

THE Rally

ISSUE ONE - 2026

Racquet In
Hand Awards
\$110,000
in Grants

**GEORGE
DIXON**

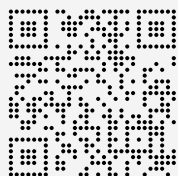
A PLACE IN THE GAME


racquet in hand
foundation

About The Rally

The Rally is the official publication of the Racquet-In-Hand Foundation. Published seasonally, it celebrates the people, partnerships, programs, and progress that are growing tennis and changing lives throughout Northeast Ohio.

Through inspiring stories, community highlights, and Foundation news, The Rally connects and strengthens the Northeast Ohio tennis community.



PUBLISHED BY:

racquet in hand
foundation

RacquetInHand.com

RaquetInHandFoundation@gmail.com

Changing Lives Through Tennis

At the Racquet-In-Hand Foundation, we believe tennis is far more than a game. Every lesson, every practice, every match, and every new player creates opportunities that extend well beyond the court.

Our mission is to ensure that tennis continues to thrive throughout Northeast Ohio by investing in the people, programs, and partnerships that make our sport stronger. We support organizations introducing children to tennis, coaches developing the next generation, community leaders creating access, and initiatives that strengthen the game at every level.

Every racquet in hand represents new possibilities—a healthier lifestyle, greater confidence, lifelong friendships, and a stronger community.

Together, we rally for the game.


racquet in hand
foundation



Welcome to the inaugural edition of ^{THE} Rally

Whether you're discovering the Racquet-In-Hand Foundation for the first time or have already joined us as a donor, volunteer, coach, player, or community partner, we're glad you're here.

Although we are a young organization, the momentum has been remarkable. During the past two years we have **awarded more than \$110,000 in community grants**, supported coaching education, junior team tennis, collegiate and professional tennis initiatives, and launched our **Racquet-In-Hand Fund** with an extraordinary inaugural fundraising event. None of this would be possible without the generosity of donors, the dedication of volunteers, and the countless organizations and individuals who share our vision.

In this **Inaugural Issue WE RALLY** behind three community champions in NEO. **Tammy Simone** a volunteer extraordinaire. Founding President of The Racquet-In-Hand Foundation. **George Dixon** a community tennis provider continuing to build the rich tradition of the Forrest City Tennis Club and **Dustin Fox** a leading donor of the RIH Foundation as a member of our Founders Circle. Thank you for being part of the rally. We invite you to join us as we continue growing the game and changing lives throughout Northeast Ohio.

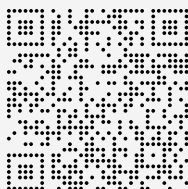
See you on the courts,

Michael Kramer

Executive Director
Racquet In Hand Foundation



Meet Our Board



↪ **READ OUR BIOS**

Behind every successful nonprofit is a team of volunteers who believe in its mission. Leaders from business, education, philanthropy, and the tennis community have come together to generously contribute their time, expertise, and passion to help guide the Foundation's future.



Tammy Simone
President



Michael Kramer
Executive Director



Todd Wojtkowski
Board Member



Sam Duvall
Board Member



Lauren Davis
Board Member



Leslie Wargo
Board Member



Barbara A. Greene
Board Member



Bill Henry
Board Member



David Limberg
Board Member

The Changeover Tammy Simone

"I've loved it my whole life. I just love it differently now."

Tammy Simone has spent nearly her entire life with a racquet in her hand—as a junior competitor, Notre Dame player and team captain, nationally ranked adult player, mother, volunteer and tennis leader. Today, as President of the Racquet-In-Hand Foundation, she's working to give others the opportunity to discover everything the game has given her. Her leadership extends across Northeast Ohio and beyond, including current and past roles with US International Club (USIC) NEOTA, USTA/MTEF, ACEing Autism–Akron and Cleveland Racquet Club.

FIRST SERVE

Favorite Player:

Stan Smith

Major she'd most like to attend:

Roland Garros

Singles or Doubles:

Singles at heart. Doubles these days.

