a friend who was really into it, but it felt so natural to me," says the 20-year-old, who grew up playing and competing in volleyball, basketball and soccer.

When Pérez saw a "really good player" slip on one of the tennis courts at Southern Utah, she was shocked. "I was used to seeing beat-up tennis courts in Peru. But I thought that was abnormal here and I wanted to make sure that surface got fixed," she explains. With support from Tiger Funk, Southern Utah University's V.P. of operations, and USTA Utah, Pérez spent eight months working on grant applications to resurface the courts at the school. As a result of her work, six beautiful courts now showcase the culmination of Utah's tennis industry working together.

"Fernanda is nothing less than incredible," says Gretchen Soffe, USTA Utah's outreach manager. "USTA Tennis Venue Services helped with the resurfacing project that was finished in May of 2026. But Fernanda spearheaded it and got the project off the ground."

"I feel really honored to have been part of this process," Pérez says. "It makes me kind of emotional because a year ago I didn't spend much time on the courts. Now, every time I walk by them, I think 'Oh, my goodness, I helped do this!'"

—Wendy Anderson

MID-ATLANTIC

FROM 'HELPER DAD' TO CHAMPIONSHIP COACH



> "If you're in the past, that's where anger lives. If you're in the future, that's where anxiety lives. In the present is being able to perform at your best no matter what you're doing," says Tennis Director John Neal, who oversees the boys' and girls' programs at Charlottesville (Va.) High School. It is a mindset he has learned not just through tennis, but through an unexpected journey that reshaped his career.

When his son was a freshman on the high school tennis team, Neal found himself becoming what he calls the team's "helper dad"—a role that would quietly change the course of his career. Seven years ago, just before the season began, the team's coach approached Neal to take over for the year. That one season became the foundation for everything that followed.

Fast-forward to 2025, and Neal was recognized as the 2024-25 National Coach of the Year by the National Federation of State High School Associations Coaches Association. That honor followed his recognition as the 2025 Central Virginia Coach of the Year. In just seven years at Charlottesville High School, he has helped build one of the top high school tennis programs in Virginia, including back-to-back State High School League Championships.

"High school coaching has given me the opportunity to see the long-term growth of the players," says Neal. "A lot of the kids are beginners and you water that seed for years, then a tennis player emerges."

MIDDLE STATES

Advantage Lancaster

> What's in a name? If you ask Shayne Meadows and Ty Bair, the founders of Advantage Lancaster in Pennsylvania, they'll tell you that there is a whole lot.

The NJTL program's original moniker, Exit Lancaster, was born from a reality they observed in their neighborhood. "My brothers had never seen anything beyond Lancaster City," Bair says. "And I thought about how many kids are living in that same situation. We wanted them to exit any excuse that they might have had that they couldn't make it in life."

With that, and in memory of his late brothers, the program began as a summer project, but it quickly took on a life of its own. "Mr. Meadows said something that was profound: 'Once you step into a young person's life, you can't just step out if you really want change to happen,'" Bair says. "So, we decided that we were going to stay with these kids as long as they wanted to stay with us." That promise turned a temporary summer trial into a permanent commitment that has now spanned 26 years.



Twelve years ago, Exit Lancaster changed its name to Advantage Lancaster, better reflecting its core mission to equip students with the skills to succeed beyond high school. For the past five years, Advantage Lancaster has maintained a 100 percent high school graduation rate.

"What Ty and Shayne have done for that community and for those children is just beyond belief," says Judy Levering, the first female president of the USTA and founder of the USTA Foundation. "They have given them a completely different outlook on what life can be."

MIDWEST

Going to the Dogs

> In 2018, to create more inclusive and comprehensive tennis programming, Joe Tegtmeier founded First Service Doubles (FSD), designed for veterans, first responders and anyone 15 years of age or older who has physical disabilities or invisible injuries, including PTSD. But the unique part of the program is that it invites participants to play tennis alongside their service dogs, or any well-trained dog.

By thoughtfully adapting the on-court environment to recognize the important role service animals play, the program removes barriers and helps players build confidence and make connections. In fact, the program has become so successful, it's been picked up by other USTA sections—Northern California, Pacific Northwest, Southern and Southern California have begun hosting FSD events.



Jaime Oppenlander, who leads the USTA Midwest Adaptive Tennis Committee, is encouraged by the program's growing attendance and positive feedback. "It is a powerful example of how ... adaptations can create belonging and lifelong engagement in our sport," says Oppenlander. "First Service Doubles demonstrates that innovation in adaptive tennis isn't only about changing the equipment or rules. It can be about creating an environment where every participant feels supported, understood and welcome."

