

CHAPTER THREE

THE SECOND DECADE

On Wayne Ferrell's departure tennis manager Bob Litrich temporarily took on the role of interim golf club manager. Fortunately, his tennis duties had been eased with the addition in 1975 of a full-time tennis social director.

Randy Ball did this for a year, but his replacement, Lynn Stein, became a tennis club fixture for the next 24 years. Stein had been a career recreation director in the Navy, earning great experience at organizing tournaments and other activities. After retiring, he was a high level high school sports referee, and then found his perfect job at Old Ranch. His friendliness, energy and organizational skills made a great impression on all, as did his style. Lisa Mulvaney (then Lisa Hall) remembered him as "always so dapper and elegant, in non-tennis clothes."

Litrich still handled the growing number of bigger tournaments but Stein's organizational skills gave Bob more time to do his favorite thing—teach.

Many of his students -- his "kids" as he called them -- went on to play Division I college tennis. A few, like Kevin McClintic and Diane Desfors, even spent short stints on the grueling pro tennis tour. But Litrich's most famous student was former President of the United States, Gerald Ford. In Spring 1978 Ford happened to be spending a lot of time in Long Beach when his wife Betty was undergoing treatment for alcoholism at the Long Beach Naval Hospital. Through an Old Ranch tennis member (a doctor), Litrich was asked if he was willing to take on a special student. Within a few days the Secret Service visited him, and soon after that Litrich was helping the former President develop his backhand and other strokes at Old Ranch -- with a Secret Serviceman standing guard on top of the clubhouse roof.

Ford's presence was complimented by visits from tennis royalty like Bjorn Borg and other tennis-playing celebrities like Merv Griffin, as well as the continued appearances of pros like Billie Jean King.

OLD RANCH AT FIFTY



From 1976-2004, the energy and organizational skills of tennis club social director Lynn Stein (far left) made life much easier for tennis manager Bob Litrich, except when he had the staff in Chippendale's style costumes such as at this women's group luncheon. Pictured with Stein are teaching pros Craig Rodgers, Jim Haley and Litrich.



Stein's work allowed Litrich to focus on teaching and bringing in top-level tournaments and clinics. In 1978 one of Bob's students was former President Gerald Ford. When Ford took lessons at the club, a Secret service marksman was always stationed on the tennis clubhouse roof. In the 1980s Old Ranch was graced with the presence of world champion Bjorn Borg who is shown during a clinic for Old Ranch youth players.

By this time Litrich's schedule had lightened because in July 1977 golf industry veteran Dean Kring became the second Old Ranch General Manager. Despite Kring's experience, Bixby Vice-President Rodger Karrenbrock gave him strict instructions: First and foremost, the club was a business. Management had to avoid any perception of playing favorites or acting as if they too were members.

Kring ended the waiving of club dues and monthly fees which led to some member exits. A bigger concern was the high number of non-renewals every January, made more pronounced this year in a poor economy.

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In 1975, new club pro Bob Lovejoy presented Betse Straub with her seventh women's club championship trophy with the help of third place finisher Elaine McDonnell (left) and runner-up Norma Deeble (second from left).

“Rodger taught me to analyze our figures every which way. So I tried to look at the non-renewals from different angles. I realized that the rain in January and February meant a lot of days when people couldn't play. So maybe they're upset, about that and then at the same time they're hit with their annual renewal fee which makes them even more ticked off. So we changed the renewals to April and May— after they'd gotten some good months of golf in and they were in a good mood. This made a big difference in our renewal rate.”

But the economy and societal changes still took a toll on membership revenue. “Golf wasn't as popular, and there were more clubs now, more competition. So I focused on social memberships.” Kring says he went to places already catering to “the right demographic” for potential members – places like the Los Alamitos Race Track where he met the track's owner, Millie Vessels. “I talked her into a social membership. I told her you can't relax at your own club, too many people asking you questions all the time. She agreed, and then once she came over she brought with her all kinds of social friends who also joined.”

Kring also let the social members play for a greens fee on certain days. “The golf members complained to Rodger. But he backed me up – he told them ‘don't you realize he's keeping dues down for you golf members.’”

Helping Kring sell social memberships was new club secretary Cindy Culpeper. She assumed that role in August 1977 after spending five years at Old Ranch — three as the front desk receptionist and two years as tennis club secretary.

Another of Kring's early ideas was ‘Dean's Derby.’ “When I arrived at Old Ranch, the women seemed to feel they were taken for granted. Technically they weren't

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Winners of the second Dean's Derby were Jim Ream Sr. and Lilly Zimmerman (above).

Winners of the 5th Derby were Les Harris and Ann Diamond, shown right receiving their trophy from tourney director Frank Holland. The last derby drew a crowd of over 400 spectators.



members, but they felt they were – especially the ones writing that monthly check.”

Kring's solution – a nine-hole tournament featuring mixed couples of the ten lowest handicaps for men and women. Teams were drawn – The Male golfer with the lowest handicap was paired with the tenth lowest handicap female golfer. Second low male with ninth low female and so on. Parimutuel betting was set up in the bar with members able to bet on the team they thought would win. All nine teams would start the tenth hole with the men and women alternating shots. Worst score at each hole was eliminated.

It was a huge success although it almost didn't happen. “I must have talked to thirty or forty women before we got anyone who would agree to play.”

