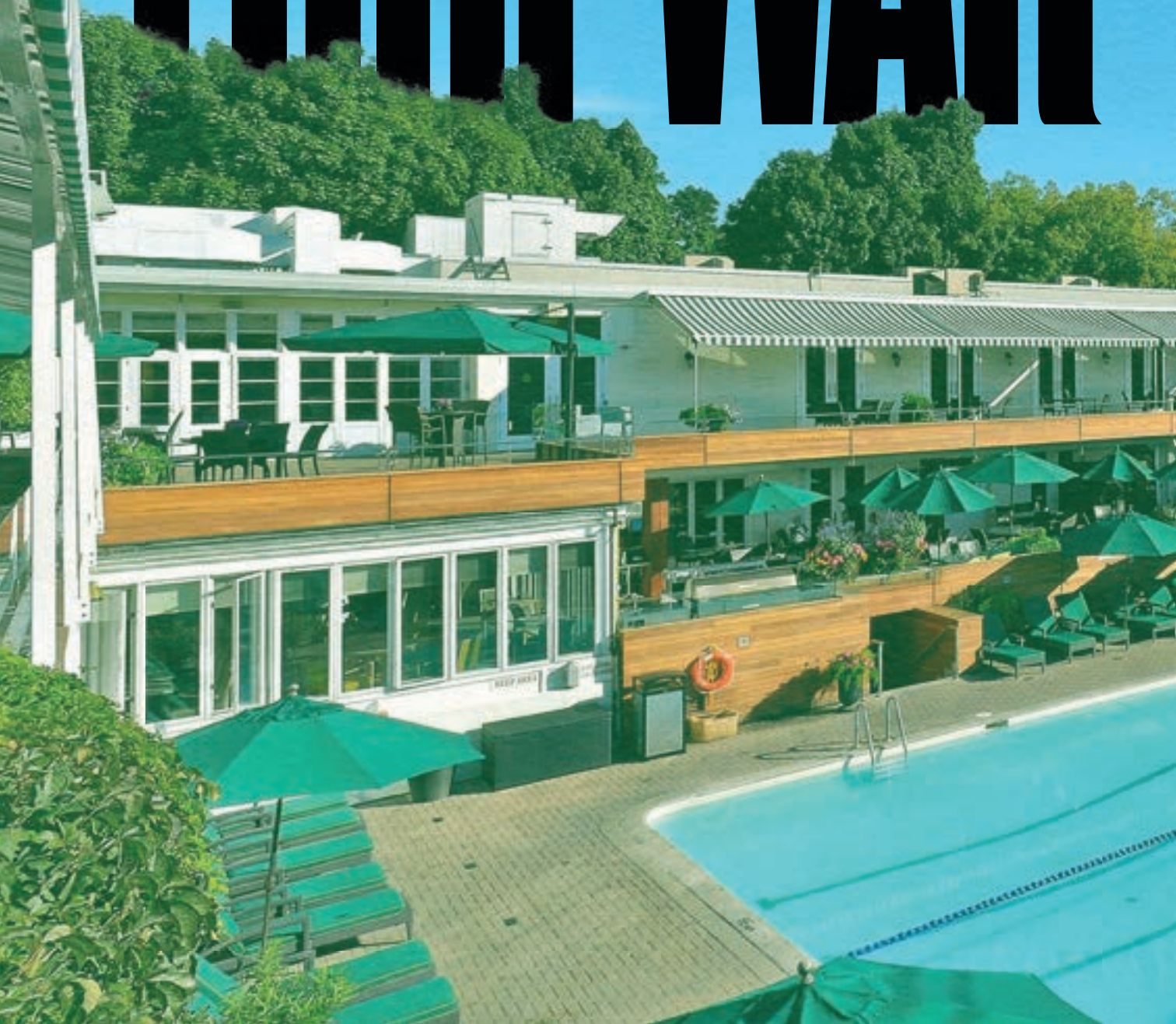


TIRE WAR



For 148 years, the Toronto Lawn Tennis Club was an ivy-covered bastion of civility with a roster of like-minded, blue-blooded members. Then an old-money-versus-new-money clash erupted

BY SARAH TRELEAVEN

IN THE BEGINNING, before the fractious infighting, malignant gossip, low-key vandalism, overpriced quesadillas and flurry of haymakers, it was all about the tennis. When the Toronto Lawn Tennis Club was founded back in 1876—just nine years after Confederation—it was a place for Torontonians to play the sport they loved. Everything else was secondary.