Favorite Surface:

Clay

Racquet:

HEAD Radical, VS Gut at 63 – yes 63!

Greatest Extravagance:

"Tennis. Without question."

Talent she'd most like to have:

Sing on key.

Perfect Sunday:

Tennis. Brunch. More tennis. Dinner outside with her family.



If Tammy had to choose one person who most influenced her tennis journey, her father would be at the top of the list. A sheet-metal worker, her dad discovered tennis during the sport's 1970s boom. When Tammy was eight, her parents bought her a racquet. Later, when a club opened near their Mansfield home, her father used money he'd set aside to purchase a family membership. The court became Tammy's favorite place to be. And someone noticed.

THE COMPETITOR - SHE PUT IN THE HOURS.

Around age 12, Jerry Lorentz (USTA Pro and Lakewood Racquet Club Tennis Hall of Fame inductee) saw something in Tammy's game and offered to coach her if she was willing to do the work. She was. Tammy walked to the club after school. Sometimes Lorenz gave her a lesson. Other days he arranged a match and offered a few observations afterward. Soon she was playing NEOTA tournaments. At 13, she won Seaway, a qualifier for the Westerns. She played No. 1 singles throughout high school and arrived at Notre Dame as a walk-on. After two years on JV, she earned her way onto varsity. By senior year, she was captain. And she never really stopped competing.

At 46, Tammy earned a national ranking and finished No. 3 in the country. But somewhere along the way, tennis became about considerably more than winning. College. Summer jobs. Her first job. Friendships. Even meeting her husband, Steve.

"Everything in my life is because of tennis."

THE MATCH SHE'LL NEVER FORGET

In 2016, Tammy played the National Mother-Son Clay Courts with her son Joey. Facing the No. 1 seeds, they split the first two sets.

Joey looked at his mother: "*Mom, we got them.*"

They did.

Tammy and Joey pulled off the upset and ultimately finished fourth. But that's not why Tammy treasures the memory. She remembers watching a son who hadn't grown up playing tournaments suddenly become completely confident on the court.

"That's a top memory, not just tennis. That's a great memory."

(continued)

THE CHANGE - LOVING THE GAME DIFFERENTLY

Tammy still wants to win. What changed is everything else she now sees when she looks across a tennis court.

"I've loved it my whole life. I just love it differently now."

Years ago, while serving as NEOTA President, Tammy became increasingly convinced that the value of tennis couldn't be measured only by championships, rankings or the development of elite juniors. She saw something larger.

A child discovering confidence. An adult finding friends in a new community. A volunteer making a connection. Someone learning that effort can turn potential into accomplishment.

Tammy and Michael Kramer eventually began developing the idea that became the Racquet-In-Hand Foundation—a locally driven organization created to grow and support grassroots tennis throughout Northeast Ohio.



WHAT DOES "CHANGING LIVES THROUGH TENNIS" MEAN TO YOU?

For Tammy, tennis creates an unusual opportunity:

"To allow someone to get the confidence, to see their potential, to do the work themselves to make that potential happen—and from that, to see their life going in a way that maybe they wouldn't have seen it before."

She sees it in programs like ACEing Autism: children becoming more comfortable on court, parents finding community, volunteers discovering another dimension of the game.

And in some ways, it brings Tammy right back to where her own story of a father making an investment. A coach seeing potential. A young player doing the work.

Nearly five decades later, she's still competing, still learning—and now helping make sure someone else gets a chance to begin.

Rallying Around Our Communities

This spring we completed our second annual Community Grant Program. During our first two grant cycles, we've **awarded more than \$110,000 to over 30 organizations** serving communities across our region.

Every grant helps create opportunities such as introducing children and adults to tennis, supporting school programs, expanding community instruction, training coaches, or strengthening local organizations.

Congratulations to our 2025-2026 Racquet In Hand Grant Recipients!



