

French game grows with support from developer

By H.M. CAULEY
For the Journal-Constitution

A summertime trip to the Gulf Coast eight years ago changed Andy Isakson's sporting life.

The managing partner of Isakson Living — the owners and operators of retirement communities across metro Atlanta — crossed paths with a Frenchman who introduced him to the game of petanque, a game akin to horseshoes or bocce.

"This man started a game in the community, and we played in the morning and again in the evening," Isakson said. "I got hooked on it, mostly because it's a really social game. While one person is throwing, the rest are standing around watching. There's a lot of camaraderie and conversation. Some people have even been known to have a cocktail while they play."

When team players get their turn, they're focused on tossing metal balls, about the size of oranges, across a hard surface to get as close as possible to the smallest piece, called the pig.

"On the surface, it seems very simple," Isakson said. "But it can get very complicated. There's a lot of strategy. You score points by getting close to the pig and the first one to 13 wins. But the best thing about petanque is that you can play a complete game in about 45 minutes, as opposed to four hours or more for golf."

Isakson, who lives in Roswell, became such a fanatic of the game that he joined the local chapter of the Federation of Petanque USA. He's now president of the Atlanta group.

"It's a growing sport, but there aren't many people playing it in Atlanta yet," he said. "But in the last few years, I've played in tournaments that had as many as 100 teams. It attracts a nice mix of people — boys and girls, older and younger — and everyone has an equal shot at winning. It's a pretty fair game."

Isakson is so passionate about petanque that when construction was under way at his latest community, Park



Photos by ELISSA EUBANKS / eeubanks@ajc.com

Andy Isakson likes petanque so much that he's putting courts in the retirement communities he develops and operates.



The French game of petanque takes about 45 minutes to play, says Isakson (standing at right), president to the local chapter of the Federation of Petanque USA. Taking in a game with Isakson at Park Springs are (from left) **Stephanie Lewy, 92; Burness Moore, 95; Floyd Fawcett, 72; and Dr. William H. Galloway, 89.**

4 fun facts about ... Andy Isakson

1. He enjoys fishing.
2. As an avid art collector, he likes to include original art in the communities he builds.
3. His real estate career dates to the mid-1970s when he graduated from Vanderbilt University in Tennessee and started building shopping centers.
4. His grandfather immigrated from Sweden and was the contractor on Oglethorpe University's coliseum.

Springs in Stone Mountain, he incorporated a court into the outdoor design. Members of the Atlanta club now meet there and many of the Park Springs residents have taken up the game as well.

"Park Springs now has one of the nicer courts around,"

he said with a laugh. "It has a limestone surface with lots of trees around it for shade. And there's a nice curve around the court so the balls don't get too far away."

Isakson also has played the sport in France, where fans will start a game on the sidewalk, the side of the road or in parks. "I also started drinking French wine, so both my vices are now related to France," Isakson admitted.

Isakson's current project, an active adult community in Peachtree Hills, also is slated to have a petanque court.

"It will be very near to the public cafe that will be under construction later this year," he said. "It will be a great place for Atlantans to show up, have a drink or something to eat and discover the game."

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