By 1913, after the club had moved from Front Street and settled over the iron-gated wall at the end of Price Street in Rosedale, it had become *the* site in the

world of Canadian tennis. Doug Philpott played his first tournament there in 1921. Later, as the club's renown increased, it hosted Arthur Ashe, Jimmy Connors, Björn Borg and Chris Evert. Since then, Martina Navratilova, Andy Roddick and Serena Williams have all paid visits.

Yet, for a private club, the Lawn was always unfancy, and intentionally so. Nothing shone; nothing glistened. Its clay courts were immaculate, but inside the clubhouse, the carpets were threadbare, the furniture mismatched, the gym drafty in winter and unbearably hot in summer.

The bar, located awkwardly next to the squash courts, stank sourly of sweat.

For the families that had been members for ages, the shopworn quality was part of the charm. The Lawn was like a cottage where the draw was the pristine lake, not the rustic cabin. One member I spoke with likened it to an old pair of slippers: they don't look like much, but they're comfy.

For a long time, the Lawn was also affordable. In the 1970s, the entrance fee was a mere \$125. And once you were in, the membership stayed in the family, passed down like a sterling silver tea set.



There were, of course, fabulously wealthy members, including Gary Berman, CEO of Tricon Residential, and his wife, Sonja; sundry Eatons; Nadir Mohamed, former CEO of Rogers; Moez Kassam, founder of Anson Funds; and Alex and Galen Weston Jr. There were local celebrities too, like *Shark Tank* personality Kevin O'Leary and his wife, Linda, and Jessica and Ben Mulroney. But the crowd at the Lawn was otherwise upper middle class—the accountants, entrepreneurs, doctors and lawyers, the well-off but not ultra-rich, who were happy to play a few sets, eat a BYO sandwich, shower and head back to the office.

Members liked to define the club by what it wasn't. Specifically, the Granite, Cricket or Rosedale Valley clubs, with their state-of-the-art facilities and price tags to match. As one member put it in a Toronto Lawn survey, "The club's particular charm works for people. We don't want to get into too fancy or too expensive.... We don't have a lot of appetite for Granite Club-type facilities—if you want that, then go join the Granite Club." Another respondent was more succinct: "This is never going to be the Cricket or Granite Club. And we don't want it to be."

But change was already afoot in Rosedale. The leafy midtown enclave, just steps from Branksome Hall and a 10-minute drive to Upper Canada College, was a safe, exclusive and prosperous neighbourhood. It was highly attractive to a new moneyed class in Toronto, which drove up the cost of real estate even beyond the usual bonkers price tags in the city. In 1980, a detached in Rosedale went for roughly \$250,000. Today, it goes for more than \$3 million, and anything that can't survive a multimillion-dollar reno is torn down, replaced by a soaring monument to ego.

For new Rosedalians, a membership at the Lawn was all but mandatory. "If you live in Rosedale but aren't a member at the Lawn, do you really live there?" was how one member semi-jokingly phrased it. Many of the new joiners sought the social status and prestige that a membership bestowed, but they had never picked up a racquet. At the club, the trend was noted—and judged. "Are we a tennis club in Rosedale or a Rosedale club where you can play tennis?" said one member.

