

## **What's the Dill With City Pickle?**

By: Isabella Sayers 10/13/22

When “CityPickle” appeared on my newsfeed, my first thought was there must be some sort of pickle convention going on in New York City. A place where vinegar-soaked cucumber enthusiasts gathered to share their passion for preservatives. Wrong.

CityPickle is a pickleball club that has opened a month-long pop-up location in Hudson Yards, Manhattan with a free court. The CityPickle website went live on September 26th, and in under 3 minutes the entire month of October was fully booked.

Pickleball is an indoor/outdoor activity for all ages that combines similar techniques used in ping-pong, tennis, and badminton.

The concept of CityPickle was developed by two best friends, Mary Cannon and Erica Desai. Before pursuing CityPickle full-time, Mary devoted many years working in Real Estate at Goldman Sachs while Erica's career was in healthcare at the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Earlier this year, both made the decision to leave their longtime professions in order to promote and oversee their new business.

CityPickle's Marketing Director, Kristin Hess told me that the duo had been tennis partners for 10 years prior to discovering pickleball. Although the sport was invented in 1965, it wasn't until 2018, that Erica first played the highly contagious sport during a family vacation to Vermont. Upon her return to the big apple, she noticed that there

were very few places to play pickleball, especially when weather conditions seemed unreliable.

“All they wanted was a space inside to be able to play, so when COVID hit and the game started getting more and more popular they decided to do something about it,” said Hess.

The Hudson Yards CityPickle pop-up event is a way to promote the grand opening of a permanent in-door location coming to Long Island City in 2023. While the midtown pop-up has one outdoor court, the Long Island City location is expected to have 7-8 pickleball courts along with a fully functioning restaurant, bar, and lounge area.

“Think of it like Top Golf, but without the golf,” Hess added, “We want people to be able to make an entire day out of it.”

Even though I couldn't get a reservation, I showed up at Hudson Yards wearing sneakers and a fit bit. Skies had been gray and gloomy all day, with rain falling sporadically at the rhythm of its own beat. I thought surely this “stay in and watch Harry Potter” weather was enough to persuade the most dedicated “pickler,” a term used to describe those passionate about pickleball, to surrender their court reservation, leaving me a window of opportunity to see what all the fuss is about.

Alas, I was out of luck. Two younger men were racing back and forth on the court swinging their paddles and yelling profanities. It's moments like this where I'm not

entirely sure Pickleball is “for all ages.” That said, I was perfectly content remaining on the sidelines as I was able to admire the Vessel, a grand spiraling staircase that has become a prominent Manhattan landmark.

Time passed on, and though the gentleman occupying the court didn’t exactly invite me to play doubles, they did offer their thoughts on the game that had them running around wearing shorts in 55 degree weather. “I played on a competitive pickleball team back in college, and Tommy boy played quidditch,” Jeremy Hodge, 25, consulting analyst at Deloitte, said with his arm draped around his friend's shoulder. “Our parents are really proud.”

“Really proud,” Tommy Dyer , 24, consulting analyst at Deloitte, echoed sarcastically.

The gentleman said that they preferred pickleball to other sports because it was new and one of the easier sports to learn to get good at. Hodge also shared that he tried his hand in golf but, unlike pickleball, the pacing was too slow for his taste.

While hanging around the area I was also able to speak with a young married couple who were getting ready to take over the court. “This is our first time here, but we love playing pickleball whenever we visit her (his wife) family in Massachusetts. So while the sitter still has Noa (the couple's young daughter) this is how we’re spending date night,” said Benjamin Edelmann, 34, software developer for Amazon.

USA Pickleball Ambassador, Katherine Hedden has also attached herself to CityPickle. She spends about 3 hours a day, 7 days a week giving 50 minute lessons for \$100 per session. I was not able to get in touch with Hedden to comment, but this does not come as a total surprise as her individual training sessions were fully booked for October four hours following the CityPickle website going live.

Although construction has begun on CityPickle's Long Island City court, it may take at least six months before the place is done.

In the meantime, there are lots of other places to play pickleball in NYC. In Manhattan, there are currently nine pickleball courts, two of which are recreational facilities with in-door courts located on 80 Catherine Street in Downtown and 232 West 60th Street on the Upper West Side. According to the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, more outdoor pickleball courts are underway near West 34th Street, just below Pier 76.