That first Derby had about 150 spectators who watched Mike Blum and Helen Wilson pull out a close win. The Derby was so popular that Kring started doing it twice a year. The crowd size grew to over 400 for the fifth derby, won by Les Harris and Anne Diamond.

The Kring tenure produced another mixed event – well, at least for one year. John Deeble, then a high-schooler, remembers that one year his dad Bill was unavailable to play in the club's annual father-son match. So he suggested John play with his mom, Norma. “Yes, she was a club champion, but she was still... my mom. But I wanted to play,” said John. “Then when we arrived all the other guys are there with their dads and I'm there with ... mom. It was embarrassing—until mom started hitting all these long drives right down the middle and we ended up winning it. Then I was probably the proudest kid there.”

Other golf was going on at this time – some of it very good. In June 1977 the club

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1977 champion Mike Blum assists Don Bliss with the 1978 Club Championship jacket, Blum felt Bliss was one of the club's best golfers ever. Bliss' job would soon transfer him back to Missouri where he would earn a spot in that state's Golf Hall of Fame.



Conrad Lopes was once dubbed "the teen with the nice swing" by Honolulu newspapers while leading St. Louis High School to state golf titles in 1959 and 1960. He won the 1979 and 1981 Old Ranch club championships and served on the Board of Governors for a few years.

hosted the local qualifiers for the SoCal Amateur Championship. Don Bliss, who had recently joined Old Ranch, was one of 11 to advance to the SoCal Finals.

The man responsible for bringing these qualifiers to Old Ranch was Head Professional Bob Lovejoy who had become very involved with the SoCal PGA after becoming the club's head pro in 1975.

Lovejoy remembers his ten years at Old Ranch as a wonderful time. "There was so much activity going on, especially early on. Friday smokers would be full. During the summer we'd have 300-plus golfers on a Sunday – and everybody wanted an early time. We finally devised a spreadsheet to keep track and even things out."

"Even Twilight golf would draw 120 men on the links.

Kring had little experience managing a bar, so Lovejoy's responsibilities expanded. "I had no real bar experience either, other than sitting at one on a stool. But I guess I did good because my role on the food side expanded over the next five years. I was even selecting where the company Christmas party would be. That de-



Gathering together to celebrated the club's its 13th anniversary in March 1980 were many of the club's charter members. Seated in front were Dr. Scouter and his wife Ruth. Standing behind him from the left are Maury Cohn, Craig Kennedy, Miriam Cohn, Romer Kennedy, Helen Wilson, Dick and Carol Greer, John Wilson, Gordon and Ruth Sandberg, Betse and Curt Straube, Dean and Theo Kring, Paul and Jackie Southgate, Marge and Van Harris and Don Rafferty.

cision was usually based on a business's quality of chocolate soufflé, which just happened to be Pres Hotchkis' favorite dessert."

One of Lovejoy's early hires was assistant pro Kim Porter who would become very popular before heading on to a successful career as a head pro at Mission Viejo and Mesa Verde and General Manager at the latter.

"Bob hired me in 1976 at the very generous salary of \$600 a month for 65 hours of work per week," laughed Porter. "He also tells me for the first month I would open the course each morning. Golf began at 6:45 but I had to show up by 5:30. That first day when I show up there at 5:30, there are already 30-40 guys there playing cards. The kitchen was open, Irene was serving breakfast and a member, Jack Roberts, walks up to me with a sheet of paper and a list of foursomes and says 'Here are your first seven tee times.'"

Porter remembers the course as always busy. "We averaged around 200 rounds of golf a day so the staff was always looking for ways to speed up play."

"We tried split tees – one group starting at the first and another at the tenth, so you get the course filled up right away. The problem was some groups – like Jack's group – were rabbits. They liked to be first on the course, get their game in and get on with their day. But with the split tees, Jack's group could finish their nine then maybe have to wait 45 minutes or so before they could tee off on the back nine."

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One of the most popular events on the WGA calendar was the annual Eclectic Tournament. Finishing in the first flight in 1978 were Kathy Bransford (6th), Helen Wilson (3rd), Betty Lou Zimmerman (4th), Ginny Cool (1st) Doris Eppler (8th) and Cathy Hutton (2nd).

Porter was paid an extra hundred to manage the scorecards and calculate handicaps. “I was a walking encyclopedia when it came to that. 1,200 scorecards a month, 60,000 rounds a year. I quickly learned who was sandbagging and who wasn’t. Guys would walk around with a cane and end up with an eight. Then came tournament time, gone was the cane and they played a two.”

Kring and Lovejoy both praised the help from the Governing Board.

“Unlike most non-equity clubs, the Bixbys made sure our Board had some input,” recalled Mike Blum. “They also softened the drudge of Board meetings by making sure to serve great meals, especially during the Wayne Ferrell days.”

Blum, who served as Greens Chairman for six years in the 70s and 80s, listed his biggest accomplishments as getting mats on the old driving range (“the tee areas were just worn out dirt at the time”), getting fast-growing trees planted to create an attractive barrier on Lampson (“I think they were Meyer Spruce”), and helping the drainage issues with the concrete ditch that ran across the ninth and first fairways.

Almost any rain still caused flood issues. “There were a couple times you could have floated a yacht down the first fairway (the current driving range),” recalled Kim Porter. “One year we were closed two and a half of the first three months.”

