

ASPEN LAKES: Golf course creation was a family affair

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Sisters Aggregate, worked at Cascade Meadow Ranch. The idea of a cluster development on the land that would become Aspen Lakes had a lot of appeal — much more than an unrestricted development that could have put residential development right up against their farm land, creating conflicts.

“That would have changed the whole feel of the community,” Matt Cyrus said. “We felt that (the cluster development and golf course) concept made more sense than the (then) current plan.”

The family acquired the property in 1987. The land-use process and financing took years to put together, and it was in the mid-1990s that construction work got underway.

The family ultimately hoped to create a destination resort on the property, featuring upscale homes on smaller lots with lots of open space and a water system that would be of wider benefit to the Cloverdale Fire District. They didn’t want the golf course to simply be a feature for selling real estate.

“Our philosophy was that we wanted a quality course that would hopefully be a profit center and stand on its own,” Keith Cyrus said.

None of the family were golfers, but they plunged in, with the services of course designer William Overdorf to help guide them. One major priority was taking

full advantage of the property’s mountain views. Laying out the course was a family affair — which might have been unconventional, but, with Overdorf’s willingness to go along, turned out to be a benefit.

Keith mapped things out and Matt acted as a surveyor.

“We were on the ground laying out holes,” Kelly Cyrus recalled.

“We had a certain feel for the land,” Pam Mitchell said. “We were really close to what was happening out there.”

Keith chuckled as he described the process: “We didn’t have (any) money to put into it — it was all sweat.”

Overdorf was a hands-on designer, too, and earned Keith’s respect. The elder Cyrus was used to using a bulldozer to level ground; the golf course work required pushing dirt up to form the contours of the course. Overdorf was highly skilled in that arena.

“All of this was a departure from my background as a leveler for flood irrigation,” Keith said. “(Overdorf) was an artist with that ‘dozer.”

In May 1997, the first nine holes at Aspen Lakes opened. Three years later, the course was completed.

“We had to quit raising potatoes to do the second nine,” Connie Cyrus recalled. “We didn’t have time.”

In November 2007, the family opened Brand 33 restaurant. The name came from a cattle brand registered in 1883 in Crook County.

“It goes back to my great-granddad,” Keith Cyrus said.

Aspen Lakes was the first course in Oregon to be enrolled in the Audubon

Signature Sanctuary Program. And the course quickly earned recognition for its beauty and the quality of the golf experience.

The family continues to be deeply involved in the operation of the course, the restaurant, and the housing development. It hasn’t always been easy and it’s always a tremendous amount of work.

“We had to learn *so much*,” Kelly Cyrus reflected.

That included the golf business, the restaurant business, law and engineering.

Yet, Matt Cyrus relishes the difference between his work with Aspen Lakes and the agricultural world he was born into, with its slower rhythms and long-delayed outcomes.

“It’s been fun to work with a business where you can make changes on the fly — which is different from agriculture,” he said.

Pam Mitchell cites the relationships built through golf, hosting fundraisers for the local community, and operating a restaurant.

“I think it’s been very rewarding,” she said. “We’ve created so many friendships over the years.”

The next 20 years look to be every bit as challenging as the first 20.

“Golf is on the decline,” Matt Cyrus said.

His wife, Kelly, concurred. “When we started, they said the U.S. needs to keep building a course a day to keep up with the demand.”

That’s not the case anymore. The Great Recession took a deep bite out of the game nationwide, and it



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

The Cyrus family took a hands-on approach to the development of Aspen Lakes Golf Course — now celebrating its 20th anniversary.

hasn’t really recovered. An increasingly harried pace in the business world means a leisurely round of business golf is a rare commodity, and other activities compete for families’ time and attention.

To adapt to changing industry conditions, Aspen Lakes is focused on making golf an attractive family time — which also helps to introduce new golfers to the game.

Pam Mitchell says the critical element is “trying to make it innovative, creative, fun. I think keeping it fun is key.”

Matt says that the

development still plans to find a way to add overnight accommodations — a requirement if the course is to host events of national stature. Overnight accommodations would also be a boon to Sisters’ tourist economy in general, he notes, since the area is not flush with rooms for our major events.

Whatever the next 20 years holds, it can be expected that the Cyrus family will be operating hands-on, putting their sweat into their family enterprise — and not worrying too much about whether their approach fits “inside the box.”



PHOTO BY JERRY BALDOCK

Along with Black Butte Ranch and Eagle Crest, Aspen Lakes hosted more than 300 golfers for the Central Oregon Shootout last weekend.

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