

# Meet Judy Bowman

## *"Key Player" Spotlight*



*by: Chris Moody, VAS Contributor*

Judy Bowman is an evangelist for her deepest beliefs. She has a bicycle ministry that has led her to ride across the U.S. spreading the Gospel 15 times.

She is also an evangelist for pickleball.

That's no glib statement. Bowman has dedicated her life to spreading the Good Word, founding Wheel Power, a bicycle ministry, in 1993. She is a fulltime missionary whose mission is to bring people to Christ.

In addition to her all-encompassing efforts to share and spread her Christian faith is the zeal to do the same for the benefits and enjoyment of pickleball. She is a USA Pickleball certified ambassador.

A sport that started near Seattle in 1965, pickleball has spread across the world. Bowman found it while teaching physical education in California. When she moved to the Lynchburg area to teach at Liberty University, she decided to introduce Virginia to pickleball. From Farmville to the New River Valley, Bowman introduced pickleball to churches, YMCAs and recreation centers.

Enthusiasm for the sport soared. In 2014 the Commonwealth Games was the first state games to add pickleball. Judy and son Steve Bowman are the directors of pickleball in the Commonwealth Games.

"Each year we have more people playing, although there was an expected drop last year," Judy said. "We have had about 175 players and soon we'll top 200, maybe this year."

Bowman, a tennis player since the age of 7, said pickleball appeals to people who want to compete in a similar sport, but like a smaller court with less physical abuse to the knees and legs from running around a court. The paddles and plastic ball make the game slower than tennis, serving as an equalizer of sorts. Doubles teams are known to be a grandparent and grandchild. Several courts fit comfortably in a gym, so multiple matches can be played simultaneously in a facility.

It's easy to see why 3.5 million Americans play pickleball, which calls itself the fastest growing sport in the country. Attendance figures across all the state games has pickleball as the second-most attended event, behind only figure skating.

In 2018, John Lindsoe of Lynchburg participated at age 91, the oldest competitor in the country.

The open division is for players 19-49, with age brackets proceeding in five year steps until age 75. The top bracket is 75-plus.

Pickleball's popularity is such that people from all over the east coast tour the tournament circuit. As such, out of state players are welcome in the Commonwealth Games. Medals are given to each age bracket's top three finishers and to the top three from Virginia.

"We give medals to the Virginia participants based on their finish if the out-of-state player wasn't there," Bowman said.

The pickleball competition is held the weekend prior to the rest of the Commonwealth Games because it needs the same gym space as basketball. Bowman said the facility at Liberty is perfect.

"We have 24 beautiful, hardwood floor indoor courts," she said.

Between 175 and 200 matches are played. Each match is a best 2-out-of-3 games.

The Commonwealth Games tournament will be three days. Singles will be Friday, July 16. Doubles are on Saturday, July 17, and mixed doubles round out the event on Sunday, July 18.