This not only affected membership renewal revenues. “You lost golf fees,” said Blum, “and you also lost cart revenue for several days after each storm. The members kept telling Bixby that the drainage was awful, but their engineers were telling them all the water was coming in from the Navy base and we couldn’t do anything about it. We must have talked about it every Board meeting for a couple years. Finally, the Bixby’s threw me a bone and a few dollars. I got Bill Benkey, a member who was a cement contractor, and then [course superintendent] Tom Coyne put together an eight-person crew. We built that concrete ditch that crossed the 18th, ninth



In May 1978 club pro Bob Lovejoy inspects the damage after strong winds blew over fourteen poles of the chain link fence separating the driving range from Lampson Avenue. Fortunately the fence fell towards the course and away from traffic. 28 trees on the course were also damaged and had to be removed and replaced.

and first fairways and that made a huge difference in the drainage.” Blum is convinced the club more than paid for the investment from the increased cart fees over the years.” The concrete ditch also resulted in a number of local ground rules.

It wasn't just rain that posed a hazard. The night-time dew could also be problematic—especially during prom season. One Sunday morning in the late 1970s when Kim Porter arrived to open the pro shop/course and some early golfers informed him of a new fairway hazard on the back nine. It turns out a young lad had borrowed his dad's brand new white Jaguar for the previous night's prom and perhaps trying to impress his date, he was speeding down Lampson, hit the dip at Candleberry, lost control, jumped the curb, went through the fence just beyond the driving range, and the car kept sliding on the wet grass until it reached the middle of the 12th. Aware that it's bad golf etiquette to leave your jaguar in the field of play, he tried to exit, but the spinning wheels just kept getting the car stuck further in fairway. This being the days before cell phones, he hiked back to an open gas station, found a phone and no doubt reluctantly called his dad to come help him.

When Kim arrived at the 12th, he sees the kid sitting with his hands in his head and his dad pacing back and forth. The rising sun not only showed the Jag's exterior with green scratches from the fence, but it turned out that while the kid was hiking

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In 1978 Tournament chair Kummer (left) congratulates Tom Mahoney for winning the A-flight at the Club Championship tournament, Mahoney would later become the chair of the Board of Governors.



Gere Hege (left) captained the WGA team for many years, including 1980 when the ladies won the WSCGA Southern California Championship. Above, Leigh Israel (right) presents Hege, affectionately dubbed “Mother Duck” by her team, a gift from her grateful ducklings at a team party.

back to find a phone, some opportunistic passersby had seen the car and hurriedly stripped as much of it as they could.

Kim said the cops later estimated the Jaguar’s speed at around 120.

Car hazards on the 12th also occurred during the day. Don DeYoung was lining up shot when a car came barreling down Lampson, lost control at the same hard bend and crashed through the fence and skidded on to the 12th fairway.

DeYoung had another car experience on Old #2 whose tee box was right next to the freeway. DeYoung was part of a foursome when one of his partners was getting ready to tee off and was suddenly interrupted by a car crash next to the tees. DeYoung also recalled a time on the same Hole when one of his golf partners finished his swing and the head of his driver went flying off and onto the freeway.

Blum again captured the 1977 club title, becoming Old Ranch’s first three-time champion. But he considered his successor, 1978 club champ Don Bliss, as one of the club’s best-ever golfers. Bliss, a zero-handicap, would reach the semi-finals of the California Amateur championship in 1979 and was invited to a US Open qualifier in June 1980, but by then Don’s employer transferred him back to Missouri where Bliss would play enough golf to earn a place in the Missouri Golf Hall of Fame.

His departure opened the way for Conrad Lopes, who won the 1979 and 1981 club titles. As a high schooler in Hawaii, Lopes was dubbed “the teen with the nice swing” by Honolulu newspapers while leading St. Louis High School to the state golf titles in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

OLD RANCH AT FIFTY



The success of the Tennis club prompted renovations in 1974 and then in again in 1980. The latter enlarged the snack area, added a dining area, and converted the sloped grass center court seating area to a terraced seating area (shown below). The new facility made its formal public debut with a match between Long Beach State and Pepperdine.



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In 1982 Ed and Amalia (Mali) Kearns, winners of the low gross at the Mr. and Mrs. Tournament, receive their awards from Jack Ewald and Doral Hunter. Mali would later go on to win the womens club championship four times. Dottie McClure, winner of the 1983 Presidents Cup, receives the trophy from WGA President Marce Maurer.

Lopes attended college in Los Angeles, graduating with a law degree from Loyola Marymount in 1969. He joined Old Ranch in the mid-1970s.

Lopes perfected the three-day work-week for his personal injury law practice, (“leaving golf for Wednesdays and Fridays”) and over the next 20 years was a regular on the city championship, club invitational circuit, here and in Hawaii where he continued to participate in a number of tournaments, some with fellow Old Rancher Jerry Hutton. The pair finished second at the Riviera-El Caballero Invitational in 1988.

Over the years, Lopes maintained his game. He reached the championship flight of the Long Beach Amateur Championships in 1999 and in 2014, at age 69 he shot a 66 gross at Virginia Country Club. The second time he had scored less than his age.

While the Club Championship still had the most bragging rights, most agree the annual Member-Guests and the Member-Member tourneys as the most popular.

Kim Porter recalled one Member-Guest which introduced him to the Bixby upper management. Chase Morgan, then the attorney and later President of the Bixby Ranch Company, arrived in a private helicopter that landed on the 15th fairway.

