

## CHAPTER 6

# OLD RANCH TODAY

Ryan Panichpakdee (understandably known to most as Ryan Panich) joined Old Ranch in 2014 and won the club championships in 2015, 2016 and 2017. He was no stranger to the course. His parents, Prayouth (Pete) and Ku, joined the club in the 1990s and Ryan often played the old and new courses en route to becoming a league champion golfer first at Wilson High School, then Long Beach State. Ryan qualified for the pro tour in 2010 but after a few years he stepped back into the amateur world.

Ryan collected some Member-Member and Member-Guest titles at Old Ranch and even set a course record 63, a record soon broken by his frequent guest, Lucas Lee. Lee was a UCLA All-American and still is on the pro tour, current pro. When playing with Ryan in 2015, Lucas destroyed the Old Ranch course, playing 18 holes in a record 59.

Another former pro golfer, Eunice Cho, also joined Old Ranch in 2014. She won WGA club titles in 2015, 2016, and 2017. Cho has also shared the Member-Member titles and won four straight Betse Straub titles with Christina Hardy and also took home the 2017 couples championship trophy with her husband Brian.

Eunice was a golf star at Laguna Hills High then UCLA, finishing third in the Pac-10 Individual Championships in 1997. After a few years on the Ladies Pro Mini-Tour she decided the touring life wasn't for her, and became an assistant club pro at Shady Canyon Golf Course in Irvine. "I was always in charge of the ladies tournaments and buying the tee prizes. While on a green one day I saw something sparkly and it hit me, a sparkly pretty ball marker would be a great tee prize." That led to her forming Bonjoc in 2005 to manufacture and market her line of sparkly ball markers (using Swarovski crystals). The success of her line of golf ball bling allowed her to leave her pro duties behind and spend more of her time with her family.

She and Brian live in Redondo Beach, but they joined Old Ranch because it "is a

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Ryan Panichpakdee won club championships began playing the Old Ranch course at age 12 when his parents joined. After a few years trying the pro tour Ryan stepped back, joined Old Ranch in 2014 and won the club titles in 2015, 2016 and 2017.



Eunice Cho, a former pro on the LPGA mini-tour, also joined Old Ranch in 2014. She won club championships in 2014, 2015 and 2016 and other club titles as well, including the 2017 Club Couples championship with her husband Brian.

fun place to play. I love the clubhouse, it's kid-friendly, and everything is convenient.”

Making things family friendly and convenient was a big focus of the new Sequoia management when it took over in late 2013. To run the club Sequoia hired Frank Herrera as Old Ranch's eighth General Manager. Herrera, a native of Redondo Beach, had been GM at Los Coyotes Country Club, and immediately earned the respect of Old Ranch club members.

One of his biggest fans was Arnie Wilkins, who was still Chairman of the Board of Governors. “I thought Ken Kelley did a great job, especially in holding and growing memberships. But Frank and Sequoia took it to another level, especially Frank's his attention to detail regarding membership and property improvements.”

Another big fan of the new operators is Bev Sawrey who flatly affirmed “the course management now is the best it's ever been.”

One of Herrera's key hires was course superintendent Terry Vassey who brought with him a PhD degree from the University of Missouri in Agronomy and Plant Physiology and Bio-Chemistry . Vassey was also been a professor at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo's Environmental Science program.

The course was soon sprinkled with new grasses and shrubs “to create a more interesting look through variations and tiers of height and different textures.” Old



Terry Vassey took over the Old Ranch Course Superintendent role in 2014. To improve the course's natural sustainability, he established the bluebird houses, in association with the WGA. Bluebirds eat insects which do damage to the course and also help propagate the plants in the boundary areas.



Vic Placeres oversees the pro shop staff of six and the locker room and cart barn staffs as well. These days Placeres relies on the staff more than ever since he was recently elected as the President of the Southern California Pro Golfers Association. .

Ranch also began working with environmental groups to create “living habitats” in out-of-play areas that could naturally sustain themselves. Longer grasses near the lakes would also help filter out the downhill drainage of the chemicals used on the golf course to keep the course at a quality acceptable to the membership.

Another introduction were the Bluebird birdhouses found throughout the course. Bluebirds not only feed on insects which can damage the golf course, they help naturally pollinate and propagate the plants in the out of bounds areas. The bird houses are maintained with the help of the WGA. “That’s been fun,” noted Sawrey, “and the women took pride in watching their birdhouses.”

