



The Neighborhood Country Club

written by Doug Copsey



Photo of original promotional group, right to left: Monte Brooks, Roy Arnold (brokerage firm), Earl Chandler (Chandler Building Supply), Spencer Eccles (went on to be chairman of First Cityway, which sold to Wells Fargo), Joe Tonascia, John Molitor, unknown, Stan Daly.

The 1960s were a time of change for this country, and Boise was no exception. The city was growing. Homes in the new Highlands development offered unmatched views of downtown and the vast high desert beyond. Whether those views had anything to do with the lofty idea of weaving a country club into a couple of the narrow canyons that laced the sagebrush hills will probably never be known, but during the first years of the decade Fred Bagley and Richard B. Smith tossed the idea around a number of times with Joe Tonascia, Stan Daly, Spencer Eccles and a few of their friends.



"I was president of Highlands Inc. at the time," Bagley recalls, "and Richard was a founding officer. He pretty much had an exclusive over the sale of Highlands land. We encouraged these fellows to form a board of directors and sell memberships to raise the money to build a golf course."

After considerable talking, a deal was struck. The plan was to put the down payments for memberships into escrow, and when the number reached 300, the group could break escrow and build the course. The original charter membership fee of \$600 was limited to 350 members, with monthly dues set at \$20.



In August 1962 an agreement was signed, with Crane Creek Country Club paying Highlands Inc. "\$50 and due consideration" in return for 131 acres along the bottoms of two canyons. The due consideration part gave the development group the right to subdivide all the land around the course and sell lots. It wasn't all smooth sailing, however.

"I remember Jack Simplot had a 40-acre parcel that jutted into the valley where the south nine were going," says Bagley, "but when we discussed it with him, he said that since we were giving the land for the golf course, he would turn over the 10 or 15 acres they needed from his piece as well."



The course was scheduled to open in the spring of 1963, but an early thaw washed out a large part of the front nine, making a second seeding necessary, and it wasn't ready for play until almost the end of the summer. The pro shop was located in the old Highlands bomb shelter, which had been a popular teenage dance spot for many years.

Bob Baldock, a Fresno, California, golf course architect who had designed over 100 courses around the world, surveyed the land and declared it ideally suited for a championship 18-hole course. He not only designed it but also supervised construction, with much of the work being done by

energetic weekend and evening volunteer members anxious to get their club underway and eager not to exceed the \$150,000 budget. One of their biggest jobs was planting the hundreds of trees, mostly blue spruce and pines, bought for next to nothing from a generous friend of the Smith family. (Many still line the fairways today.)

The clubhouse, swimming pool and tennis courts were estimated at an additional \$60,000, and were added over the next few years as new members were recruited and funds became available. One of the original members was Dick Adams, a local painting contractor. But when his good friend



Richard Smith first asked him to join, he wasn't too interested.

"Neither my wife nor I played golf at the time," Adams remembers, "but our kids were swimmers, so when Richard came back the second or third time and told us about the swimming pool they were planning, we decided it might be beneficial for us. I've never been sorry."

With help from original board member Alex Findlay, Adams pushed for a competition-sized pool so that the club could organize a swim team and compete against the YMCA and other local teams. After a couple



Tony Contrill



Karen Matmillion



Mike Mooney, Jack Barber and friends



Diane & Greg Luca



Jim Reid



Becky Rawlins & Mike Goffin



John Hutchinson

of years, Adams and his wife decided that they ought to learn to play golf, and they've been active members ever since. Dick got his first hole-in-one at Crane Creek just last year on number 12, but most of his favorite memories of the course have to do with the abundant deer and other wildlife that seem to take quite nicely to the country club life.

"We were up on 13," Adams recalls with a grin, "and I was just lining up my ball to tee off when this fox walks up the trail and stops right in front of me. I couldn't hit my ball, he was too close, and he acted like we weren't even there. We just stood there waiting, and all of sudden he took a little pounce and got this little vole. But instead of taking off, he lies down right there in front of us and starts playing with the dam thing. We just waited patiently, and finally he got up, tossed the vole in the air and dropped it in his mouth, and walked off. I'd never seen anything else like that in my life."

The golf pro is the heart of any country club, and though he wasn't there very long, Chuck Chronister got

things off on the right foot. The club went through a few more—like Bud Sower, who gave the Adamases their first lessons—before Stoney Brown came in from Colorado to take the reins. Considered by most to be the consummate golf pro, Brown ran the Crane Creek course for 28 years, a tenure of rare length in the golf world.

"A good pro means everything to a country club," explains attorney Jody Olson, a second-generation member. "We all thought Stoney was the best professional in the Northwest."

Olson was in high school when his father joined the club.

"My dad was actually given his membership by his employer, Ray Cole, as a Christmas bonus one year," Olson remembers.

"My parents loved it, and I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. I'd play 36 holes a day up there, even in the 100-degree summer heat."

