

History of the Oak Ridge Country Club, Part 2

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on January 12, 2010)

As we continue the history of one of Oak Ridge's historical icons, the Oak Ridge Country Club, Dub Shults, Ward Foster and George Courville brings us the rest of the story. As you will recall, the club started in 1947 and quickly grew into a well established golf course, but "borrowing" of AEC equipment eventually caught up with the early enthusiasts.

"The club bought the land in the mid-1950s when the AEC began to sell government property to the citizens. Prudential Insurance Company loaned us the money. The transaction wasn't exactly straightforward, however. Before we could purchase the land, we had to pay AEC a rental fee of \$9,000 for the use of that motorized equipment that we "borrowed" during construction of the second nine. (Don't you just know there is more to this story than is being told – Ray)

"Prudential supplied that money also. The swimming pool was added shortly after we purchased the land and a few years later, the tennis courts and squash court were built. The course matured into a nice, but not plush venue, pretty and fun to play.

"Many celebrities have played here, including touring pros Patty Berg, Mason Rudolph, J. C. Goosie, Joe Campbell, Sam Snead, and Arnold Palmer. We were rather proud of newly rebuilt greens when Arnold Palmer played an exhibition round here, but were brought back to earth when he remarked that we "have a nice course but it needs new greens."

"Today, the Oak Ridge Country Club is represented by Professional Golf Association's Touring Pro Troy Matteson who learned his trade here and Scott Stallings who was Club Champion before turning pro and joining the Hooter's Tour. In November and December of 2009, Scott played well enough in the PGA Qualifying Tournament to earn his player's card for the Nationwide Tour of 2010.

"By the 1990s, the course needed more than new greens...it needed renovation. Robert Cupp, a premier golf course architect, was hired to redesign and renovate the course. Several plans were developed and proposed to the membership. Ultimately, the current course design was selected because it retained the flavor of the old course and yet is enjoyable to golfers of all skill levels.

"The course was closed in April 1995 for major renovation and construction. Holes were re-routed; greens were enlarged and rebuilt, mounding was added, sand bunkers were enlarged in size and number, cart paths were widened, roughs were sculpted of fescue, multiple tees were added, and fairways were sprigged with zoysia. The sprigging of zoysia fairways was an experiment at the time, and it proved to be quite successful for us.

"Construction lasted sixteen months, during which time members continued to pay monthly dues. Many members also volunteered for a Beautification Committee that worked to enhance the natural beauty of the "new" course. The renovated course while still rough but promising reopened for play on July 12, 1996. Under the leadership and care of Superintendent Guy Hudson, ORCC's golf course matured into one of the foremost golf facilities in East Tennessee.

"The new course layout is a 6,836-yard championship venue featuring large bent grass greens, numerous sand bunkers, and tees that will accommodate various skill levels. The course's ambience is both beautiful and pristine. (Another example of an Oak Ridge historic treasure that many of us take for granted, but is rarely found in other communities – Ray)

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"As mentioned above, the original clubhouse was the result of a merger between volunteer effort and surplus buildings. It nevertheless grew into a large facility with most of the amenities needed for its place as the leading social venue in Oak Ridge. It was a dynamic place, with restaurant, bars, meeting rooms, dance floor with bandstand, and deck overlooking the pool. Social events were regular affairs. The one thing that the clubhouse lacked was operating efficiency.

"Largely because of that operating inefficiency and the age of the facility, the club decided to replace it with a totally new clubhouse in 1984. The new one would be much smaller, with fewer amenities, and much more cost efficient in operation.

"The old clubhouse was demolished to provide a prominent location for its replacement. Clubhouse operations moved into a mobile home near No. 1 tee during construction. The second clubhouse served the membership with little change until 2007. At that time, a total remodeling and renovation was undertaken.

"On January 23, 2006, the Oak Ridge Country Club sold some 175 acres of land west of the golf course to a local real estate developer. Proceeds from that sale enabled a much-needed and complete renovation of the clubhouse. The work was undertaken promptly in order to avoid capital gains tax on the proceeds of the land sale.

"The membership celebrated completion of its second "new" clubhouse in April 2009, marking the fact that once again the Oak Ridge Country Club had a clubhouse comparable in quality and function with its golf course.

"Over the years, the Oak Ridge Country Club has been fortunate to have a series of exceptional golf professionals since the club's beginning in 1947. These men have played a large part in the success of the club. They are listed here along with their terms of service.

1947-49	Bernard Beasley
1950-52	Jake Burchfield
1952-82	R. E. ("Rabbit") Grove
1983-84	Chuck Furbee
1985-99	Richard ("Rich") Spraker
2000-03	Chris Cox
2004-09	Richard ("Rich") Spraker
2009-	Barrett Tanner

"Three Charter Members remain today: Phil Marlino (Inactive), Ward Foster (Honorary), and Jake Horton. Jake continues to be an active golfer, playing or practicing almost daily, and participating in East Tennessee Seniors Golf Association events.

That concludes the history as provided by Dub Shults and written by Dub, Ward Foster and George Courville. I hope you have enjoyed learning more about the historic Oak Ridge Country Club.

Members of the club include golfers from Oak Ridge, Knoxville, Kingston, Clinton, Farragut, Maryville, and Alcoa. The golf course is well known and has cooperated with many organizations over the years to hold

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golf tournaments there. I have personally been involved in the United Way golf tournaments and found the club to be most helpful to our efforts to raise money for United Way agencies.



R. E. "Rabbit" Grove, Mickey Mantle, Tom Pace III, Al Tucker, Ray McKenry and John Greer



Oak Ridge golfer Liz Libberman and Patty Berg played in foursome with Ethel Howell and Evelyn Kimbal during Berg's visit to the Oak Ridge Country Club on March 17, 1955

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Arnold Palmer plays Oak Ridge Country Club golf course on July 30, 1966

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Aerial image of today's Oak Ridge Country Club made by Ken Brown and daughter Emily Smartt from Terry Mullins' helicopter

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A scenic view of Oak Ridge Country Club