Each day the Old Ranch maintenance crew of over 20 is up before sunrise to start the day’s course work, beginning with the greens. The mowers start at 5 a.m. with a goal of being done by 8:30. Using helical blades (“less damage to the grass blade which keeps it greener”) greens are cut to a height of just over .100 (1/10th of an inch). Championship courses are able to tolerate a level .095. a 1/200th of an inch difference.)

The 18 holes and practice putting and chipping areas are divided among four crews. The mowing order is determined by which gets played first. Then the 31 traps are raked by hand, and after that there is always enough repair and replanting, trimming and thinning of the rest of the landscaping to keep the crews busy the rest of

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the day. And time has to be set aside for special events like the Cowboy Campouts.

While the crews are mowing, the rest of the Old Ranch staff shifts into gear. Vic Placeres' pro staff—Shaun, John, Shingo, Zach, Char and David—are organizing the day's start times, restocking the pro shop, and planning out future tournaments and lesson schedules. With his recent election as President of the Metropolitan Chapter of the SoCal PGA, Vic relies on his staff more than ever.

Inside the snack shack Alfredo and Leo prepare for the morning rush which often doesn't give them time to prepare. "Sometimes we are walking down the stairs at 6am and there is already a line of six or seven golfers," said Leobardo. But within minutes they are turning out their breakfast burritos, tuna cups and the big favorite, their English muffins. On weekends, Karlie sets out with her loaded cart at 6:30 and begins making the rounds.

The dining room kitchen staff does the same. Lupe and Dina have the locker rooms ready, while in the cart barn, the vehicles are unplugged and rolled out to the waiting area. Bob Blanchard is no doubt hard at work on his next prank while Ed Robinson is perhaps pondering what his next newsletter would say if Lynda would let him write it.

By mid-day Renee is talking to potential members and Kathleen is showing Old Ranch's many banquet and catering amenities to a bride-to-be or a nervous assistant in charge of the next company banquet. Between appointments Kathleen and Felicia are planning for the January bridal show. On weekends they are making sure the 100 weddings or so go off without a hitch. In this they get help from long time staffer, Veronica Moody who works with the bridal parties. "The photographers are the big



The John Hall Cup requires a good-looking, snazzy crew of tournament officials. Filling the bill in 2014 were pro staff members Shingo Matsuo, Jason Overly, Mike Miles, Head Pro Vic Placeres and Shaun Hashimoto. Overly left the club in late summer 2017 and Miles, who earned a spot in the 1987 US Open and been a former teaching pro at Virginia CC as well as a high finisher at many senior tournaments, soon left to run golf at a Florida club.



Ryan Panich wasn't the only men's champ at Old Ranch in 2017. The Seniors title was won by (l-r) Glen Dejong (gross), Bill Madrid (net) and Ed Copelin captured the Super Senior title. Not pictured is Governors Cup repeat winner, Igor Suvorov.



Joining Eunice Cho (left, white hat) in receiving some WGA Championship love and flowers were Jeanette Nowlin who won her fifth straight Senior Champion trophy and Carla Watson became the club's third Super-Senior Champ, following previous winners Terrill Smith and Marilyn Hull.

challenge. They always want to shots of the bride and groom by the greens because it looks so good. So we're always making sure they don't actually step on the greens in their shoes and cause the golfers or the guys in the pro shop to go nuts."

In the back, Operations Manager Chad St. John huddles with Chef Mike and Food and Beverage Director James Poper to figure out how to top the spectacularly successful Friday Chop House or even coming up with totally new events. like Summer Solstice Celebration, or a post-aeration Welcome Back Pig-Out).

Under Herrera, the club staff is always ready to help members—be it Helen Wilson and the Friday bridge group; or Marie Nessley, Sylvia Duncan, Marilyn Hull,

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Although the Mulligans group numbers over 20 members, organizer/MFIC Ed Robinson strictly limits a days play to ten golfers. Here are some of them. (seated, front) Don McEntee, Bob Barth, David Gayl; (standing, rear) Kevin Vest, Robert Vogeli, Ed Robinson (MFIC), Jim Cantrell, Steve Grove, Darrell Younger, Norm Huffaker.

and Carol Burgner and their weekly Wednesday afternoon get-together now going on some 20 years. The staff is also ready to help Paul and Sue Liles with their dance groups, or the Hernandez, Hardin and McGuire families and all the others partaking the Chop House nights.