One of Olson's earliest memories of Crane Creek is playing with pal Dick Copsy and their fathers while they were still students at Boise High in 1964. He joined on

his own when he graduated from college, then left town for a number of years. But when he returned in 1992, he moved to the Highlands and joined up again. He served as president of the board of directors in 2003-04, one of the more tumultuous periods of Crane Creek's history.

During Mike Wilson's presidency, just before Olson's, there was a very close and contentious vote on a \$1 million remodel of the clubhouse and golf course. The fallout from that cost the club about a third of its membership. When the course was shut down for five months to upgrade greens and bunkers and replace a number of aging blue spruce with more open deciduous species, the dissention continued. Then long-time general manager Barry Beavers left the club and Stoney Brown followed him not long after.

Ben Hay was hired as the new general manager and Ron Rawls became the new golf pro, and once the clubhouse remodel was completed in 2006, things began to settle back into a normal routine.

"Of course as it turns out," says Olson with a smile, "the change is fabulous. It reminds me of friends visiting





Joel Nicholson, Ron Rawls (Current Head Golf Professional) and the rest of the 1978 BSU Golf Team



Clark & Sydney Fidler and Friends



Mike Wilson



Robert F. Rice

But the big story at Crane Creek over the past three years has been the explosion of its tennis program. The sport has grown more than 30 percent nationally, and under Adam King the club has done even better than that.

Sun Valley and asking when the great days were, and being able to tell them that the great days are right now. Crane Creek has never been a more enjoyable club to belong to."

But you know what they say about remodeling—once you start, it's tough to stop.

"Each year since then we've gone around and done another area," explains Hay. The fitness room downstairs in the clubhouse was first. A \$100,000 makeover of the tennis courts followed that, including new furniture, a new office and a new pro shop for Tennis Director Adam King, who came on board in 2007.

"Along with a new ceiling for the indoor courts and new windscreens on the outside courts," adds King. "The tennis facility is getting to be pretty state-of-the-art, and one of the finest in the area."

Last year, to accommodate a swim team program with over 100 young members, the club tackled the swimming pool, to the tune of \$750,000, remodeling all the dressing rooms and bathrooms and adding a full-service kitchen on the patio. The directors also took a suggestion from Dick

Adams to heart and put in a 2,000-square-foot deck next to the food service area that looks out over the 10th fairway. And plans are still in the works to upgrade the pool itself.

The golf program has grown under Rawls's supervision as well. In-house there are two men's leagues and a more casual women's league, all following five-week sessions. Two more women's groups play Tuesday and Thursday mornings. A friendly cross-town rivalry with Hillcrest Country Club rears its head each year with a men's match that's been going on for 16 seasons, and the annual Tri-Club, a tradition more than 40 years old, pits the women from Crane Creek, Hillcrest and the Plantation against each other in an annual competition that features one round at each course.

"Our golf committee has been committed to keeping Crane Creek in the forefront of the sport," says Rawls proudly. "We've taken part in the Boise Open ever since it started 20 years ago by hosting a Pro-Am day up here. We've also hosted a number of United States Golf Association local qualifier tournaments over the last five years."

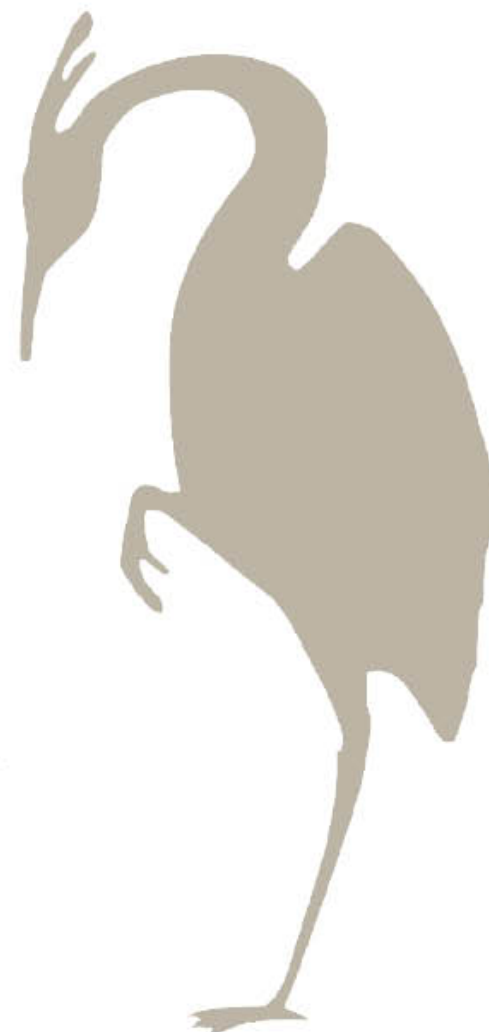


In 2007 Crane Creek hosted the Big I, a national junior tournament that features the best junior players in the country. The girls' championship trophy never left town, as Boise's own Madeleine Sheils bested all comers. The club has also hosted the Pacific Northwest Golf Association Cup, a team event that brought amateur players from Canada, Washington, Oregon and Idaho. It's all part of the club's ongoing search for events that fit the scope of what Crane Creek has to offer.

