

VENICE HERALD TRIBUNE

By Mic Huber

9/20/2007

PROMOTER TAKES CAUSE PERSONALLY

Karen Scott Happer can't talk about her little baby without getting emotional. Her baby is called the Grand Slam Winners Classic, a fundraising tennis event to be held Nov. 3-Dec. 1 at The Colony Beach and Tennis Resort on Longboat Key. The event, which will benefit the Wellness Community of Southwest Florida, is more than just a project for the veteran tennis promoter.

This time it is personal. "I got breast cancer exactly this time last year," Happer said Tuesday. She explained how her friend, Susan Bassett Klauber, helped her find doctors and was there for her in her time of need. "I said, 'As soon as I get through this, we are going to put on an event that knocks everyone's socks off,'" Happer said. "That is how the Grand Slam Winners Classic was born out of my breast cancer experience and my friendship with Sue."

Now cancer free, Happer is the event organizer and the co-chairwoman with Bassett-Klauber. The event is being held at the Colony, which is owned by Bassett-Klauber's husband, Murray "Murf" Klauber. The purpose is to raise money for TWC, a nonprofit organization that provides free psychological and educational services for cancer patients and their loved ones.

And Happer's hope is that there is a hefty amount of money to give. "Every cent we make will go to the charity," Happer said. "No one is getting a salary, and the players are doing this at a fraction of what they normally charge. The event is designed to provide a chance for 24 guests to pay for a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" to play on the courts with and against eight celebrity players. And not just any players. All eight have won at least one Grand Slam tournament title.

Already committed are Guillermo Vilas, Fred Stolle, Stan Smith, Owen Davidson, Johan Kriek and Robert Seguso. Happer plans to announce the final two players next week and promises that tennis fans will be pleasantly surprised.

"This is the first event I have ever run for myself and I have called in favors on everyone," she said. Her long history in the game has laid a foundation for plenty of favors. Happer used to run the Australian Open tournament - still the only woman to direct one of the four Grand Slam tournaments — and also managed the Australian branch of ProServ, one of the game's biggest management firms.

She has been involved in every aspect of the game around the world. She still manages Jimmy Connors' ventures and helped put together the agreement that has Connors coaching Andy Roddick. She is married to Marshall Happer, who was once the head of the Men's Tennis Council, which at the time governed the men's international tennis tour. Marshall Happer also has served as the executive director and chief operating officer of the USTA.

Since moving to Venice two years ago, both have been involved with Karen Happer's **Champagne Tennis® Etcetera, Inc.**, a company that promotes various events.

It was while Karen Happer worked for ProServ in Australia that young tennis pro Carling Bassett was one of the company's top clients. Happer came to know Bassett's mother. She lost contact with Sue Bassett for several years, but the friendship was reinforced, particularly when the Happers moved to Florida, where they have a home at the Venice Golf and River Club.

"We absolutely love it here in Florida," Karen Happer said. Marshall Happer, who was a former top junior player in North Carolina, still plays tennis around the area. And Karen Happer is busy with her little baby. "It was important to me to find not only Grand Slam champions but also players who are fun," Happer said. "If you walk away from an event and are laughing and having fun, you can't wait to come back the next year." For now, her energy is putting together this year's event, which will include a party Friday night (Nov. 30) for players, guests and sponsors.

Saturday (Dec. 1) will be a full day of tennis. That night there will be a dinner/dance for participants and also members of the public who wish to purchase tickets.