But golf is still the primary focal point of the club and Panich and Cho aren't the only champions. On the men's side Igor Suvarov has won the past two Governors Cup, and the 2017 Seniors Championship was won by Clayton Dejong (gross) and Bill

There have always been unofficial golf groups at Old Ranch – but they seem to have proliferated in recent years, at least according to one of the club's designated true characters -- Ed (Smooth Swing) Robinson.

“The Internationals,” a Saturday morning crew formed by Jerry Cline during the Renovation-imposed exile to Los Coyotes in 2000-2001, has grown even larger under the leadership and incredibly accurate scorecard calculations of Dan Knobloch who is still wondering how he was tricked into taking over the organizing duties.

Robinson himself heads up the Mulligans — men allegedly “of great moral fiber and utmost integrity” which places greater importance on high-quality conversation over low golf scores and permits their namesake “do-overs” when one is celebrating a birthday, an anniversary or even minimal success in the sexual performance arena (we are paraphrasing Mr. Robinson's more colorful description.) Even though the



The Queen of the Members Grill, Allison Lansdale (seated front), with her court of Friday Member-Mixer golfers. (second row) Dick Stevenson, Bill Turner, Tom Curran, Brian Lindsey, Felix Wilson, Barry Hartwyk, Andrew Walker, Darrell Wilson, Mike Mokler; (back row) Dr. Bill Madrid, Mike Pepper, Dan Regan, Andy Griffith, Rick Streelman, Jon Worden, Tim Dewese, Ned Ligenza.

group's email list numbers over 20, self-proclaimed "MFIC" Robinson and his assistants strictly enforce a first-come first serve limit of 10 golfers on any one Wednesday or Friday. Among the Mulligans frequent golfers are Perry Watson, Norm Huffaker, Darrell Younger, Daryl Phillips, David Gayl, Steve Grove, Don McEntee, Bob Barth, John Schulte, Mike Baghramian, Rick Mort, Robert Vogeli, John Trapani, Frank Hardy, Kevin Vest, Jim Cantrell, Glenn Rabenn, Leroy Williams, Arnie Wilkins, Bob Conway, Alan Griffith and Jack Irvin. and Dr. Dick Egan (whose daughter Susan has played the lead on Broadway's "Beauty and the Beast," "Thoroughly Modern Millie" and "Cabaret," and had a quite successful cabaret singing career as well.)

Since 1987 an informal fraternity of wine aficionados has topped off their Friday afternoon round with a selection of favorite vintages. "At first it was just Dave Olszewski, Steve Pearce and myself," said Rich Foster. "And then it grew to eight. We didn't want to play for money so we decided to play for who pays for wine. That's when we learned that some of the guys like some real good wine." The 19th Hole gathering has now become an elegant white-tablecloth affair on the terrace efficiently overseen by Allison. The golf and grape gourmands usually will include organizers Olszewski, Pearce, and Foster as well as Bill Shelton, Steve Yamaguchi, John Morrison, Kevin Falsken, Jack Scharringhausen, Dr. Naz Tejani, and Collie Conoley.

Another regular Wednesday morning group is the Hoff group, a more clandestine



(Left) 2017 WGA Member-Guest “it’s Five O’Clock Somewhere” paid homage to Jimmy Buffett’s world of margaritaville and parrotheads. (Right) After the passing of beloved member (and avid golf show collector) Kathy Andross, her husband and the WGA honored her with a perpetual trophy (the “Walk in Her Shoes” Kathy Andross Memorial Trophy) that will have the names of each year’s Individual Eclectic Champion.

cabal formed by Jim Hofheinz and whose foursomes might include Danny Fromdahl, Ted Pollard, Bruce Patterson, Larry Shaver or Steve Prochnow.