The snark went both ways. Many of the newish members were aghast at the sorry state of repair at the club they'd heard so much about. "Yes, we love this place, but *really?* The premier tennis club? You bring people here and they say, '*Really?*'" said one member in the same

series of surveys. These folks weren't asking for opulence, but couldn't someone do something about the out-of-order showers? Or the boggy stench emanating from the drains? And what about the leaks, mould and peeling paint?

The first time the club tried to address these problems was in 2014. They could fix all of it, the administrators said, and more. Much more. The club could launch an ambitious multi-year capital project designed to modernize everything. Less Botox around the eyes, more full reconstructive surgery. The Lawn, that familiar no-frills redoubt, could be razed and replaced with a shiny new build. But to fund it all, dues would skyrocket, and the past—and all it meant—would be reduced to rubble.

And that's where the trouble began.

THE REACTION among the old guard to the idea of a massive renovation was so venomous that management didn't dare bring it to a shareholder vote. Instead, the club opted for small repairs and deferred any big plans. Four years later, in 2018, the club brought on a new general manager who would lead the membership into its brave new future. David Main had been a club pro and an executive at golf clubs across Ontario. Tall, well dressed, with a shaved head and a trim beard, he looked the part. But, for many long-standing members, his lack of tennis pedigree was a fatal flaw. "He's a golf guy," one said, unimpressed. "He's just not well-liked," said another.

Main introduced a fancy bistro menu—which included those controversial quesadillas—but otherwise not much changed over the next two years. Every time something broke and was left unrepaired, some members would grouse about the club's culture of inertia. By 2021, the board decided to try again, making the case that mini repairs were more expensive in the long run than a full-scale renovation.

The board issued an RFP and, in 2022, hired Williamson Williamson, a Toronto-based husband-and-wife architecture firm. They also retained a company called GGA Partners, which stands for Global Golf Advisors, further irking the tennis-first crowd. In July of that year, GGA sent out a survey to the Lawn's 2,316 members, asking for input on the scope of a reno. The cheapest option was a piecemeal renovation costing \$27 million at a minimum; two mid-range alternatives were



THE LAWN HAS HOSTED CANADIAN OPEN TOURNAMENTS OVER THE YEARS—AND SEVERAL HIGH-PROFILE PLAYERS:

1. **John Newcombe, 1969**
2. **Arthur Ashe, 1974**
3. **Chris Evert, 1974**

OPENER BY THE TORONTO LAWN TENNIS CLUB/FACEBOOK, NEWCOMBE BY DOUG GRIFFIN/TORONTO STAR/GETTY IMAGES, ASHE AND EVERT BY REG INNELL/TORONTO STAR/GETTY IMAGES

estimated at between \$39 million and \$79 million. The most expensive option was a full teardown followed by a brand new clubhouse with expanded auxiliary spaces, for as much as \$116 million. To pay for any of the options, increased dues and a special levy would be applied to all members. It was a return to the 2014 stand-off, but this time the tone from the board seemed resolute. Change was coming to the Lawn; the only question was how radical it would be.

The survey results showed what everyone already knew. Older members either wanted no changes at all or small tweaks. Younger, newer members, on the other hand, had a bigger appetite for a massive undertaking, what GGA called “a generational project.” The company later offered a written analysis of the discrepancy, which included the following tone-deaf snippet: “This follows what is commonly observed in private clubs, as more senior members will not realize the benefits of the ‘generational’ remodel.” First the club was extracting extra fees for a rebuild the older members didn’t want; now a bunch of high-priced golf consultants were telling them that they would soon be too dead to enjoy it.

A small but determined faction coalesced in opposition to a rebuild, calling themselves the Concerned Members. Public enemy number one was the general manager, David Main. While some pro-rebuild members described him to me as an affable, consummate professional, a Concerned Member likened him to Judas. “He’s awful,” she said.

The Concerned Members also put Michael Hartrick, the president of the board, in their crosshairs. A lawyer, Hartrick defied categorization: he was both a long-time member and in favour of an ambitious rebuild. Having been present for a previous failed attempt, however, he knew the bumpy road that lay ahead. Working in his favour was a low threshold: historically, major capital projects at the club needed to receive only a 50 per cent plus one vote majority to proceed.