- ACEing Autism
- Advantage Cleveland Tennis & Education, Inc.
- Ashtabula County Tennis Ladder
- Beachwood City Summer Recreation Tennis
- City of Bay Village Recreation Department
- CLETENNIS.COM
- Copley Fairlawn City Schools
- Ed Davis Tennis Camp (Akron)
- Forest City Tennis Club
- Garfield CLC Public School
- Geneva Tennis Foundation
- Green High School Tennis
- Kokosing Valley CTA
- Lorain County Community College
- Lorain County Community Tennis Assoc.
- Niles Mc Kinley High School
- North High School (Akron)
- Ohio Youth Tennis Assoc.
- Orrville Youth Tennis
- Over the Net
- Perry Area Tennis Assoc. (PATA)
- Perry High School Tennis Program
- Saint Joseph Academy
- Strongsville Rec. Summer Tennis Lessons
- Thrive Through Tennis Foundation
- Towpath Tennis Center
- University of Mount Union
- Warren John F Kennedy High School
- Wooster High School
- Kenyon Tennis-Gambier Tennis Assoc.

George Dixon

A Place in the Game

Tennis found George Dixon when he was 10 years old. His father called him inside to watch a young Venus Williams play on television. George was fascinated. Soon afterward, his parents took him to Rockefeller Park, where he discovered Forest City Tennis Club. Nearly three decades later, he's still there. Only now, George is President of the organization that helped introduce him to the game—and he's working to make sure another generation knows there's a place for them in tennis.

CONTINUED →

FIRST SERVE

Favorite Player:

Venus Williams

Favorite Major:

Wimbledon

Favorite Court:

Rockefeller Park

Favorite Surface:

Clay

Singles or Doubles:

Both

Favorite Movie:

The Devil Wears Prada

Dream Dinner Guest:

Michelle Obama



(continued)

WHAT QUALITY DO YOU MOST ADMIRE?

Authenticity.

"People who can be themselves in every room they walk into."

And George's idea of perfect happiness?

Being able to wake up every day, do what he loves and make an impact.

If he could run Forest City every day and still pay the bills, he says he'd do it for the rest of his life.

THE STORY - "GEORGE IS READY."

George remembers Court 3. At the indoor facility where Forest City trained, the courts represented a progression. Developing players occupied the first courts. Advanced juniors and tournament players were on Courts 5 and 6. George wasn't convinced he belonged over there.

Eddie Chambers was. Chambers ran Forest City's junior program and became one of the most important influences in George's life. George remembers him walking around the courts:

"Dixon, move your feet. You can do it."

Eventually Chambers decided George had spent enough time on Court 3.

Another coach wasn't so sure.

Chambers walked George across the facility.

"George is ready." George moved to Court 5.

Decades later, he hasn't forgotten what those words did for him. *"Sometimes it's all you need—someone to just hold your hand and say, 'Hey, you got this.'"* Now George tries to give Forest City's young players the same thing Chambers gave him. Some don't believe they're ready. Some haven't seen many people who look like them playing tennis.

George tells them:

"You can do this. With some practice, you can play. You can have fun. You can make tennis part of your life. "

THE LESSON

A great coach didn't simply teach George Dixon how to play better.

He helped George see himself differently.

And now George gets to return the favor.

BELONGING - "I'M SUPPOSED TO BE HERE."

As a young tournament player traveling beyond Cleveland, George often found himself among relatively few Black players in the draw. At one tournament at a local club, he remembers an opponent making comments questioning why George was there.

George was down a set and 4-1. Then he came back. He won the match. And then he won the tournament.

What stayed with him wasn't simply the comeback. It was the answer to the question.

"I'm supposed to be here."

For George, that's what tennis is supposed to offer.

"Tennis is a sport that's supposed to bring people together, not divide people."

Everyone is there to compete. To improve. To have fun. To play the game. And perhaps that's why his journey from Forest City junior to Forest City president feels so fitting. The kid who once needed someone to tell him "George is ready" is now helping create a community where another kid can discover: I belong here, too.

George's message to the next generation isn't complicated:

"YOU CAN DO THIS."

Sometimes four words are enough to move someone from Court 3 to Court 5. Sometimes they're enough to change a life.