Blum considered the Member-Member as “the highlight of the year. It filled up before you know it, and, of course, the big excitement was in the Net Score.”

Technically, the excitement was in the gambling on the Net score—more specifically, on the Calcutta, an auction in which members bid on golfers in a tournament.

The rules of a Calcutta (which are illegal in many states) vary from club to club, event to event. But generally, before each tournament club members would bid, auc-

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In March 1983 the club hosted the Old Ranch Review, its first members talent show. Shown above are troupe members Eileen Cooper, Jack Fedder, Joyce Clifford and Vic Hamburg. Feder was also the show's director.

tion style, on the golfer or team who they think will win the tournament, or the various flights. Bids could get quite high, and in some cases members would pool their resources and form a syndicate to place their bet. All the money went into a pot with the winnings divided different ways. Sometimes only the top two finishers shared the pot, sometimes the top four places. At Old Ranch it has varied, but the norm seemed to be first place taking 70%, second place 20% and third place 10%.

Members gave differing testimony as to how big the pots got for Old Ranch events. "All I can remember is there was an awful lot of money going there," said Les Harris. Other members recall a few times when strippers were hired to help choose the numbers. But even in years or events when gambling numbers were chosen less exotically, the board with all the betting info was placed above the bar.

At least, it was until the Seal Beach Police Department—reportedly acting on a tip from a disgruntled member or wife, depending on your source—paid an unannounced visit and hauled away the cash and the betting board over some Super Bowl gambling, and said "if gambling like this happens again they'd arrest us."

Most members weren't thrilled by the heavy-handed action ("They could have called and we'd have taken down the board.") But the Bixbys promised to forbid such action on site again. Undaunted, the members took all future Calcutta action off site. The next bidding nights were held at a site in Huntington Beach, then at The Golden Sails Motel and Petroleum Club in Long Beach, the Princess Louise restaurant in



In 1985 the tennis club marked its 15th anniversary and a number of charter members were on hand to help celebrate. (l-r) Maurice Wan, Sadorus Lower, Bill Lower, Nancy Smith, Richard Wigod, Misako Yamazaki, Steve Smith, Myrna Wigod, Siro Yamazaki, Norm Slomann (six time Old Ranch singles tennis champ) and tennis manager Bob Litrich.

San Pedro, and even the Los Alamitos Country Club before it was closed down.

By early 1980 Rodger Karrenbrock had left the Bixby Ranch Company and Kring found himself at odds with a Bixby executive's plan to put a new dining room over the tennis facility.

"I told him "Look at my books! Tennis players aren't big eaters or big drinkers. Plus, a dining room at the Tennis Club would take business from the golf clubhouse."

It was a valid point but the Bixby executive was company President Pres Hotchkis who preferred tennis to golf, and apparently didn't like having to cross the street to eat while in sweaty tennis clothes.

Ultimately, Kring's arguments and passion seems to have won the battle but lost the war. Bixby didn't build the dining facility over the tennis club (although they did remodel and expand the existing clubhouse) but they gave Kring his notice. (Kring soon after landed the General Manager job at Mission Viejo Country Club and hired Old Ranch assistant pro Kim Porter to be his club pro.)

Technically, Bixby Ranch Company construction executive Stu Honeyman served as interim General Manager into the summer, but it was Litrich who was again the real interim GM with Lovejoy continuing to manage the club golf and bar operations. Honeyman focused on the clubhouse remodeling which was completed in late summer. The makeover included "new interior design of the dining room, new carpets, draperies, lighting, bar stools, pro shop and parkway entrance."

Over the next few years a new management team fell into place at Bixby. Tim King became the Company's Chief Financial Officer and the liaison with Old Ranch

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Soon after Old Ranch got its first big screen TV in the bar, members gathered to watch the 1982 Super Bowl pitting the San Francisco 49ers against the Cincinnati Bengals. The Niners won, apparently much to the pleasure of the staff who put up a number of pro-49ers banners.

for the next 24 years. Bixby attorney Chase Morgan would assume the role of company President. And Ron Bradshaw came on board to oversee development of the company's unimproved real estate parcels. Some of those unimproved lots around Old Ranch would dramatically affect the future of the golf club.

Harry Davis replaced Kring as the club's new General Manager. Davis had been a 20-year man in the Marines, primarily assigned to R&R stations in Europe and the Pacific. After the service he managed a club in San Diego then headed up to Long Beach to run the Virginia Country Club.

Old-timers have mixed memories of Davis. His reserved "stay in the back room" style was a dramatic change from the very social Ferrell and Kring. But that seemed to be exactly what the Bixbys wanted.

Mike Blum and Bob Lovejoy are effusive in their praise of Davis. Both also described the former Marine as no-nonsense and tough as nails.

"He was a prince," said Lovejoy, a former marine who felt Davis' military background was a plus. "He knew how leadership worked. He tried to inspire you, not threaten you. But if you messed up he let you know."

Early on Davis simplified Lovejoy's duties. "After a tournament, he saw me trying to handle the scoring and the bar at the same time. The bar was going crazy and he says flat out 'You can't do this anymore.' And he went out and hired a bar manager."