Hoping to calm unrest and win over some of the dissenters, Toronto Lawn’s leadership embarked on what they called “listening sessions” and set up a virtual “listening booth” through which members could submit testimonials by video, audio or text. If the feedback revealed anything, it was that no one was happy. Some members complained that the process was happening too fast. Others complained that it was too slow. Some

older folks were annoyed by the younger generation’s entitled, demanding attitude. Meanwhile, many members rolled their eyes at the fusty old guard, echoing concerns raised in an earlier survey: “We can’t just ask the ‘grumpy old men’ because they are not the future—it is the families and young people like our kids and our grandchildren,” said one. “We have to keep evolving...or we will deteriorate as a club.”

SENSING the potential for chaos, the board brought members together in September of 2022 for a town hall. Roslyn Houser, a lawyer at Goodmans who specializes in municipal law and land development, presented on zoning and permitting; Todd Cowan, CEO of Capital Developments, discussed financing; and Marianne McKenna, an architect who was part of the search committee for an architecture firm, submitted a video statement endorsing Williamson Williamson. She said it was time to stop “putting lipstick on the existing facilities.”

As the afternoon progressed, tension in the room increased palpably. At one point, Hartrick took the podium to quell the storm. He promised that no decisions had been made and no vote was imminent. “We want to reach a consensus,” he said. Rob Beaudin, a member who is staunchly opposed to the rebuild, stood up and heatedly suggested that they amend the club bylaws to raise the threshold for approval, an idea that was met with applause. Buoyed by the energy of the crowd, he continued, accusing GGA of wording the survey in a manner that steered members toward supporting the more expensive options. More applause.

Eventually, club members submitted a request to amend the bylaws: any capital project with a budget of more than \$10 million should require at least 55 per cent of the vote, they said. Hartrick diplomatically referred the matter to the governance committee, which later rejected it.

For all the attempted consensus-building, Main, Hartrick and the planning committee had made no further progress than their predecessors. Even worse, the opposition was now galvanized like never before. Raising the stakes was the fact that the Lawn had been operating on the cheap for years, keeping dues too low to cover repairs and leaving the finances in disarray. In this respect, the Lawn wasn’t unique. According

The Lawn’s leadership wanted to launch a multi-year capital project designed to modernize everything. Less Botox around the eyes, more full reconstructive surgery

to a 2023 report from private-club consultancy Club Benchmarking, 45 per cent of board members and 37 per cent of managers at clubs across North America said that either their club didn’t have a long-term financial plan in progress or they weren’t aware of one. Too often, the report noted, clubs simply “kick the can” down the road and allow assets to deteriorate.

As a not-for-profit, the Lawn had only \$1.5 million in cash on hand, not nearly enough for any kind of capital project. The club brings in roughly \$12 million a year—from member dues, clubhouse services, and food and beverage sales—but sometimes spends more than that on operations. In 2022, for example, the club lost \$1.2 million in its food and beverage program alone. To help buoy their finances, clubs in similar situations often look to recruiting new members. One-time initiation fees, which cost in the tens of thousands, play a disproportionate role in propping up club finances. The result is a tightrope walk for management: update the facilities to attract new members who pay a lot, but in doing so risk the wrath of the old guard.

Many of Toronto’s old-school private clubs have embarked on large-scale renovations of their facilities to attract new members. That’s true at the Granite Club (a massive aquatics facility with a competition-scale swimming pool and a retractable roof), the Boulevard Club (a new wing with badminton facilities, a spa, sports therapy treatment rooms and waterfront lounge

areas), the National Club (dining facilities, a business centre and overnight accommodations) and the York Club (a \$17-million renovation that will include a new bar, kitchen and garden space.)

