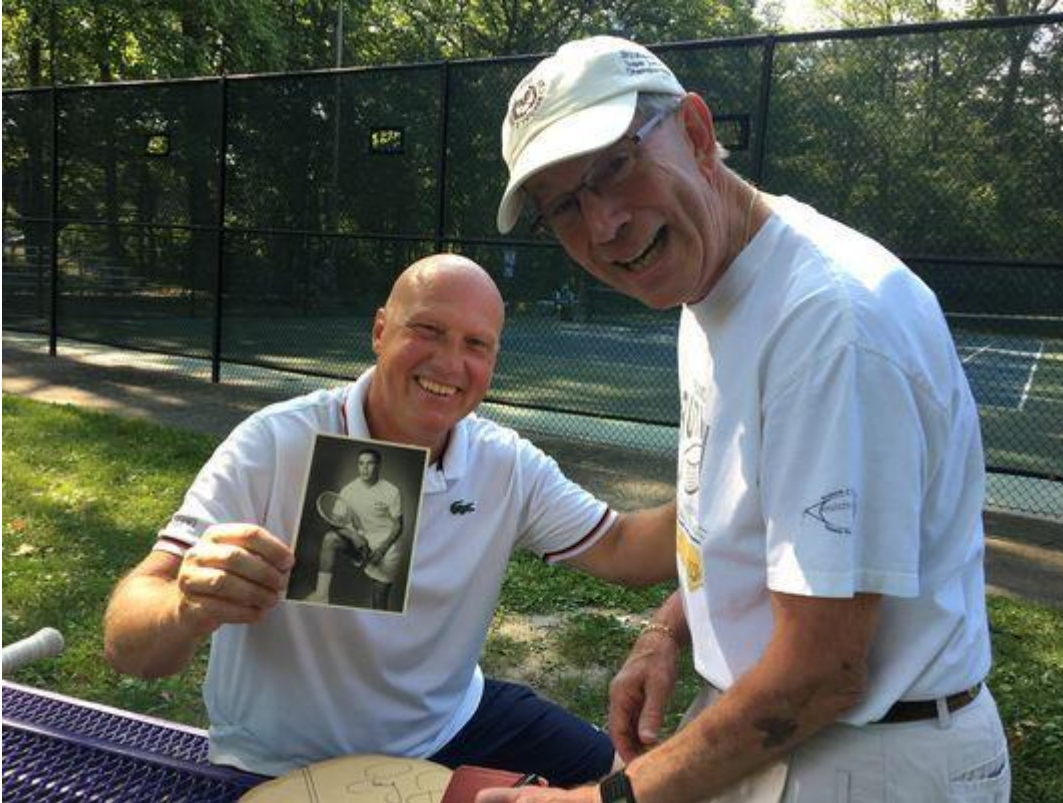


## 76-year-old Art Smith plays in 60th Robinson Tournament

Joseph Hayes, Times Herald

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*(Photo: Joseph Hayes, Times Herald)*

He's the elder statesmen of one of the area's longest running tournaments.

Art Smith will turn 77 years old soon, but he's still going strong. This week, he will renew his love for tennis when he plays in the 60th Francis J. Robinson Memorial International Tennis Tournament.

But what makes Smith unique is the fact that he has played in the tournament every year since its inception.

"He loves the game and tennis is a lifetime sport," tournament director Steve Pillon said. "I started playing when I was 3 or 4 years old and we have people out here in the draws that are 80 years old.

"It's a sport for a lifetime and people want to keep coming back. It's a fun event and we are all family. It's like a family reunion coming back and he's our ambassador for the tournament."



**Art Smith, of Port Huron, returns the ball during the Francis J. Robinson Memorial International Tournament Wednesday, August 5, 2015 at Sanborn Park in Port Huron. (Photo: JEFFREY M. SMITH, TIMES HERALD)**

It's always easy to find Smith when he is around. He will be the one smiling, making a joke or two and telling old stories about the famed event.

When asked why he continued to play after so many years, Smith was in classic form.

"I can't break my streak," he said with a chuckle. "No, this is something I look forward to every year. I was the tournament director way back.

"It's been all kinds of changes over the years, but a lot are for the better. I'm just going along with it. Three or four years ago, I started back taking lessons again."

Smith said this year's tournament will have a more special feel than normal as he is joined at the event by 14 of his family members.

"It pretty much started with me and I have two sons and a daughter and they each have two kids," Smith said. "My wife and I, our kids and their spouses and grandkids are all in the tournament.

"I love it. I get enjoyment from both, watching them play and playing. It's been a lot of fun."



**Art Smith shows off a t-shirt displaying the names of all 14 family members that will play in this year's Francis J. Robinson Memorial International Tennis Tournament. (Photo: Joseph Hayes, Times Herald)**

Smith described himself as an avid runner who enjoys being a part of local competitions. But he has always been known for his ability on the hard courts after dominating the Robinson Tournament for so many years.

"In the '80s, I was more interested in running than tennis," he recalled. "If you know runners, you know we are addicted. You can't stop. I think that helped me play tennis. It helped me lose weight and I just had to keep competing.

"I think tennis is just a great sport. I hope many people find it and do whatever they can do. This tournament is one of the longest running tournaments in the country as a community tournament. It's just terrific to see it come together."

When it comes to his future, Smith won't say how many more years he expects to play tennis. But he does have a few goals for this year's event, even while playing in the 60-year-old division.

"I'm planning on winning a match," he said with a wide smile.

Contact Joseph Hayes at (810) 989-6268 or at jahayes@gannett.com. Follow him on Twitter @Joseph\_Hayes11.