

Our Story: “A dream 40 years in the making”

Written By: Gary Davies

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Burl Aycock remembers the moment well. It was the early '80s and there he was, side-by-side on a pair of horses with his long-time friend Stan Carscallen peering through the bush that would eventually serve as the 17th tee box of the Hawk golf course. “I was swatting mosquitos off my face, it was raining a bit, and I looked over at Stan and said, ‘Nobody is going to come here to golf and we’re going to lose everything,’” Aycock recalls some 35 years later. “Well, I guess I was wrong.”

And, oh, how wrong he was.

It is unlikely that the four founders behind Priddis Greens Golf and Country Club – **Burl Aycock, Stan Carscallen, Ron Goodwin, and Bill Newis** – could have ever known how successful their fledgling venture would have been when they opened their first nine holes of golf back in the late summer of 1984. But to say the club has firmly established itself as one of the premier golf entities in the country would be an understatement.

Boasting a membership of 850, Priddis Greens’ 36 holes of golf, world-class practice facilities, and stunning clubhouse, have played host to three LPGA Canadian Women’s Opens (in 1999, 2009 and 2016), and both courses regularly place on Score Golf magazine’s bi-annual Top 100 list.

Guests of members regularly fawn over the courses’ condition, the unparalleled views from the clubhouse, and the course design that never seems to get old. But to say that it was a smooth 40-year ride would also be an understatement. Without the unwavering commitment of the founders to see their dream come to fruition, this area of land in the rolling foothills might have remained solely for the enjoyment of horses, riders, and the odd mosquito.

Stan Carscallen’s father had rented the property owned by Brian and Jean Horn in the Foothills west of Priddis since the early-1960s to pasture cattle on. Carscallen loved the area so much, that he told the Horns when he was still a young man that if they were interested in selling, he wanted the first phone call to come to him.

That call came in 1978. Stan and his wife Gail (who passed away in 2008), along with Burl and Linda Aycock, got together and convinced old friend Ron Goodwin to join them on buying two quarters. “They said if Kathleen (who passed away in 2000) and I would buy the east quarter, plus the three acres with the house and barn on it, that they would buy the west quarter,” Goodwin recalls, of the place his daughter’s family called home for a few years. “So that’s what we did.”

Originally, the three families planned to simply hold onto the land, but in the early 1980s, Goodwin had another idea. “I was clearing trees and shaping the tees and greens for the Redwood Meadows Golf and Country Club (which Goodwin had been contracted to work on), when Bill Newis (the course’s upstart designer who already had McCall Lake and Bearspaw on his resume) said to me, ‘We sure could use another golf course in southwest Calgary.’”

The two of them toured a number of sites in and around Priddis before Goodwin informed Newis that he and some partners had some land they could take a look at. “When I got here (the present site of the clubhouse) I turned to Ron and said, ‘What a waste,’” Newis recalls. “Ron

looked at me and said, 'What do you mean?' I said, 'What a waste of time looking at all those other sites. We should have just come here in the first place.'"

It surprisingly didn't take much for Goodwin to convince his partners – under the banner of Priddis Creek Developments – to convert the land into the golf course that Newis had in mind, and within a couple of years, Goodwin and his team, which consisted of both his sons, were out moving dirt and framing holes. This was in 1982, at the onset of the oil crash, the National Energy Policy, and double-digit interest rates.

Carscallen's sweat equity in the project was to secure all the regulatory approvals to get the course built – 32 were required in all – dealing with everything from water to pipelines to roads. He also got to deal with the banks and the financing process – something that still haunts him to this day.

"I remember it like it was yesterday – May 15, 1984," Carscallen recalls. "We had already borrowed \$600,000 to build the first nine and we needed to borrow another \$600,000 to finish the back nine (what is now the first five holes and last four holes of the Hawk course).

"At 7 p.m. that night, I got a call from a Mr. Bell at the Bank of Nova Scotia who said, 'We're not giving you the second loan and we're also calling the first loan.' I didn't sleep much that night." Carscallen spent the next three weeks running around downtown Calgary looking for a solution, before the Royal Bank stepped in with the funds to get the second nine completed.

"When you think about it, we really begged, borrowed, and stole to make this thing happen," Aycock said. "Each of us put everything we could into this to keep it going."

By the summer of 1984, the club had managed to attract 200 golfers to provide the initial \$750 deposit, which provided them with an opportunity to play the first completed nine (what is now the back nine of the Raven course).

"I remember our opening day was scheduled shortly after the Labour Day long weekend, and it must have snowed four inches that day," Carscallen said. "We had to postpone everything and move it back a week (to Sept. 15th), but we did get a few weeks' worth of golf in that year."

The second nine was opened by late summer 1985 and shortly thereafter the course started to receive rave reviews in the local press. Upon completion of the full 18 holes, Newis called it "the best natural site we've had to work with," a quote that made its way prominently onto most of the early marketing materials.

Aycock says the downturn of the early-'80s actually worked in the golf club's favour. "Guys in their 50s and 60s were getting laid off and they were getting big packages. There was no employment anywhere for these guys, so they came golfing."

It wasn't until the early 1990s, when the ownership group was transferring ownership to the club's board of directors and a lease agreement was created, that a third nine holes was added. The ownership group had purchased the only land available adjacent to the course – 80 acres from the Meadows family – that would become the North Nine (now the front nine of the Raven course). "That's why that nine is a little tighter than the others," Carscallen said. "There just wasn't as much room to work with."

But acquiring land for the final nine holes a few years later would prove the most challenging.

Carscallen had heard a rumour that the club had taken an option on some land to build a fourth nine holes some two miles from the club, because no more land was readily available next door. The best possible solution (where holes 6 to 14 on the Hawk course now reside) was Crown land, and when the club inquired about purchasing it, it was informed that that the "government doesn't sell land."

While the board was stymied, Carscallen pressed the issue, and in turn found out that the government would trade land. Provided with a list of 20 parcels of land in Alberta the government would be interested in trading for, Carscallen travelled from one end of the province to the other, buying up multiple pieces of land, that would eventually hold the same value to the government as the land adjacent to the golf course. The trade was made, the ownership group amended the lease for \$1, and the final nine holes was born.

Everything about the early days of Priddis Greens can be described as a family affair. Except for Aycock – whose family moved to Denver in the early-'80s for seven years after the oil firm he was working for at the time transferred him there – the rest of the partners built a true family business.

Goodwin worked with his son Mike to clear the first 18 holes of the course, while his other son Brent not only managed the seeding and irrigation, but he was also the club's first greenskeeper. Newis's sons, Gord, Tom and Dave would all eventually join the greenskeeping team. And Gail Carscallen, would design the halfway house and the clubhouse (and oversee both renovations).

When asked how he feels about the legacy he helped build over the last 40 years, the man who turned the first piece of dirt puts it best. "In a way," Goodwin says, "it kind of makes you feel proud."

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