Consensus-building doesn't always work. The Summit Golf Club in Richmond Hill, a century-old institution with a clubhouse designed by architect Eden Smith, recently failed to get a clubhouse rebuild proposal approved after hiring external consultants and architects; in the end, only 25 per cent of members voted in support. During the thick of Covid lockdowns in 2020, the University Club weighed a proposal to build condos atop its neoclassical building on prime University Avenue. The resulting funds would have paid for updated facilities, but the members declined. "They felt they'd lose more than they'd gain in terms of what was important to them about the club," one insider told me.

FOR MEMBERS at the Lawn, there was plenty to lose, but most of all money. The club's initiation fee had held steady at \$30,000 for years, and annual dues increased by a modest two per cent per year. But, in March of 2023, Hartrick emailed members to explain that the board had recently discovered it had neglected to collect capital dues to support the ongoing maintenance of the facilities, an oversight that would have to be corrected. Starting that fall, each senior member would have to pay an additional \$840 per year for ongoing maintenance.

Anger and skepticism erupted. Dan Reisler, a long-time member and critic of a rebuild, suspected a connection between the sudden increase and the rebuild plans. "There is no coincidence here," he wrote to seven other members. "The club would not get financing for the grand plan so here's the solution."

The idea caught on. "They're being dishonest by pretending this is just a routine development," wrote another member in an email to the group. "This is definitely related to the rebuild." The group challenged the legality of implementing the dues, forcing the club to hire outside counsel to address the issue.

There was more unwelcome news: members learned that if the rebuild were approved, the club would also apply a special assessment. Senior individual members—meaning those between 30 and 69 years old—would be charged \$960.



1. Michael Hartrick was president of the Lawn's board of directors during the fraught rebuild process

2. David Main, hired as GM in 2018, came from the golf-club world

In addition to the special assessment, senior members could now expect to pay \$840 in annual capital dues, a \$290 service fee, the standard \$320 minimum yearly spend on food and beverages, plus regular operating dues, which were to increase by nine per cent. At an April town hall, a member named Biff Norris grew agitated. He told the crowd that, all in, he'd be paying 40 per cent more than he had the previous year. Adding summer and winter tennis fees, senior members were looking at \$7,800 a year. (For comparison, a senior member at the Granite pays around \$6,800 after tax.) For a family of four with two kids in their 20s, all of whom play tennis, the annual dues at the Lawn would go up to almost \$25,000.

Some raised concerns that, if the rebuild went ahead, they would need to pay the increased fees while the place was under construction: the clubhouse would be unavailable, the pool would be closed and some of the courts would be out of commission for up to two years. As a peace offering, management said they would bring in portable toilets and a food truck, which irritated their opponents even more.

Many members saw it differently: they were thrilled by the momentum. Finally, something was happening in spite of the meddling by the Concerned Members, whom they saw as out-of-touch and cheap—the "deep pockets, short arms" crowd, as one member described them. Even worse, they were responsible for this whole mess. If maintenance hadn't been deferred for so long, if there had been a willingness—or, in some cases, financial capacity—to shell out for needed repairs and an acceptance that dues would need to increase for that to happen, then the clubhouse wouldn't need to be torn down. "Unfortunately, they

joined a club that they can no longer afford," one member told me.

At one meeting, a newer member stood to profess her support for the rebuild, stating that most shareholders, now in midlife, had surely paid off their mortgages and could afford a bump in fees. It was a gauche assumption that, to many of the old guard, felt like a betrayal of the modesty that had made the Lawn what it was.

By August, there was news. The architects had an exciting presentation to share, including renderings of the new clubhouse: a timber-slatted Snøhetta-esque fantasy of breezy, light-filled café space and elegant spa-like change rooms. They'd have to demolish the historic building and relocate the pool, but it would improve the restaurant, change rooms and lounge; add more outdoor seating; move the kids' programming out of the dank basement; and leave room for future expansion, including pickleball courts. (The presentation tacked on two other options, renovation or repair, but the presenters effectively dismissed them.)