In his first year, Davis also re-hired the club's original chef Heinz Reuter, a very popular move. He also expanded Bingo activities and started a party Bridge Night

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The Guys and Dolls Tournament continued to be one of the more popular at the club. In 1982, the championship trophies are presented by tourney co-chairs Jack Ewald and Jim MacLeod (far left) and Harold Hall (far right) to Dee Ross, Don Hall, Helen Wilson and Don Welker.

and Wednesday Night family Dinner, both featuring special dinners by Chef Heinz.

And, according to Bob Lovejoy, Davis was instrumental in establishing an associate membership for the widows of former members. "This had been the center of their social life. What Harry did, gave them free membership for 12 months then continued membership at a reduced fee."

About this same time, the Tennis Club finished their renovations and 200 people attended an Open House and enjoyed the new terraced seating on Court No. 1 as the tennis teams from Pepperdine and Long Beach State put on a great match.

Many of the former staff say at this time the tennis operation was more active than the golf part. "Tennis was running full speed when I came aboard," said long-time club golf pro Bob Silver. "Litrich really had it going."

Future women's golf champ Lisa Mulvaney was 16-year old Lisa Hall when her parents moved from Connecticut in 1976 and joined the tennis club. "We had played back east and joined the club and I walked on as the No. 1 girls tennis player at Los Alamitos High School. By 1980 she was a senior at Long Beach state, playing for coach Robin Kahn who was an assistant pro at Old Ranch. "So I would not only play at Old Ranch with my parents, our team practiced there and had matches there. I just remember the club as being a real active place. Very, very social."

Mulvaney had a inside view of the operation. Her mom, Pat Hall, chaired the Tennis Board for a couple years.

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The 1980 WGA team won the WSCGA team championship rallying from 10 strokes down to win their final match by a 39-stroke victory. (front, l-r) Betse Straub, Kay Maggio, Elaine McDonnell, Kathy Bransford, Kathy Hutton; Middle: Norma Deeble, Betty Lou Zimmerman, Gery Hege, Betty Sichel, Margie Horn, Barbara Harris; Standing, back) Ginny Cool, Helen Wilson, Mae Dynes, Carol Rafferty, Anne Diamond.



In October 1980 the Women's Golf team captured the 60-team Women's Southern California Golf Association title. The Old Ranch team had the lowest-handicapped team in WSCGA history to that time, and had to surrender 50 strokes to perennial champ Victoria Country Club of San Diego for the two-match home and home championship set. After playing the first meeting on the road, they found themselves down ten strokes – not unexpected as the home team, naturally very familiar with their home course, usually won a WSCGA match. The key question was how many strokes you won by. Back at Old Ranch on October 31, the Blue and White machine rallied to win by 39 strokes and capture their first team title. The squad which was led by former club champs Betse Straub, Norma Deeble, and Anne Diamond along with Helen Wilson and captained by Geri Hege, “the Mother Hen.”

The WGA correspondent noted that new GM Davis hosted a “celebration to be remembered: champagne until you could no longer feel the bubbles.”

In late 1981 the club purchased a large screen projection TV just in time for members to watch the 1982 49ers-Bengals Super-Bowl game. It was a very crowded affair with a crowd biased towards the 49ers.

In April 1981 Bob Lovejoy was elected President of the SoCal Professional Golfers Association. His additional duties there—including the inaugural banquet of the new SoCal PGA Hall of Fame at Old Ranch—meant he would need more help with his other Old Ranch responsibilities, so he hired Bob Silver as his top assistant pro. Silver would be a key figure at the club over the next two decades.

Silver came over from the Los Alamitos Country Club where he had been an assistant pro under the local legend Frank Cormaci. “It wasn't by any stretch a real



Sue Ewart (center) won her first Old Ranch women's championship in 1985. She would be victorious ten times over the next eleven years before stepping back to take the job as the golf coach at Long Beach State and a USGA golf official. She is shown above (center) after winning the 1987 club title. Mae Dynes (left) was third and Betty Pfahler (right) was second.

Country Club, but it definitely had character,” joked Silver. “Being next to the race track, it attracted guys who loved to gamble on their golf – among them Evel Knevel and former boxing great Joe Louis. Cormaci was one of the great teaching pros – he was at Meadowlark before taking the Los Al job. When I worked for him, by noon he was always being called over by the owner Millie Vessels to have a drink with them at the track. So I was giving his afternoon lessons, and running the business side most of the day. It was great experience.”

Silver was very serious about his new duties at Old Ranch. Upon being hired he went to the hallway which then had a photo of every single club member. Within a few days he had memorized the face and name of every club golfer.

But at times some of his research was lacking. “When I first came to Old Ranch, there had been some past relationships between members not married to each other—it was the 70s—but I was new, and didn’t know all this. So I booked a couples foursome tournament and paired up two couples where the wife in one couple had an affair with the husband of the other couple.

“Bob Lovejoy comes in and gives me the backstory and says ‘You booked it, you handle it.’” With trepidation, Silver approached the aggrieved husband who told him not to worry. They had worked it out some time before. Still, Bob was relieved when the other couple didn’t show up that day.

Silver wasn’t the only employee to make Lovejoy’s job more challenging. Current member Todd Pollard, remembers a time when he was working as a cartboy. Part of that job included vacuuming the pro shop at the end of the day. “The shop had that big picture window as part of its ceiling. While we were doing the clean-up a wanna-

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Dressed up for the 1987 New Year's Eve dance were Ewing and Gerrie Turner (left) and Yvonne and Harold Hall.