MISSOURI VALLEY

MAKING TENNIS MORE WELCOMING

> When Jason McFarley was 10 years old growing up in South Bend, Ind., he was flipping through TV channels when he came across Wimbledon. He was drawn to pros like Andre Agassi and Monica Seles and their intensity on the court. At the same time, he was also aware that not many players looked like he did at the pro level or in his own community. Instead of letting that deter him, it actually pulled him in.

"It made me want to take up that mantle—to see if I could find my own place in the sport," he says. "I got my first racquet shortly after that and have been playing for more than 30 years since. That early spark has never really left."

McFarley now lives in Lincoln, where, among other things, he plays and captains USTA Nebraska leagues, is involved with the Lincoln Tennis Association and is part of the USTA Missouri Valley Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Outreach Committee. He understands how powerful visibility can be, and he's helping create pathways to make tennis even more welcoming.

"When people see someone who looks like them participating, leading and enjoying the sport, it can change their perception of whether tennis is for them," he explains. "For me, DEI isn't just about race—it's about broadening participation across different sexes, ages, physical conditions and intellectual disabilities." *—Andrea Gallagher*



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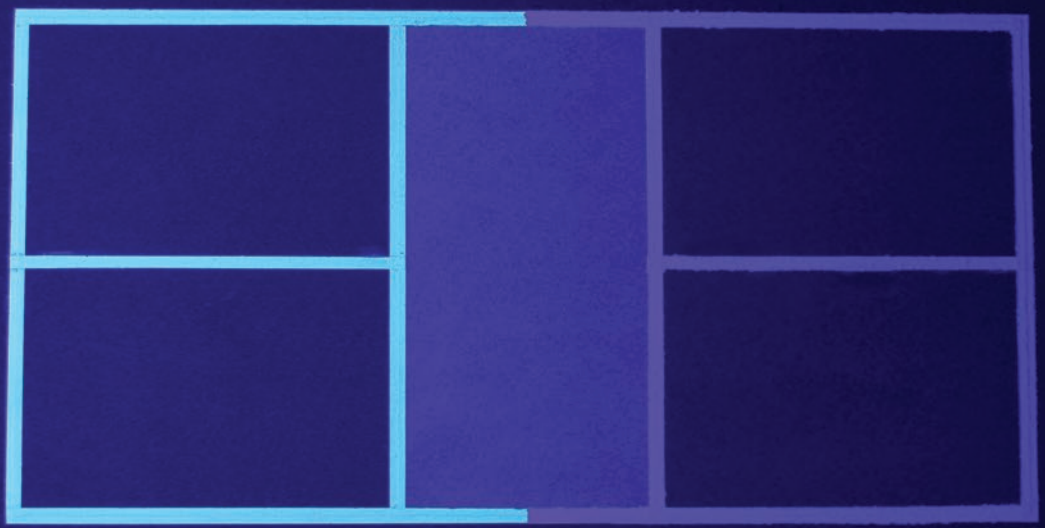

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2026 SECTION STARS

NEW ENGLAND

The Best of New England Tennis

> For the Moe family of Avon, Conn., tennis is more than a sport. It's a way of life. Recognized as the 2026 Edwin Goodman Family of the Year by USTA New England, the family embodies the values of leadership, sportsmanship, service and excellence, on and off the court.

At its core is Erika Moe, tennis director at Racquets For Life Simsbury and a former DI college player. Through her more than 25 years of coaching, community outreach and dedication to growing the game, she has helped introduce countless players to tennis while creating opportunities for juniors of all ages and abilities. Even after overcoming a life-changing spinal cord injury, she's remains a constant presence on court, continuing to inspire players through her passion, resilience and commitment.



That love of the game extends to the Moe children. Kaya will begin her collegiate tennis career at Auburn University this fall, following a decorated junior career that included top New England and national rankings as well as numerous sportsmanship honors. Karina is currently No. 5 in New England in the girls' 16s division, while also being recognized for outstanding sportsmanship. Both Kaya and Karina regularly work and volunteer as coaches and mentors. Their father, Jeff, has been an unwavering supporter of the family's tennis journey, volunteering with the Racquets for Life Foundation and making tournament trips possible.

The Moe family is united by a shared passion for the game and an enduring commitment to giving back.