FOREST CITY TENNIS CLUB

MORE THAN A CENTURY IN THE GAME



Forest City Tennis Club was established in 1912 as a place where African American players could play tennis at a time when segregation excluded them from traditional clubs. The club initially played outdoors near St. Martin's Church before eventually making Rockefeller Park its tennis home. More than a century later, the circumstances have changed. The idea of creating a place where people can play, learn and belong hasn't.

TENNIS FOR GENERATIONS

Today, Forest City's programming reaches children and adults through summer instruction, indoor programming, social play and competition. Programs including Monday Madness and We Up Wednesdays have created new ways for players to learn, compete and connect, while the Chambers-Wiley Tennis Classic honors two of the people who helped build Forest City's legacy.

CONTINUED →

(continued)

The club also participates in the longstanding Tri-City Tournament, bringing together tennis communities from Cleveland, Chicago and Detroit.

WORTHY OF THE COMMUNITY

Rockefeller Park remains at the center of the story. George remembers the old courts: cracks, uneven surfaces, standing water, even grass and sand coming through. Forest City and members of the broader tennis community advocated for something better. Today, seven reconstructed courts, improved lighting, drainage and other upgrades have transformed the facility. For George, the importance isn't really the construction. It's what happens there. "The community finally has courts worthy of the community that plays down there every day." They're used by schools, college players, neighborhood residents, tournament competitors—and generations of Cleveland tennis players.

FOREST CITY
at a glance

ESTABLISHED:
1912

HOME:
Rockefeller Park

PLAYERS:
Juniors + Adults

PROGRAMMING:
Instruction • Social Play • Competition

TRADITION:
Tri-City Tournament + Chambers Wiley Tournament

LEGACY:
More than a century of community tennis.

STILL RALLYING
The courts have changed.
The players have changed.
The generations have changed.
The rally continues.

Building The Future

On March 25, we hosted our inaugural fundraising celebration at Stirling Restaurant in Akron. The evening exceeded every expectation, raising more than

\$226,000

for the Racquet-In-Hand Community Fund.

Those dollars will provide long-term support for future community grants and ensure the Foundation can continue investing in the people and organizations growing tennis throughout our region for years to come.

We are incredibly grateful to everyone who attended, sponsored, volunteered, and contributed to making this event such a tremendous success.



Founder's Circle



Every lasting organization begins with visionary leaders. The Founders Circle recognizes individuals and organizations who committed leadership gifts of **\$10,000** or more during our founding campaign.

Their generosity is helping establish the Foundation's financial strength while creating opportunities that will benefit Northeast Ohio tennis for generations.

Thank you to our Founder's Circle Members!

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| 🎾 NE Ohio Tennis Assoc. | 🎾 Dustin & Sarah Fox |
| 🎾 Drs Michelle & Joe Blanda | 🎾 Bill & Lela Henry |
| 🎾 Francis S. Buchholzer | 🎾 Cynthia Knight |
| 🎾 Carolyn & Vince Cheverine | 🎾 Ellie Krutowsky |
| 🎾 Springside Athletic Club | 🎾 Julie Pulk |
| 🎾 Wan & Brandon Collier | 🎾 Mrs. Lori Trehan |
| 🎾 Rebecca & William Considine | 🎾 Kevin & Joyce Shaw |
| 🎾 Milan Dayalal | 🎾 Tammy & Steve Simone |
| 🎾 Frances & David Dickenson | 🎾 Amish Yajnik |

Our Donor Community

Whether it's a first donation or a leadership investment, every contribution strengthens our mission and helps us create more opportunities through tennis.



Thank you to our Donors!



- Dallas and Nancy Aleman
- Mary and Rich Bole
- Jennifer Bucheit
- Vincent Cannata
- David Cole
- Lauren Davis
- Traci Davis
- Bill Davis
- Eric Doropan
- Sam Duvall
- David Glenly
- Barb Greene
- David Hunt
- Jimmy Hyres
- Ty Hunt
- John Keller
- Michael Kramer
- David Limberg
- Laurel Marsillo
- William (Tim) McQuown
- Mike Miheli
- Richard Millisor
- Andrea Minster
- Julie Mitchell
- Russell Niswander
- Dustin Rawlin
- Robert Silver
- Stephen Simone
- Joey Simone
- Kent Smith
- Nancy Sobecks
- Julie Trende
- Leslie Vargo
- Doug Wenger
- Todd Wojtkowski

Dustin Fox

"I want other people to experience the joy."