The price tag for the big rebuild was now \$80 million, which would take 30 years to pay off. Main later emailed his support for the idea. "This comprehensive approach ensures long-term viability and sustainability and future proof the club," he wrote. The vision for the future of the Lawn was apparently set, but only a vote could confirm it.

THE BALLOT BOX was slated to open in late November of 2023, and as the big day approached, the Concerned Members seethed. They worried about the risks with the rebuild: if they closed the clubhouse, the pool and some of the courts for years, who would want to join? Membership would drop off. Wasn't that a huge problem? Management, they learned, saw this not as a loss but as an opportunity. According to the project's master plan, the club forecasted an exodus of as much as 10 per cent of total membership during construction. But new members would pay roughly \$40,000 in initiation fees—a 33 per cent increase—which would mean an overall financial boon: out with the old, in with the new.

Two long-time members with backgrounds in finance told me they worried that the Lawn could tip into bankruptcy or turn into a fire sale for one of the club's developer members who might be keen

on seizing a prime five-acre plot in Rosedale. Even if they avoided that fate, there would be inevitable problems. Narrow Price Street would be a nightmare to stage construction or get zoning permits for. The neighbours might kick up a fuss about endless road blockages, as had happened with the South Rosedale Ratepayers' Association when the club installed its tennis bubble. One member couldn't figure out, as she tallied up the numbers and imagined inevitable hassles, why the board was so hell-bent on moving forward. "My best guess is that this is about legacy," she told me. "This is about ego. And this is about their own importance and their arrogance."

In April, bruised but undefeated, the Concerned Members sent an email to the entire membership, titled "Risking Our Future." They insisted that the current voting threshold was irresponsible and that the costs associated with the rebuild lacked compassion toward the long-term members and their families. "Our club is unlike most clubs in that we have numerous second, third and fourth generation families.... It won't be a generational continuum if these very same young people cannot afford to remain members as they turn 30." They

The big-ticket option included a new courtside lounge and upper viewing deck

made a last-ditch proposal: a modest \$29.2-million renovation—like the one proposed in 2022—that would last between 13 and 16 months, be minimally disruptive and take only six years to pay off.

Sensing they might lose the information war, the board printed up leaflets titled "Myths vs. Facts of the Rebuild" and posted them around the club. Almost immediately, several were defaced—it takes little detective work to guess by which group (the Concerned Members now topped 500)—with phrases like "This is a lie," "At what cost?" and "Add two years."

By June, the tension had reached a new high. There were withering glares and snide comments. Members moved tables to avoid former friends who were on the opposing side of the rebuild issue. Some members were fed up and resigned outright. One day, the club was abuzz about two elderly women who had gotten into a shoving match. Such details were related to me numerous times with sheepish chuckles—this behaviour was not in keeping with the Lawn.

IN REPORTING this story, I spoke with almost two dozen present and former members, most of whom were keen to share their side but only without their names attached, many citing a bylaw that states, "Club activities are not to be disclosed to non-members." Some

worried about getting turfed for sully the club's reputation, and multiple people told me they were concerned about retribution from the board. I requested interviews with Main and Hartrick, but they declined. They also rejected my request to visit the club.

I got in anyway. One exceptionally hot May day, I walked through the front gate to meet Mike Hazell, a loquacious longtime member who lives directly behind the Lawn. The pool was full of delightfully screeching children, and the tennis courts were packed with singles and doubles players in their mandatory whites. The L-shaped veranda, shaded by a handsome green-and-white awning, was full, so I sat courtside, on a makeshift patio, next to someone I'm pretty certain was Geddy Lee. From the outside, the whole place had a nostalgic golden-era Muskoka vibe. Inside, however, was a different story. The clubhouse was awkwardly divided into a warren of small rooms. A laundry room off the lobby occupied prime real estate. The large second-storey spaces were dull and underutilized. The overall aesthetic was more dated Holiday Inn Express than swish Rosedale tennis club.

