



The Winter Games of Texas showcases local talent

THE WINTER GAMES OF TEXAS is January 14–16, and athletes of all ages and skill levels from amateur, to recreational, to Olympic hopefuls will be participating, including 82-year-old Plano resident **Dorothea Taschner**, who's played table tennis for more than six decades—*beat that!* Forehand, backhand, chopping, looping, pushing...Dorothea can do it all, and she has the medals to prove it.

Born in Berlin in 1928, this seasoned star learned to play table tennis when she was 16 and living in a refugee camp in Germany. "My life was table tennis," says Dorothea, with an articulate German accent. "I played for East Germany and West Germany. You were chosen by the government to play. Actually, I was a swimmer and diver but table tennis was an up-and-coming sport, more or less, and I was athletic."

Recalling her younger years, during and after World War II, Dorothea relays positive stories in a time of despair and destruction. For example, when she was a kindergarten teacher and had to walk to and from the schoolhouse, she hid behind the trees whenever she spotted Russians on the road, but one day, a farmer sold her a bicycle, and Dorothea felt "so lucky."

In 1948, Dorothea and her mother fled from East Germany to West Germany. By now, Dorothea was in her 20s and had blossomed into a beautiful young woman. She took up modeling and even graced the cover of a teen magazine in Germany. She also took on a position at the Red Cross as a nurse.

After six decades of table tennis, Dorothea Taschner still keeps her eye on the ball

Dorothea never put down her racket. She continued to play table tennis and met her future husband Helmut, who was from Czechoslovakia on the men's team. "It was many years ago during the Iron Curtain, and he came over and didn't want to go back to a Communist country. You had to get married, so, we got married."

In 1955, Helmut, Dorothea and their son, also named Helmut, moved to the United States on the advice of Dorothea's aunt, who lived in Chicago. The flight from Dusseldorf to Brussels to New York, and finally, Chicago was exhausting as Dorothea was eight months pregnant with her second child. But Dorothea has no regrets. She says, "I'm proud that I moved to this country so that my children could have freedom."

Mom and daughter played table tennis competitively with Dorothea's husband, Helmut,



as their coach. They practiced in the basement where shelves of trophies, floor to ceiling, surrounded them. The family loved traveling together to play the sport. Between Dorothea and her daughter Barbara, they have acquired more than 100 trophies.

Helmut became ill with cancer in the late '70s. The family heard about advanced chemotherapy treatment at Baylor Medical Center (Dallas), and moved to Plano. Unfortunately, Helmut passed away not long after the move, in 1981.

"Barbara quit playing. The two had grown so close to each other, she just couldn't play," said Dorothea. "I finally got her to come back and play in the Texas State Senior Games with me."



Dorothea Taschner poses with trophies, medals and photographs from her days as a table-tennis champ—and she's not done yet! Profile photos/Brit Mott

Both of Dorothea's children, her son Helmut and her daughter Barbara, currently live in Plano and have their own children.

After her husband's death, Dorothea took on employment at Plano General Hospital, now The Medical Center of Plano, in the X-ray department, and later at Wells Elementary School, in the kitchen. Her last job was at Burger King, serving as breakfast manager, before retiring at 60.

Numerous trophies and medals from the Plano Senior Games, the Texas Senior Games, and other competitions span six decades of hard work, wins, and fond memories for Dorothea. Her greatest accomplishment was winning the 1977 U.S. Open Table Tennis Championships, Senior Woman Over 40. "That's the highest honor from the United States Table Tennis Association," she says, proudly.

Pointing to her bronze, silver and gold Senior Olympic medals, she said, "I qualified to play again next year in the Senior Olympics. In the Senior Games, you play in your age group, like 50-54, 55-59, and so on. My partner is 20 years younger than I am so I always had to play in her age group. Last year, we played in San Francisco together and came out 6th out of 34 teams, so that's not too bad. I was 81 at the time and she was 58.

"Now I am playing with someone who is nine years younger (her new

partner, Robert Donahoo), so I'm playing in the age division 70-74. It's getting harder but I can still go! I always tell my family and friends, I'm not going to die in bed. I'm going to die playing table tennis."

At the time of this interview, Dorothea was taking a break because she is recovering from lymphedema. She had breast cancer in 1991. "I'm a survivor," she said. "They took too many lymph nodes out so I have to keep this wrap on to keep the swelling down."

Since the Winter Games are around the corner, this 82-year-old athlete is hoping for a fast recovery. She and her partner, Robert, are playing mixed doubles. "This

will be my third time to play in these games," she said, "and I'm looking forward to it."

The Winter Games of Texas are the largest multi-sport event in North Texas drawing an estimated 4,300 athletes and 17,000

spectators. Sports include swimming, fencing, basketball, flag football, gymnastics, soccer, bowling, wrestling, figure skating, ice hockey, taekwondo, volleyball, and, of course, table tennis. Games are played at venues all around Frisco and are estimated to generate \$2.75 million dollars for the area.

The Winter Games of Texas was created by the Texas Amateur Athletic Federation, the Frisco Convention & Visitors Bureau, and the Frisco Parks and Recreation Department. For more information, call 1.800.GoFrisco (463.7472) or visit taaf.com.