Dustin Fox has spent most of his adult life around sports. He was a four-year starter at Ohio State, a member of the Buckeyes' 2002 national championship team, an NFL draft pick and player, and today travels the country as a college football analyst for ESPN. But somewhere along the way, tennis became much more than another sport to follow. It became part of the rhythm of his life.



Fox picked up the game around 2019 or 2020. Today, tennis is on the televisions in his house almost constantly, he plays whenever his schedule allows, and when ESPN sends him somewhere for a football assignment, his racquet goes too. “Every week.”

Fox regularly reaches out to college tennis programs before he travels to arrange a hit. Missouri. Tennessee. BYU. Arkansas. Texas Tech. If there’s a court nearby and some time before kickoff, there’s a good chance Dustin is trying to get on it.

TENNIS, EVERYWHERE

There are people who play tennis. And then there are people who begin arranging their lives around tennis. Dustin seems to have joined the second group.

CONTINUED →

FIRST SERVE

Favorite Major:
Wimbledon

Favorite Local Court:
Fairlawn Country Club

Favorite Surface:
Clay / Har-Tru

Racquet:
Wilson Blade, Luxilon ALU Power
Rough 1.25, 50lbs

Dream Doubles Partner:
John Isner – Hello the Serve!

Always in the Bag:
Smelling salts + a speaker

2026 U.S. Open Men’s Pick:
Alexander Zverev

College Football Championship Matchup:
Ohio State vs. Texas

MIDWEST

NEC

USTA

MIDWEST



(continued)

During the college football season, his ESPN schedule sends him from campus to campus. Rather than leave tennis at home, Fox treats those assignments as opportunities to experience another tennis community. Before a trip, he starts making calls.

"I reach out to the schools and talk to the tennis programs."

That has led to memorable hits at college facilities around the country — including BYU, Tennessee, Arkansas and Texas Tech.



That enthusiasm is not limited to playing. Fox watches the professional game constantly. During our interview, there was tennis playing on the television beside him and he sometimes watches matches without commentary simply because he enjoys the sound of the game.

And now he's talking about tennis professionally, too. Fox co-hosts a tennis podcast with Mitch Michaels through BetRivers. During Grand Slams and selected Masters 1000 events, the pair record twice-weekly shows while watching live matches, discussing the action and the wagering markets around it.

A DIFFERENT VIEW FROM THE COURT

Some of his football instincts still come in handy. Ask what playing defensive back taught him about doubles and Fox immediately talks about anticipation, angles and positioning. A ball coming across the net? To him, it isn't all that different from reading a quarterback.

"You've got to know where that ball is going. You've got to anticipate. You've got to beat the ball there — and then you've got to finish it."

Different game. Same competitive mind.

WHAT THE GAME GAVE HIM

For Dustin, the most meaningful part of tennis isn't actually competition. It's connection. He speaks openly about his sobriety and the role tennis has played in that chapter of his life.

“Tennis was so helpful to me with my journey and becoming sober and turning my life around.”

He says the game helped him become a better parent, husband and friend. It gave him discipline. It introduced him to people who became genuine friends. It gave him a community. When Dustin talks about what that network has meant, he compares it to one of the most important elements people find in recovery programs: connection to other people.

That same game is now creating another connection in his life. His daughter plays tennis for GlenOak High School — the same school Dustin attended.

Fox introduced her to the game around age 13. A few lessons turned into regular Sunday morning sessions at Springside, and eventually into high-school tennis.