—James Maimonis

NORTHERN

WHEN TENNIS BECAME A LIFELINE

> When uncertainty and fear spread through parts of the greater Minneapolis area this past winter, a tennis facility at the epicenter of the turmoil became much more than a place to play. The Fred Wells Tennis & Education Center (FWTEC), located near the Whipple Federal Building that houses Minnesota's Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) offices, found itself at the center of a community facing significant disruption. As Operation Metro Surge, demonstrations, and heightened anxiety affected daily life, many of the families served through FWTEC's National Junior Tennis & Learning (NJTL) program were among those most impacted.

Rather than scaling back its commitment, FWTEC leaned into its mission of serving the community. Home to more than 6,000 players each year, including nearly 2,000 youth participating in free NJTL programming, FWTEC became a source of consistency during an uncertain time. Patrons continued showing up to play despite the environment outside, while others supported the organization by making financial contributions, providing meals for staff, offering professional expertise and contributing to mutual aid efforts for affected families.

Those acts of generosity allowed FWTEC's coaching staff to extend their impact far beyond the tennis court. During January and February, trusted coaches completed more than 275 home visits, delivering over $40,000 worth of groceries and other essentials directly to families in need. At the same time, staff expanded their training in trauma-informed coaching, equipping themselves with additional tools to support children and families experiencing stress and uncertainty.



"There's a tennis community here that wants to respond and help," says FWTEC Executive Director Christine Nickels. "We cannot prevent adversity, but we can buffer the impact. For some, playing tennis here was the one hour they could escape what was going on around them and have some normalcy."

2026 SECTION STARS

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

A PASSION FOR PARKS & REC AND TENNIS

> Pam Sloan of Stockton, Calif. has spent decades helping tennis grow through public parks, grassroots programs and community service. Her passion for Parks and Recreation and the game of tennis has shaped a lifetime of opening doors for others, creating opportunities to play, and helping communities connect through the sport. From local programming to leadership roles across the tennis community—including serving as USTA NorCal board president and as a delegate—she has remained a steady and passionate advocate for making tennis welcoming, accessible and community-driven for all.

These efforts have certainly not gone unnoticed or unappreciated. Sloan has been honored as the Billie Jean King Public Parks Tennis Person of the Year, an annual award given by the National Public Parks Tennis Association (NPPTA). She also received the Barbara Williams Service Award, which recognizes a female volunteer who, through her leadership and example, has encouraged and inspired others.

Among her accomplishments—and the list is extensive—Sloan assisted in the development of the initial Public Parks Committee and advocated for the inclusion of parks and recreation systems to promote the game of tennis and carry on the mission of making tennis accessible in public parks everywhere. As a board member of the NPPTA and a past director for the National Recreation and Park Association, Sloan has leveraged these relationships to build a bridge between the USTA and the two organizations.

"I hope the USTA always has a relationship with the National Recreation and Park Association and that sections remain engaged with local public parks," says Sloan. "They are a natural delivery system, and tennis will continue to grow. USTA and sections need to be there for local park and recreation agencies."



PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Tennis as a Pathway to Success

> As the executive director of Portland Tennis & Education (PT&E), Campbell Garonzik has been dedicated to expanding opportunities for youth through tennis and education. Under her leadership, PT&E was named the 2025 USTA Foundation NJTL Chapter of the Year, a national honor recognizing excellence in using tennis as a pathway to academic achievement, mentorship and lifelong success.

As an NJTL, PT&E is part of the nationwide network of more than 270 community-based organizations that use tennis, education and mentorship to prepare young people from under-resourced communities for the challenges and opportunities of life.



Since its inception in 1996, PT&E has empowered nearly 20,000 young people, and participants and their family members receive approximately 1,000 hours of annual support. Additionally, every PT&E senior has graduated on time and pursued a secondary education path, with a number of graduates receiving scholarship support from the USTA Foundation.

"Campbell embodies the very best of what leadership in our section looks like," says Matthew Warren, CEO and Executive Director of USTA Pacific Northwest. "Under her direction, Portland Tennis & Education has shown what's possible when you give a young person both a court and a classroom. We share a deep belief that tennis can change the trajectory of a life, and Campbell lives that belief every day. We are so proud to celebrate her."

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2026 SECTION STARS

SOUTHERN

Supporting Female Tennis Leaders

> Using tennis as a platform to build confident female leaders was something Mildred F. Southern valued greatly throughout her life. Southern was a former USTA Southern president and devoted volunteer who helped launch numerous junior tennis programs. In 1974 she received the USTA Eve Kraft Outstanding Service award in its inaugural year. She established Young Folks Tennis in Winston-Salem, N.C., for any child to learn to play tennis, and her daughter, Debbie Southern, notes, "It is still going strong today!"

