

[Back to top](#)

World class athletes compete in Rockford Friday through Sunday

[\[TOP\]](#)



POWERFUL PLAYER - Valerie Wallace, of Rockford, reaches for a shot during a competition. Above, some of the members of the Grand Rapids Wheelchair Association team. They will be among players competing on tour at Champion Health and Fitness for the seventh year. The public is invited to watch events and find out more about competing in wheelchair sports.



Area residents can watch top tennis athletes on wheels compete in Rockford this Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Athletes from five countries - New Zealand, Chili, France, Canada and the United States - will play on all six tennis courts at Champion Health and Fitness in Rockford as part of the Grand Rapids Wheelchair Sport Association midwest tour.

According to organizer Lynn Bender, this year's event has the highest level of local participants in the event's history as well as plenty of world class talent.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to see wheelchair sports from novice to advanced," she explained. Among the participants is the country's second highest ranking junior player and the 47th world ranked tennis athlete. Emmy Kaiser, is ranked number two in the country as a juniors player and ranked 47 in the world in open women's ranking.

"This is America's up and coming future tennis player," Bender said.

For those who may be interested in participating in wheelchair sports, the Rockford stop on the midwest tour is a opportunity to see how much the sport has to offer. "This is a professional tournament. Our major sponsors have provided

Suzi Egeler, of Belmont, is one of the athletes participating in this weekend's Wheelchair Tennis Tournament at Champion Health and Fitness.



\$9,000 in prize money."

She noted that one player at the event, is a sixteen-year-old athlete who plays on her high school tennis team against able-bodied players. Other athletes also play on their high school teams as a wheelchair athlete. There will be all levels represented at the tournament, from novice to advanced (professional) and for age groups through adult.

"For anyone in the midwest, this is the only drivable tournament," said Bender. She noted that wheelchair sports is moving into mainstream, and Michigan, as a tennis state, is benefiting. Grand Valley State University is starting the area's first collegiate wheelchair tennis program. "What a great opportunity to send a kid locally who wants to play wheelchair sports, rather than sending them to college in Arizona?" Bender stressed.

When Bender began on the tournament eight years ago, there were 25 athletes total participating. She said the numbers have jumped by two thirds.

"It's a great problem to have, to increase like that," she said. In addition to those interested in wheelchair sports, the general public will be amazed at the skill of these athletes. "Anyone who likes to watch tennis will enjoy this," Bender said.

Growing among athletes to the sport are amputees who are able to walk with prosthetics, but qualify to compete in chairs. "Amputees are huge right now," Bender noted.



"They are a whole base of athletes in this sport."

"It's so exciting. We've had to add practices every week. This represents our highest level ever of local participation."

Bender said the competition will be at Champion on Friday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., Saturday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. The public is invited to watch. Bender also suggested those interested in the program to visit the Grand Rapids Wheelchair Sport Association website at www.grwsa.com.

[Back to top](#)

Courtland Crossings rezoning denied

[\[TOP\]](#)

200-acre property can be "reasonably used" as is

The Courtland Township Planning Commission unanimously voted against rezoning a manufactured home park for stick built houses.

According to Township Supervisor Jim McIntyre, the commission considered an

application for rezoning part of Courtland Crossings, located at the northeast corner of Ritchie Avenue and 14 Mile Road.

"The rezoning wouldn't fit in with the neighborhood there. It can be reasonably used as it is currently zoned," McIntyre said.

The controversial development, with sites for 691 manufactured homes, has been nearly vacant since it was built over six years ago. It is currently occupied by only 11 residences. It includes a sewer treatment facility and community center.

The township was forced to allow the manufactured home development by a consent judgement entered on October 2000. Developers proposed that the township was discriminating against lower income people who would move into the area but could not because low cost housing was not available.

It was proposed by the developers, Landon Holdings, that the township grant special use and rezoning to accommodate stick-built homes on the manufactured home lots.