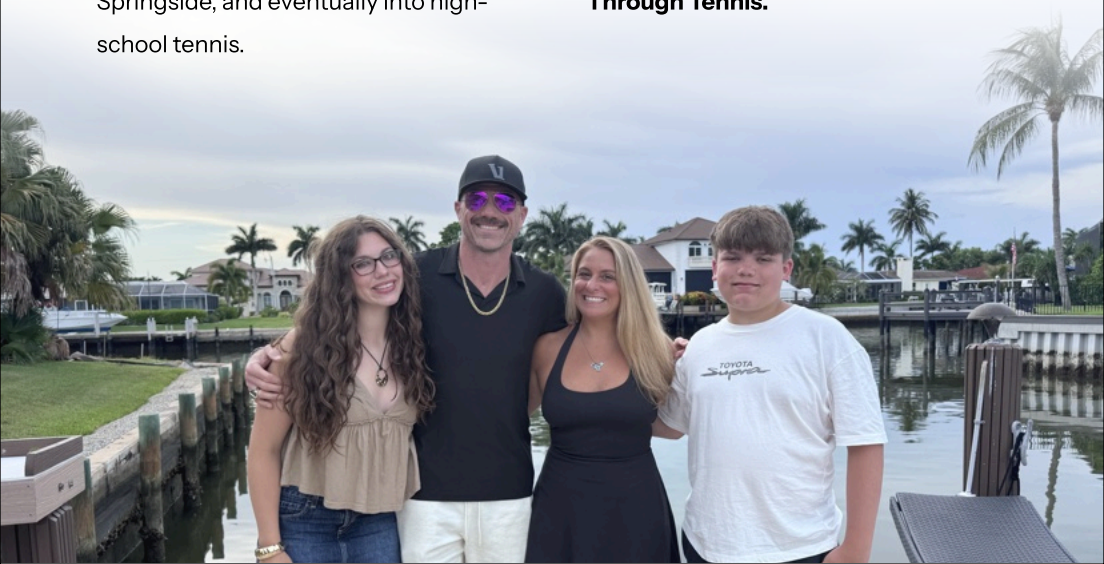
What he noticed wasn't simply that she was learning to play. The court became a place where she could relax, talk with her coach, hit a ball and work things out. She kept asking to go back.

Now Dustin gets to be on the other side of the fence — watching his daughter compete, learning the rhythms of high-school tennis and sharing a sport that neither of them grew up expecting would become such a large part of their lives.

And that helps explain why Fox became one of the Racquet-In-Hand Foundation's earliest supporters and a member of its **Founders Circle**.

Tennis gave Dustin Fox competition, friendships, connection, family experiences and another community to call his own.

Now he wants more people to have the opportunity to find out what the game might give them. **Changing Lives Through Tennis.**





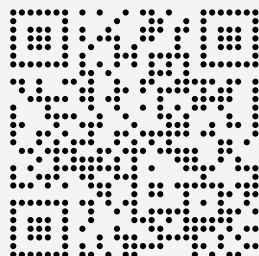
Join The Rally

Donate Today to support the Racquet-In-Hand Foundation. Checks can be mailed to:

Racquet-In-Hand Foundation
2582 Falmouth Road
Fairlawn Ohio 44333.

Or call for more information:

646-623-4610.



racquetinhand.com/donate



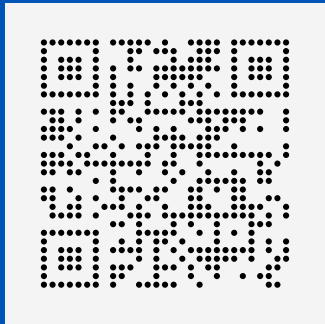
Apply for a Grant Today

If you have a program, project or initiative that can help grow the game, **we want to hear from you.**

The Racquet-In-Hand Foundation provides grants to organizations and community providers working to expand access, create opportunities and strengthen tennis throughout Northeast Ohio.

racquetinhand.com/donate

↩ PUT YOUR IDEA IN PLAY



racquetinhand.com/apply



racquet in hand
foundation

There's a place for you in...

THE Rally

DONATE | VOLUNTEER | APPLY → [RACQUETINHAND.COM](https://racquetinhand.com)