A train of interested members watched the final round of the 1987 club championship which was won by Dennis Iden.

be assistant pro starts bragging about his form, and grabs a club and takes a hard swing. The club slips out of his hand and heads straight up and hits the ceiling window, which shattered and dropped all over the shop. We all ditch out of there, sure we're going to get fired. The wanna-be pro did, but the rest of us survived the cut."

Much of Silver's work at Old Ranch came through Lovejoy's PGA connections—especially the increased number of PGA events at the club. "We hosted USGA Senior Open sectional qualifying for roughly 10 years. The first year I worked we had 55 players, ten years later it was 180 players with practice rounds." Eventually, it became too much to handle and the senior qualifiers moved to Mesa Verde Country Club.

In the late 70s and early 80s, electric golf carts became more and more popular.



In 1987 Old Ranch celebrated its 20th anniversary, Slicing up the anniversary cake at the club's birthday gala were General Manager Harry Davis, charter member Maury Cohn, newest member David Nell and Board Chairman Lou Laphorne.

Norm Gordon remembers lots of members buying their own, some from Bernie Solomon, a member who was a successful builder who started a sideline golf cart business. "God, Bernie did so many things and then he started selling those automated carts. I thought they were the greatest thing but within a year most of them were probably given away. There were crazy problems with those." More than one member story ends with an automated cart ending up in a lake.

Nonetheless, the mid-1980s saw some of the best golf in the club's history. On the women's side Betse Straub captured her 10th, 11th and 12th club championships in 1981, 1983 and 1984. Norma Deeble won in 1982 but in 1985 a new lady sheriff of the WGA arrived in town: Sue Ewart captured her first of ten championships in 11 years. Only Gayle Jenkins 1991 victory interrupted the streak.

Bob Silver says Sue Ewart (Sue Bennett before her marriage) was the best woman golfer he ever saw at the club. He first met her when she worked on the driving range at the old Los Alamitos Course. In 1974 she was one of the key members of a championship Los Alamitos High golf team that also included future UCLA and pro golfer Chuck White and future state JC champ Barry Sher.

Ewart attended Long Beach State and while there she won three straight Long Beach Women's City Championship in 1977-78-79.

She played on the LPGA Tour in 1981-82. She regained her amateur status and



Dennis Murphy won four Old Ranch club championships. He started at the club as a teaching pro in 1972. After a brief stint on the pro circuit he regained his amateur standing and won club titles in 1984, 1987, 1990 and 1991.



Dennis Iden was another former pro who regained amateur status and then won Old Ranch golf titles. A golf salesman by profession he became familiar with the club during his sales stops. After joining, he won club titles in 1985 and 1986.

after her marriage to Bob Ewart, Sue began her run at Old Ranch in 1985.

On the men's side, the early 80s saw titles won by Pete Sanchez, Conrad Lopes, and long-hitting Mike Higgins before Mike Blum rallied for his fourth club title in 1983.

In 1984 Dennis Murphy—who 12 years before had been a teaching pro at Old Ranch—won the first of four club championships, and became a club legend in the process. “Dennis Murphy was a great golfer,” said Barry Sher. “And he was even better when he was drinking,” an opinion echoed by many Old Ranch old-timers.

Murphy once held course records at four different clubs. As a junior golfer he made a name for himself as a 13-year old prodigy playing out of Meadowlark, then Huntington Beach High School and winning the state junior golf championship in 1956 and 57. In 1956 he advanced to the National Junior tournament where one of the finalists was a kid from Columbus, Ohio named Jack Nicklaus.

Murphy was the state junior college golf champ while at Orange Coast College and was a star at Fresno State before trying the pro circuit for a few years. He began to teach at Meadowlark and in 1972 he became a teaching pro at Old Ranch. He soon regained his amateur status and joined Old Ranch as a member.

Bob Silver remembers that as Murphy got older he would get so nervous on his putts that he couldn't play without a drink. “He'd get the yips. But give him a beer and he was fine.”

Silver laughingly remembered one club champions match at Newport. The

THE SECOND DECADE



Pete Sanchez was not the biggest of players, but as one member stated, “he could hit the crap out of the ball.” Sanchez, a 3-handicap for many years, captured the 1980 club championship.



The 1986 Club Youth Champion was Vivian Overturf who also shot a record setting 67 on the first day of play. After graduating from Ocean View High School, Vivian went on to play for San Diego State.

match was starting and Silver was in the cart waiting, and finally Dennis comes running up late—he was always late—and he was out of breath. Dennis gets ready to light up a cigarette, but the caddy says ‘Sorry, sir, no smoking on the course.’

“OK, well, just let me run and get a six-pack.”

“Sorry sir, no drinking on the course.”

Silver finished by saying “Dennis didn’t do well that day.”

In 1986, Dennis Iden, another former pro who had regained his amateur status won the first of his two club championship titles. Iden grew up in Chicago and achieved success at the junior and collegiate levels. He also earned money as a much in demand caddy at a club whose membership included some colorful gangsters. John Tate said Iden once told him when he showed up late for a caddy session and explained the streetcars were running late, the gangster pulled out a wad of large bills, peeled off a number of them and gruffly told the young kid to “go buy yourself a car.”