But the big story at Crane Creek over the past three years has been the explosion of its tennis program. The sport has grown more than 30 percent nationally, and under Adam King the club has done even better than that. After working outdoors in the Florida sun and humidity for ten years, the New Zealander truly appreciates the four seasons Idaho has to offer.

"In my three years here, we've grown from 5 United States Tennis Association teams to 13. Our junior programs, in particular, have really grown. We have about 100 kids a week up here year-round, anywhere from age 4 through 17. Our 3 adult men's teams and 10 adult women's teams add another 160 to that, so we keep pretty busy."

The adult leagues compete around the valley, each team playing two singles matches and three doubles matches each week, and King is proud to say they compete pretty well. In addition to his full-time staff—a Head Pro and an Assistant Pro—King taps into the local market for coaches to help handle the very popular summer camps for children.





Crane Creek Managers: Ben Hay, Yvonne Buffinger, Gordon Anderson, Andrew Adam King, Phil Johnson, Ron Rawls, Adam Eggert, Devin Lester and Megan Mahr



Jim Walter, Donna Walter, Chuck Walter and Chris Walter



Garth Fisher, Jared Hembree, Jake Dangel, Jacob Fritz, and Jackson Chittano



Crane Creek prides itself on being a neighborhood institution. Families have grown up there for more than 40 years, and in fact the club will be celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2013.

"It's like a day camp," he says. "Along with tennis there are soccer and a lot of other activities, including a golf clinic once a week. It's a really well-rounded program."

This past winter Crane Creek hosted seven USTA events and two adult USTA tournaments, but the real feather in its cap came with winning a bid to host three sectional tournaments. The event includes the entire intermountain region—Utah, Nevada, Colorado, and Idaho—and will bring all the top junior players from those states to Crane Creek in 2011.

With all this activity, King has yet another goal. "I don't think we need to expand in terms of courts yet," he says, "but we need to cover two more of our existing courts because our winter programs are so popular." He hopes to get the job done in the next couple of years.

And don't think the golf course is immune to remodel fever. Two years ago, after more than 10 years

of discussion and negotiation, the club finally acquired an additional 18-acre parcel of Highlands land at the top of the canyon. Jody Olson and his successor, Mike Moore, spent many hours talking with Richard Smith and his son, Geoff, laying the foundation for a deal. By 2008 Diane Bagley, Fred's daughter, had become active in the Highlands and took on the project.

"At Dad's encouragement, I worked with Ben [Hay] and his committee," Diane recalls. "We took a little different approach and figured out a way to make it work for both parties. In the end, we were able to reach an agreement. Mind you, the two people who worked on it the most, Ron Sargent and I, don't golf. We laugh about it all the time, that they left it up to the skiers to negotiate this deal. But it's going to be a lovely addition. It's going to rock their world."

Dave Druzisky, a rising star in golf course design, had created a master plan for the course in 2000, while he was living in Phoenix. He has since moved to Eagle and

is working with Crane Creek on a final design for the new back nine that will be presented to the club membership once it's approved by the board.

"We're going to take the 10th hole out of play," explains Hay, "and move our driving range into that area, essentially pushing the golf course up and building 2 new holes, along with changing a couple of the existing holes a bit, making it a par 72 course. So it will be a really nice, flat canyon going up, then a very challenging par 4 going up the hill further still, and an equally challenging par 5 coming down, with a pretty good risk/reward for players going for it in 2. We're very excited about that."

Since it will no longer be close to a playing hole, the expanded driving range will improve safety by eliminating the need for limited flight balls, and will greatly enhance opportunities for instruction and junior programs.

"I think Druzisky has done a wonderful job with the design," says Rawls. "The two new holes will match the existing golf course very well, and they'll have a lot of character of their own. I think when all is said and done, our back nine will probably be one of the best nine holes of golf in the state, if not the northwest."

At a club where parking has always been at a premium, the 70 new parking spaces provided by the remodel will be almost as welcome to members as the challenge of the improved back nine.

With all the changes over the past few years, including the increasing popularity of the golf and swimming programs and the unprecedented growth of the tennis program, the hustle and bustle factor has grown substantially higher at Crane Creek. For some country clubs, that's not necessarily a good thing.

"One of the truly neat things to me about Crane Creek," Rawls says, "and I say this in relation to the other clubs I've worked with, is the way they embrace the junior programs here. In the summertime especially, we have kids running everywhere, and I don't get any complaints from members about that. They just embrace it. That's something really unusual for a private club."

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