Hazell, a career management consultant who just turned 70, had recently recovered from a stroke and was back to playing tennis most days. He is pro-rebuild, hopeful it will enhance the accessibility of the building, and he seemed optimistic by nature. Hazell



WILLMOR WILLMOR **FIGURE 1**

A view from Court 1 looking west at the Lounge below and the deck above

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WILLIAMSON WILLIAMSON FIGURE

A view of the Member Stair and the Café looking north. The Locker Lounge is filled with daylight.

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The proposed courtside café and locker lounge

wasn't afraid of the conflict at the Lawn. As we sat together under a blazing sun—I eating a cobb salad, he a grilled cheese—he kept inviting anti-rebuild members to join our table as they passed by.

When he introduced me, a flash of recognition and anxiety would cross members' faces. For all the harmony on display, it was obvious that deep tensions lay just below the surface, everyone cautiously on guard. Rob Beaudin, who firmly opposed the imposition of capital dues, listened to our discussion but didn't say much. Hazell introduced me to another member who instructed me not to write down his name. A third passer-by, Ronald Hutner, had just stepped off the court. A member since 1967, Hutner is an affable 77-year-old wealth manager who joked about how, at his age, he doesn't even buy green bananas. But there was a sadness to his good humour. He loves the Lawn and was clearly dismayed that it might be a construction site for his remaining active years. Hutner's father, a three-time Ontario junior tennis champ, had been denied membership to the Lawn because he was Jewish. But Hutner joined as a young man, and his daughter had her bat mitzvah in the lounge. It wasn't just a place to play tennis; it was an important part of his family history.

Hazell listened politely, sympathetic but unswayed. You can't stop progress, he

said. "If you're standing still, you're moving backward." Hazell trusted the board—they had been elected by members to represent their interests, after all—and thought they should be allowed to carry on with their work. The more Hazell spoke, the more dejected Hutner seemed. I was witnessing a microcosm: two Lawn members, each representing a diametrically opposed viewpoint, a metre away but a world apart.

Hutner contended that he found the rebuild plans opaque and lacking specificity, but he declined Hazell's invitation to debate the club's management structure. All of that was missing the point. His arguments weren't technical; they were emotional. The Lawn had been a home for him and his family for nearly six decades, and he worried it could all slip away.

Paul Dorian, another long-time member and a cardiologist at St. Michael's Hospital, told me that the kind of people who belong to private clubs like the Lawn are, broadly speaking, accustomed to getting their way. "They're highly educated individuals with some financial means who are used to having considerable freedom of decision making," he said. So giving up control was a challenge. It was also about a potential loss of status and the changing nature of wealth. "They're worried that their kids won't be able to afford to play tennis here," said Don Ritchie, another wealth-managing long-time member. "Well, they probably won't be able to afford a house in Summerhill either."

IN NOVEMBER of 2023, as voting day approached, the club seemed on edge, everyone worried about the nightmare scenario: an even split that would fracture the Lawn straight down the middle. To help avoid that outcome, the board authorized a campaign of emails and phone calls from staff—referred to by one member as "non-stop"—in a bid to steer the vote toward yes. Employees in the Lawn's Kids Klub called parents and told them it would be tantamount to "child abuse" to continue to allow their children to spend another minute in the dingy basement.

Even the fence sitters were drawn into the conflict. Trevor Byrne, who has been a Lawn member for just over a decade, hadn't used the club much since the pandemic and was neutral about the proposed rebuild, happy to stay out of the fray. Until, that is, he became annoyed by the club's incessant campaigning, which he felt was nothing more than propaganda. "My position is if they were more even-handed about the pros and cons of construction, I probably wouldn't have voted at all," he says. "Because they did seem to be a little heavier-handed, I voted against it."