Iden became a golf equipment salesman in Florida and Texas. At the latter he worked with golf legend Ben Hogan, a job with its own perils. The sales force often played with the elderly golfing legend, and all were under orders to never make the boss look bad or have to wait – at the risk losing their jobs. Making the situation more treacherous, another salesman let Iden know that Hogan’s putting had become so bad by that stage of his life, just watching it could give the younger golfers their own case of the yips so concede any second putts for Hogan. Armed with this



Jim Ream, who won the first of his 11 club championships in 1989, was the club's dominant golfer on the men's side throughout the 1990s.



The Skins Game, a made-for-TV golf event, made its debut in 1983. In 1988 Old Ranch hosted its first Skins game tournament. Taking home first place in that initial tourney were Mike Higgins and Jerry Hutton.

knowledge and warnings, when one of Hogan's putts came up eight feet short, Iden conceded it.

After moving to Southern California, Iden would frequently stop at Old Ranch on his way from his downtown LA office to his home in Irvine. "The freeways would be crowded so Dennis would always stop in and try to sell me whatever product he was pushing at the time," said Bob Silver. "Then one day he said 'you guys got a real nice course here.' So he joined and instead of talking to me when he got here, he shot 18 holes."

Iden eventually left the club when his job no longer required him to travel up to Los Angeles all the time, but in his ten years at Old Ranch he won two club titles, two senior titles and three Member-Members (often teaming with Mike Blum), and spent a few years on the Board as well. He also qualified to play in four U.S. Senior Opens (finishing 42nd in 1987), all as an amateur.

Another golfer who made his way onto the Old Ranch scene in the early 1980s was Dr. Mauricio (Mo) Heilbron, a well-known heart surgeon (and acknowledged bullet wound expert), who seems to have replaced Tom Brett as the club's alpha-male / sandbagger, a role Heilbron seemingly cultivated and encouraged.

Over the years Heilbron won many tournaments—Governors Cup, Partners Better Ball (with Ted Pollard), the Member-Guest (with Peter Levine of Palos Verdes), and the Member-Member (with John Lucas). His wins—and conveniently high handicap—drew anger from some mem-



Friends in the card room and friends in the dining room were Leo Birnbaum, Ben Baines and Leo Imperiale. For many years Ben was chair of the club's social committee and in this photo he shows some of the social skills he learned to long-time waitresses Evicka Miranda and Mary Warrington.

bers. Said Barry Sher, "Guys were upset with Mo because he won, but he won because he never choked."

Mike Joseph agreed. "Mo once told me 'pressure is when you have a heart wide open and you can't stop the bleeding. A golf game is nothing.'"

Many people remember that Heilbron seemed driven to win. But Sher quickly adds, "What people don't remember is he never took any money he won home. He gave huge tips to the staff, and the rest he spent in the bar, buying drinks for everyone."

Heilbron's off-course talents benefitted many an Old Ranch member.

"He saved my life," said Mike Joseph. "We were playing golf and he saw me walking funny and said you need that checked out ...now! It turned out to be a tumor in my brain. He did the surgery and years later, I'm still here."

Todd Pollard, John Ward, Barry Sher and many others have their "How Mo helped" stories. "If a member looked sickly, Heilbron got them hooked up with the right doctor, sometimes driving a cart over to where another doctor (like Panos Marmarelis) was playing. If a member had surgery Heilbron dropped in afterwards and made sure they got the right care, sometimes making his signature and other writing so indecipherable, the hospital wouldn't be able to figure out who to bill.

One time Heilbron did heart surgery on another club member, Bob Phillips. Soon Phillips was on his feet, better than ever. A year later, while playing in a foursome, the pair got in a heated argument until Heilbron finally said, "I should have let you die on the operating table." After the round, the pair were buying each other drinks in the clubhouse.

Heilbron not only helped members, he helped staff. In 1982, when Booker T. Ash-

OLD RANCH AT FIFTY



Dr. Maurice (Mo) Heilbron was one of the club's more controversial members. Left undisputed were his abilities as a golfer. In 1987 he won the Governors Cup, the Member-Guest and the Member-Member.



Gene Wray brought home the 1982 Governors Cup Trophy

ford, a 15-year employee at Old Ranch died, Heilbron organized a golf tournament with proceeds going to his widow. Lupe Torres recalled many other instances of help and generosity from Mo towards staff workers.

Mo was also a fixture in the card room—which stayed busy through the 1980s with new regulars joining the old. Barry Sher remembers that whenever he finished his afternoon round of golf, there was always the same guys in the card room – “Bob Bonin, Sandy Baines and Ben Baines, Leo Imperiale (who owned Tile World), and Dave Freeman who owned a computer store. Ted Conlin was in there all the time as well.” Others frequently cite Larry Mastro and Danny Fromdahl.

“There would usually be about 8-10 guys playing cards when I’d arrive at the club,” said Sher. “By late afternoon there might be 12. If they weren’t playing Gin, it would be Stoop or Acey-Deucey. That got into some serious money, real crazy.”

Judge Gordon remembers Baron Lane playing gin with that group. “We had a group that golfed on Wednesday, Thursday and Sundays. Same group all the time. Then afterwards Baron would go play cards with the other group – and always have 4-6 Crown Royals on the rocks.

“The rule was that whoever won at cards, picked up the bar tab. Leo Imperiale would get so mad, because Baron had so many Crown Royals on the bill, by the time the winner paid off, the bar tab was more than the winnings.”