The real serious golfers come out for the Friday afternoon Member-Mixer. Regular participants include Jerry Hutton, John Ward, John Holmquist, Tim Deweese, Gary Lindsley, Andrew Griffiths, Brian Lindsay, Tom Curran, Andy Walker, Todd Weatherly, Steve Jones, Ned Ligenza, Bill Criss, Eric Thompson, Felix Wilson, Rich Streeleman, Jason Carrico, Ned Ligenza, Barry Hartwyk and Bill Turner. After the rounds, the group’s unofficial *major domo*, Jon Worden, tries to make sense of the scorecards in the Members Grill while the others keep the drinks and stories flowing while enjoying Allison’s cheerfully unique service and the refreshments prepared by Arturo, Shannon or Jose.

The biggest golf group of all is still the WGA – whose members still meet on the First and Fourth Tuesdays of each month. This year’s WGA Member-Guest tourney, “It’s Five O’Clock Somewhere” have a special nod to parrotheads and Margaritaville with Hawaiian apparel and live parrots available for the photo booths. .

2018 will see a change in the WGA’s event calendar to honor their beloved member Kathy Andross who recently passed away. Kathy was an avid golfer, shoe col-





When one-time member and popular former club pro John Hall, passed away in 2012 the members organized the John Hall Cup in his honor. It quickly became one of the more popular tournaments on the club calendar. The first tournament in 2013 pitted two teams in a Ryder Cup style format. Eight teams competed in 2016. Shown above is the winning team in 2016.

lector and overall fun person to be around. When her husband Frank, known to most as “Chip,” convinced Kathy to take up golf in 2003, he “created a monster.” She got very involved with the WGA and even moreso with her golf shoe collection which soon numbered over 100 pairs. In 2016, Kathy sadly lost her battle with cancer and in his wife’s memory, Frank planted a tree on Hole Number 8 and also presented the WGA with a trophy to honor his late-wife at the Individual Eclectic, which will now be appropriately titled “A Walk in Her Shoes.”

Kathy was also honored with a well-attended celebration of life at the club, as have others who have recently passed: Bob Orman, Commander James Alexander, Ernestine Schulte, Karen Rector, Richard Leonard, Terry Barton and most recently, Brad McKinzie, who ran the Los Alamitos Race Course when he wasn’t playing a round with his Friday golf group.

On the men’s side, the popular John Hall Cup honors the respected former club pro. John Hall grew up at Old Ranch. His parents, Harold and Yvonne Hall, were charter members. As a teenager, John rode his bike over from his Rossmoor home to play golf. Bob Lovejoy hired him as a cart boy, and then John worked his way up to become an assistant pro under Bob Silver. After a few years hiatus Hall returned to become Silver’s right-hand man and in 2004, he became Old Ranch’s fifth Head Professional. A few years after the Bixby sale, Hall left but cancer took him in 2012. The next year Jerry Hutton organized a two-team Ryder Cup style tournament to

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(Left) After retiring from the aerospace industry, Paul and Sue Liles joined Old Ranch in 2007 and began making regular appearances on the club dance floor. (Above) John Hall virtually grew up at Old Ranch and became the Head Pro after the renovation. When he passed away in 2012 the members organized the John Hall Cup in his honor.

memorialize Hall. By 2017 the John Hall Cup had grown to eight teams to handle the demand. “It’s about competition *and* camaraderie,” said Hutton, “It’s a great way to meet other members and intermingle.”

These days almost every golf tournament seems to sell out with a waitlist. The first day of the Member-Guest is especially fun – starting Friday afternoon when the battalion of carts heads out for its shotgun start. After their rounds, back at the clubhouse the players are greeted with elaborate stations of food, bar games and a cigar roller. Over the next couple days the food and entertainment gets even better.

A recent addition to the Old Ranch golf calendar is the ClubCorp Charity Classic. The event, held at almost 50 ClubCorp Properties, benefits three charities. The first is chosen by Club Corp. The second is the ClubCorps Employee-Partner Care Foundation which helps any ClubCorp employee facing unexpected hardship. “It’s already benefitted some Old Ranch employees,” said Renee Ord, “as well as ClubCorps employees hard hit by the recent floods in Houston and the fires in Santa Rosa.”

The third charity is chosen by each local club. For 2017 Old Ranch chose the Ronald McDonald House which was of great benefit when club assistant pro Shawn Hashimoto suffered the tragic death of his wife during the recent birth of their son. “It had a personal connection and we felt it was the right thing to do. Proceeds from the John Hall Cup were also donated to this fund.”