More than 84 per cent of eligible voters cast a ballot. The results were catastrophic. Exactly 50.3 per cent voted in favour of the rebuild, while 49.7 per cent voted against. The margin was tiny—a nine-vote

The anti-rebuild group boycotted the annual Christmas party, formerly the key social event of the year. Pro-rebuild members were reportedly clinking glasses to congratulate themselves

difference—but it was enough. An email from management confirmed what was already clear as day: those in favour of the rebuild were typically 59 or younger with a tenure of 19 years or less; those opposed were 60 or older with a tenure of 20 years or more.

The Concerned Members were now bound to the rebuild plan despite their dissent, and those who'd voted yes were bound to drag half the club forward on a major commitment. A December 2 email from the board made a noble attempt at positive spin, saying it was "heartening to see the membership taking an active role in discussion and decision-making about the future of our club's facilities." Byrne wasn't buying it. "It's democracy, but it's not going to make the situation better," he said.

A few weeks later, the anti-rebuild group boycotted the annual Christmas party, formerly the key social event of the year. Pro-rebuild members were reportedly clinking glasses to congratulate themselves. A few days after that, the December membership news email went out. At the bottom was a reminder about resignation deadlines.

DESPITE their narrow loss, the Concerned Members remained steadfast. This past March, one sent an urgent message informing the city's Heritage Planning division of the club's plans to bulldoze two of its Victorian semis, hoping the demolition would violate preservation rules; a planner responded that the buildings didn't have a heritage designation. In May, at the next general meeting, the Concerned Members ran a slate of four candidates to try to turn the board in their favour, but all four lost. The nuclear option remained: suing the board for neglecting their fiduciary responsibility, a tactic at least one member is considering.

Some Concerned Members told me that, as feared, the wait list for the club had declined after the vote, but in fact the wait list had increased from 254 to 272 after the news broke. And those new members, as planned, would be paying the higher initiation fee of \$40,000. As if to stick it to the opposition, the board sent out a communiqué noting that the Concerned Members had cost the club more than

After a Lawn fundraiser, a group headed to a pub on Yonge, where two men on opposing sides of the rebuild began arguing and then awkwardly tussling, each landing powerful blows

\$230,000 on legal advice to address their complaints and challenges to governance.

The vote was over, but the fight was not. In June, after an annual doubles event to raise funds for charity, a group headed to a pub around the corner on Yonge. Two men on opposing sides of the rebuild, one a chartered accountant, the other a lawyer and board member, began discussing the plan for the new squash courts. The discussion became an argument, and they moved to a corner of the bar to talk privately. Things then turned hostile. Stoked by months of resentment, they began to tussle awkwardly, each landing powerful blows.

The pair made amends, but word of the fight soon spread. Shortly afterward, the Lawn's new president, Maureen Shewchuk, a former VP at Sun Life who succeeded Hartrick in May, sent out an email alluding to the incident and pleading for civility. "As the club evolves," she wrote, "let's strive to stay united in our perspectives."

Understandably, members opposed to the rebuild worry that the social rift is permanent, that the club will never go back to the cohesive, welcoming place it once was. They feel increasingly marginalized and believe the board has done little to

address or even acknowledge their concerns. "It's a very special place for a lot of members who have bonded over their love of tennis," one member told me. "And we haven't even been invited to the table. They haven't extended anything. They don't care how we feel. That's even worse"

The radio silence may be explained, at least in part, by the fact that David Main left the club in May. After six tumultuous years, the golf guy was now heading back to the golf world. His new employer, Lambton Golf and Country Club, had just successfully approved a clubhouse renovation, a fact that may have played a role in his decision.

The Lawn contracted an executive search company to find Main's replacement. In the job description, under "Key attributes," are bullet points that tell a long, tortured story: "being a visible, positive, energized, trustworthy, and aspirational leader who... understands the dynamics of a multi-generational club"; "able to reunite the membership"; "able to say no when appropriate without alienating members or staff."

Good luck with all that. "We are looking forward to meeting his replacement," said Dan Reisler. "With optimism." ■