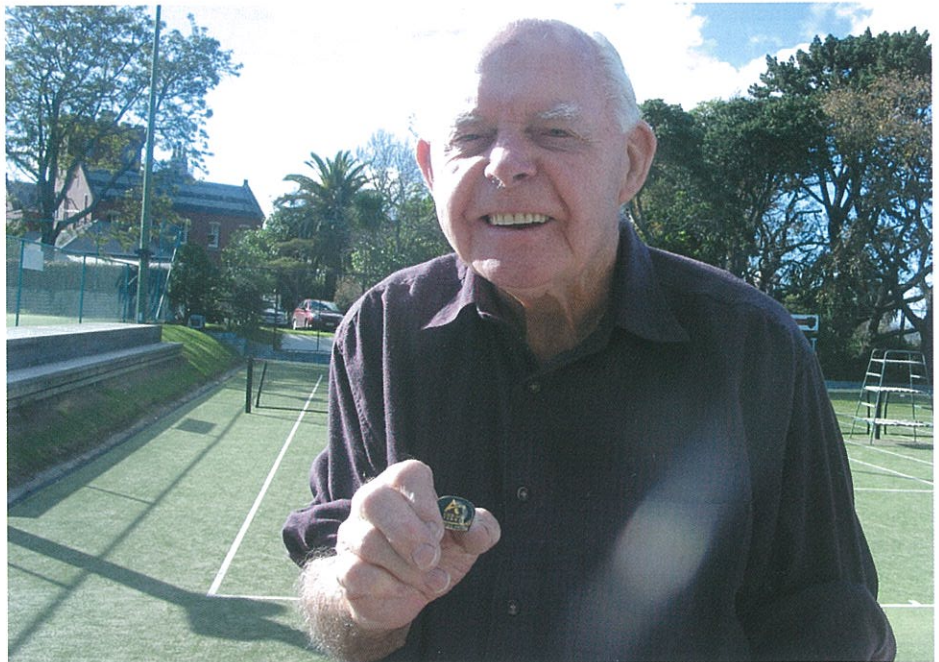


Ray Keenan, 79, a real tennis star

Without Ray Keenan there probably wouldn't be a Pompallier Tennis Club in St Mary's Bay. Auckland Tennis Association president Jill Bignell has honoured his contribution to tennis by presenting him with a club administrator's honours award.

"The award is for 20 or more years of service and this was a gold award. Ray had actually done 43 years of service for Pompallier Tennis Club," she said.

In the early 1960s he set out to save the club. At the time, tennis clubs all over Auckland were collapsing, their land dispersed for motorways, building developments and commercialism.



Ray Keenan ... honoured with a gold medal for hard work and passion for tennis.

Many went into recess during World War II.

Not so Pompallier. Ray Keenan brought it back from the dead with working bees, raffles and bottle drives. Now, more than 40 years' on, Pompallier's clubhouse and five courts, set among magnificent old trees and shrubs by the Bishop's Palace, are a beautiful, peaceful oasis in the heart of the city.

Mr Keenan, aged 79, a retired plumber, still visits at least twice a week to tidy up, make repairs, organise Sunday social tournaments and other fund-raising events just as he has done for 43 years. "I think the award is an honour," Mr Keenan said of his gold medal award. "I love doing the work for the club."

But it didn't all start at Pompallier. Before that, he had spent the 1940s and 50s saving Parnell Tennis Club after it was moved from St Mary's Cathedral grounds to the Domain. In his spare time Mr Keenan is a dab hand at tennis himself. His name stars 27 times on Pompallier's honours board, including the inaugural 1965 singles championship. He was Auckland hardcourt champion, president of Auckland Catholic Tennis and played as a veteran at Wimbledon. His son Michael is one of the club's top players and administrators.

Tennis is indeed Ray's life and love. And he likes to sit in the sun at the club and watch the kingfishers and wood pigeons.

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