Officially organized tours are not as numerous as in past years, but many Old Ranch members still arrange travel packages together. In 2014, many couples who couldn't get enough of each other organized a Rhine River cruise. (l-r) Dick and Judy Egan, Tom and Chris Hardy, Arnie and Sharon Wilkins, Ed and Lynda Robinson. Many others take advantage of the travel opportunities in ClubCorp's new Signature Gold Program.

Member camaraderie doesn't end on the course or in the clubhouse. Many Old Ranchers have organized group trips among large groups of members. Rhine River cruises trips to Mexico and Pinehurst. Also, around 275 Old Ranch members take advantage of ClubCorp's Signature Gold reciprocity program. For a \$50 monthly fee, Old Ranch members get two free rounds of golf or meals at numerous prestigious clubs around the country—including Firestone Country Club in Ohio, The Woodlands in Dallas and more locally, Mission Hills in Rancho Mirage and The University Club atop Symphony Tower in San Diego.

One never knows what one will see at Old Ranch. Untended Bat Caddy carts still occasionally end up in the water or even unintentionally running over another member. Presidents still occasionally land at the adjacent Los Alamitos air base. Air Force One taking off over Hole 6 (or watching it from Hole 16) is certainly impressive but even more impressive are the F-16 jets flown by the Air Force Thunderbirds or the F-18 Hornets flown by Blue Angels when they used Los Al as a home base while performing at the Huntington Beach air shows. The speed and deafening noise of the jets give new members insight into how it was every day back in the 1960s.

Ultimately, the measure of any club is determined by its members. Fortunately, Old Ranch has some good ones – starting with current Board chairman Jerry Waletzko and the 2017 Board of Governors then going down the membership list from A (Jeff and Christina Aase) to Z (Tom and Nancy Zusi). Some members – like Judge Norm Gordon, Paul Southgate, Helen Wilson and Ruth Sandberg— have been here through

all of the first 50 years. But as other older members move on, new ones come along — local businessmen like Bill Phillips, Mike Pepper, and Ralph Holguin; or personalities from the world of sports like US Olympic softball pitching great Lisa Fernandez Lujan, New York Yankees outfielder Aaron Hicks, Long Beach State basketball coach Dan Monson, and sports announcer Matt “Money” Smith. Others are second, even third generation members like Ryan Panich and Todd Pollard,

The club is definitely more casual now. This reflects the changing times and the realities of modern parenthood for newer members like Deanna Phillips. “When we first joined around 2005 if we wanted to come over here, it took so much time to get the kids all clean and dressed. Now after a game, we just get in the car and come over for some great food and the adults can relax while the kids swim and play.”

But there are still plenty events for all ages. The 2017 Social Calendar saw 18 different special events – including four wine pairing nights, five holiday brunch buffets, and an outstanding array of other special events.

The wine dinners have been especially popular, according to Renee Ord. “These are small and intimate gatherings of around of 70 people – where a rep from a winery speaks about their wine and gives some history and it includes four-or-five course meal from Chef Michael. It was only a couple years ago we tried our first one and now we’re doing four and they sell out within 24 hours. The Cakebread Dinner was so popular we had to add another night. They’re just amazing.”

Over the years the Old Ranch staff has created social events that reflected its times. The addition of SuperBowl parties with a Big Screen TVs ,Disco Nights, Murder-Mystery parties, Holiday Ugly Sweater “Office Parties”, Wine Wednesdays and Craft Beers and BBQ,. Appropriately topping things off (at least for the sake of this book) is the club’s 50th anniversary celebration.

The event was two years in the planning stages, beginning when former Board Chair Arnie Wilkins began the creation of a club history. For this he brought in local writer Larry Strawther for the research and writing duties for the book. The club staff created graphics and 50th anniversary commemorative wine glasses, beverage tumblers, fanny packs and golf hats. The celebration culminated in the 50th Anniversary gala in September.

The celebration was a casual affair. Children could enjoy the bouncehouses while adults could peruse tables with old photos, WGA yearbooks and member-supplied souvenirs showcase Old Ranch’s history. Casual food stations offered Chef Michael’s delicious offerings from modern lobster, sushi rolls, and mac and cheese to homages to the original menu from the 1967 opening night: stuffed chicken kiev, roasted salmon, smoked New York steak *au pouvre* and vegetable wellington.

It was a fitting end to the first fifty years and an elegant transition into the next.