THE SECOND DECADE



Entertainment at the WGA 2-day Member-Guest got more extravagant each year. By the late 1980s the “Ranchettes” were making regular appearances during the post-golf luncheons. Show above in 1988 are (l-r) Sylvia Duncan, Jeanne Leonard, Marie Hall, Teresa Nichols, Betty Pfahler, Gerrie Turner and Delores Movius.

By 1989 a new golfing force was on the scene. Jim Ream, Jr. had almost grown up on the course – his dad, Jim Ream Sr. had won the senior title in 1986. In 1989 Ream junior won the club championship, the first of 11 he would win. He would also add a few Member-Guest, Member-Member and Couples titles to the mix as well – in between taking a shot at the pro tour. Bob Silver remembers Ream using that big hook in his drive to great advantage on the Old Ranch course.

Club operations seemed to be on auto-pilot for the second half of the Davis tenure which ended in 1989. Part of this was due to changes within the Bixby Ranch Company itself. By the late 1980s the family had decided to begin an orderly process to sell off the existing company assets either right now, or to improve them for future sale at a better profit.

It was decided to improve the golf course and its surrounding property before putting it up for sale, especially now that to the north, the military air base’s lease on the 120-acre parcel of land that they used for a “crash zone” had just ended and the land was reverting back to Bixby Ranch Company.

But societal changes were also effecting the entire golf club industry. The club median age was getting older, and member usage was decreasing. All these meant decreasing revenues. Plus, there was now far more competition for family time.

“When I first started, the club was *the* recreation activity for a family,” said Bob

OLD RANCH AT FIFTY



In 1988, Ed Barbari, a charter member, shot his age — a 76 .



Big winners at the 1987 Halloween party were Joe Rodgers as Dracula and Laura Reed as the Cowardly Lion.

Lovejoy. “There was some Little League baseball and Pop Warner football, but in the late 1970s youth sports exploded. Softball, AYSO soccer and youth basketball started growing.” Then all-star seasons grew longer and sports became year-round. AYSO became known as All Your Saturdays Occupied, then club teams grew, and Fall Ball and Volleyball starting to become a big thing – and dance and gymnastics where Mary Lou Retton and the Olympics team turned that into a huge deal.

Fewer young parents golfed on weekends – they were too busy driving their kids to a sporting event. Or they were home watching the growing number of sports on TV especially after ESPN made its 1979 debut on the still small universe of cable television. In 1970 a Southern California family had eight television channels airing new programming. By 1985 there were 19 and by 1990 it was 35. All these new 24-hour networks were competing with Old Ranch for the leisure time dollar.

In addition, the club was getting worn out. Shirley Barto remembers things being especially bad in the bar. “When they first expanded the bar area they didn’t do the best construction. So by the mid-1980s the floor was sagging. Sometimes you’d walk over it and it’d give and you felt like you might be falling into the cart room.”

Since they had to do construction, they might as well do a lot of it at once.

In mid-1988 Tim King hired a firm, HCI, Inc. of Laguna Niguel, to assess Old Ranch’s challenges. One of the principals of HCI was Bill Elvins.

Elvins had managed clubs all over the country but in California he focused on renovating and reviving clubs going through a down cycle – among them Rancho Santa Fe and three clubs in the Palm Springs area -- Soboba, Marrakech and Vintage.

Elvins and HCI suggested some significant improvements which the Bixby Ranch



The pro shop crew in 1989 consisted in part of (l-r) head pro Bob Silver, first assistant pro Pete Wilman, Kris Olsen and cart shop director Greg Sorteberg. Olsen, the LPGA pro and the shop's women's clothing buyer, was with the club from 1985 through the shutdown for renovation in 1999. She replaced another LPGA pro, Doris Earls.

Company adopted. Phase One involved renovation of the locker rooms, pro shop and card and billiard rooms. Construction began in October with the work crews and pro shop setting up temporary quarters in mobile units. The clubhouse exterior and the food and bar areas would begin the following Spring.

About this same time, early 1989, Tim King says he had already decided to hire a new club manager and had been reaching out to other club managers for suggestions. "Then one day I was told by the guy who ran the Los Angeles Country Club... "you should consider Elvins – he has everything you want."

King realized the guy was right. "The timing was good," Elvins remembers. "I was getting tired of traveling, and Old Ranch was only a half hour drive from my home in Dana Point.

Elvins continued overseeing the full clubhouse remodel which began in February with a full shutdown of all food and beverage operations through May, and officially started his General Manager duties when the clubhouse reopened in May 1989.

"I thought I'd do it for three, maybe four years then retire. I ended up doing it for fifteen."

OLD RANCH AT FIFTY



Jack and Marie Nessley. Marie was a frequent performer in the WGA's Fractured Fashions shows.



Stoy and Sylvia Duncan. Stoy was known for being an early golfer who prided himself on being the first one at the club on a Saturday morning, until Bob Blanchard took it upon himself to always arrive five minutes before Stoy -- and to also hide the newspaper.



A winner in her very first tournament was Charlotte Sanders who with husband Wayne won the 1st Flight at the 1989 Mr and Mrs Tournament



Dave Scott won the club championship in 1988 but his wife Linda got her own bragging rights by getting the family's first hole in one. Dave had been golfing over 40 years without an ace, and Linda sunk one in her first year. Dave eventually got a few of his own, including one at Old Ranch in 2008.