When USTA Southern approached Debbie to ask about naming a girls' leadership program after her late mother, she was excited about the idea. "[My brother and I] thought it really aligned with our mother because she always wanted every child to learn to play tennis," says Debbie, who spent 31 seasons as the Furman University women's tennis head coach and is currently chair of the USTA Southern High School, Tennis on Campus & Collegiate Committee.



The Mildred F. Southern Girls Leadership Program, also known as Southern Stars, is designed to nurture the potential of girls ages 11-18 involved in NJTL programs. The six-week program partners with the Women's Sports Foundation (WSF), founded by Billie Jean King, to use the foundation's WePlay interactive curriculum. The WSF staff supports USTA Southern NJTL chapters with curriculum delivery through training and additional resources.

"I just know that [my mother] would have loved this opportunity for girls to learn some of the values and characteristics they are learning through this program," Southern says.

—Rhiannon Potkey

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

STRENGTHENING THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION

> In a world in which stress and burnout are increasingly common across the sports landscape, tennis can be "a mental health intervention," says Susan Zinn, a licensed psychotherapist, national clinical counselor, certified trauma and eating disorder specialist, executive board member of UCLA's Friends of Semel Institute, founder of Westside Counseling Center, and Southern California tennis parent.

Zinn, also known as "The Heart Therapist," notes that, "Many people don't think about tennis as having mental health benefits, but it certainly can. It combines aerobic activity, cognitive demand, social interaction and nervous system regulation."

Zinn encourages players, especially young athletes, to reframe how they function daily and instead learn to reconnect with what she calls "heart qualities: genuine joy, real connection and the feeling of being fully alive." Ultimately, she believes that if we integrate and normalize mental health into the culture of tennis, we will raise a generation of players who are not just better athletes, but more fully alive human beings.

"Tennis gives people something they are quietly starving for right now: a way to feel fully alive. But that only happens when we protect what makes the sport powerful," she emphasizes. "Connection over comparison. Regulation over pressure. Community over ranking. Play for the sensation first. The results follow." *—Riley Shear*





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SOUTHWEST

Promoting Empowerment, Hope & Enthusiasm



> The pop of tennis balls against strings is the distinctive sound of tennis—but listening for a deeper meaning, it's also a sound emblematic of a changing community every time a new player strikes a ball. At the heart of this change in the Phoenix tennis community is Leslie Banks, a tennis coach whose impact has extended into the neighborhoods that need it most.

As founder and executive director of the Phoenix nonprofit youth tennis group Serve the Future AZ, Banks has made her program into an engine of not just tennis, but of incalculable social goodwill. She's helped introduce nearly 800 children to tennis since the program's inception in 2021, bringing new and different faces into the game and arming them with quality tennis instruction as well as life skills.

She also has been a leader in the coaching community, serving as a board member of the RSPA Southwest Division. She received the first-ever USTA Champion of Equality award for the Southwest in 2023, and she was named the RSPA Star Award winner in 2022 for her work in advancing diversity and inclusion in tennis.

In a city known for unrelenting heat, Banks provides a different kind of warmth to the Phoenix community—one built on empowerment, hope and enthusiasm to change lives through tennis. —*Jeff Sikes*

TEXAS

MAKING STRONG CONNECTIONS



> What started off as a simple idea to bring the tennis community together grew into a powerful movement. Jasmine Henderson, co-founder of DFW Black Tennis, explains, "In the early days, it was about showing up to the court, inviting a few people, and creating a space where everyone felt welcome. People came looking for a game, but stayed for the connection. Standing almost three years strong, DFW Black Tennis has impacted 500-plus players, bringing tennis to the culture, and culture to tennis."

In 2026, the group was named the USTA Texas Small CTA of the Year. DFW has partnered with entities such as Wilson and the American Heart Association to provide resources to the community, thus laying the foundation for a growing community rooted in access, connection, and a shared love for tennis across the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

"Tennis has the power to bring people together, and through DFW Black Tennis we've seen that firsthand," says Henderson. "It has created a space where the Black community in Dallas can connect, build relationships, and feel represented in a sport that hasn't always reflected them. [It shows] how the game can unite and uplift a community."

"Jasmine is one of those rare leaders who sees what is possible and has the passion, courage and determination to bring that vision to life," remarks Katy Rogers, USTA Texas Director of CTAs & Facilities. "Through DFW Black Tennis, she's created more than just a tennis community—she's built a movement rooted in connection, belonging and opportunity. Her vision and leadership are breaking barriers, opening doors, and creating a lasting impact that will continue to shape the future of tennis for generations to come." RSi