

Gribbles recall how local golf course began 40 years ago



Dolores and Lowell Gribble

Like many a proud papa, Lowell Gribble was on hand for the birth of his baby. It was a big baby; a very big baby. And 40 years after its conception, Gribble's baby, the Heppner golf course, has grown even bigger.

In 1952, when the course was just a twinkle in Gribble's eye, he and a fellow golfer, John Williams, stopped to munch hamburgers at a Heppner eatery. They had discussed what they missed most in Heppner and talked about finding a site. Gribble and Williams happened to be eating at the "Wishing Well," the "local version of the Golden Arches," says Lowell, and were looking out of the restaurant window. To their good fortune, the restaurant just happened to have 23 acres adjoining it. "It was beautifully bushy, cattailed with gopher mounds, springs and a swamp," said Gribble. Gribble and Williams asked Tom Wells, the owner of the Wishing Well, if he would consider renting the property to locate a golf course. "Tom, being a businessman, said he would for \$300. I thought he meant a month, but he meant a year," said Gribble. Wells also offered to provide water for a drinking fountain and a ball washer.

Now Gribble had the site and an idea, but limited finances. He then approached the local law firm, Mahoney and Fancher, who agreed to draw up the papers without cost. They intended the course to be a community affair, so the charter was constructed so that no one group would own the course.

"Now it was work, work, work," said Gribble. They started out with three holes laid out across the creek, cleared brush and hauled sand. They bought a three-gang fairway mower and a John Deere "put-put" tractor. Originally the three holes were not over 100 yards apart with sand greens. They cut up old pieces of wood for drags and oiled the greens. Being slow had its penalties—whichever was last to finish had to drag the greens.

"Now we had started to play golf," laughed Gribble. "Little did we know what lay ahead." Next they put three more holes on the west side of the railroad crossing.

This involved more work days and potlucks. They replaced the bridges when high water washed them down the creek. The pro-

blem was finally solved by anchoring the one end of the bridge to a tree. Flooding then was constantly a problem, and three severe floods brought "heartache and frustration" which they finally conquered through perseverance.

Jack Van Winkle, who owned a service station at the time donated some pieces of rip rap to control the flooding, but the next flood picked the rip rap up and deposited it on the fairway. The mounding on no. 3 green resulted from all the silt from the flood, they said. Dolores, Gribble's wife, commented that the cattails on the no. 3 green were all higher than her head. Between the seventh and fifth holes was a swamp with three different springs. When the well was dug, the springs were lost. Gribble said that for years the course was irrigated by hand-moved sprinklers hooked up to a pump from the creek. He says that about this time Kit George was hired parttime to do the sprinkling and mowing and he has been there ever since.

Fritz Cutsforth witched the well, which put out around 90 gallons a minute. Underground sprinklers were installed, which made a fairway green possible. They then had to buy a fairway mower and many farmers furnished equipment.

Frank Turner purchased a railway bunkhouse for a club house, and a porch and deck were added. Ed Hiemstra and Maury Groves were the carpeter consultants, says Gribble.

It wasn't until this point that they decided to approach Tom Wells about purchasing the land. They bought the 23 acres from him for \$3,000.

The original membership dues were \$15 a year for a family, \$5 a year for an individual and \$1 a day for nine holes. "One thing I wish they hadn't changed is that we allowed all ministers in town to play for free," said Lowell.

By July of 1966 a work crew had moved the west bank of the railroad down to the swamp, at the present site of hole no. 1. The course was finally laid out as a nine-hole course.

Everyone pitched in. Dolores and Lowell taught golf lessons and donated a large mirror for the clubhouse. Phil and Hazel Mahoney donated a barbecue pit. Kinzua donated logs and lumber for the first new permanent bridge, which has since been



The Gribbles' threesome Helen and Harry O'Donnell, Helen and Ed Schaffitz and Dolores and Lowell Gribble.



Clubhouse in Aug. 1963

replaced, and a propane cooking stove. For maintenance the greens were divided up and each threesome had to maintain a green as well as provide entertainment.

"For the first 20 years," added Lowell, "we worked on Saturdays and played on Sundays. Ned Sweek, 'who never played a day of golf in his life,' donated a week of his vacation from the mill to clean out the creek bed."

For many years there was only one restroom, by the no. 2 hole, says Lowell. He and Dolores won't name names but remembers once when a player drove a ball right into the restroom while it was in use.

Because of an old football injury, Lowell was the first to buy a golf cart. And Eddie Gunderson was second, he says. The cards were originally stored in an old wooden shed where the carts now stand. The wooden shed once met with an unfortunate accident at the hand of Dolores. As she was driving into the shed with the cart, she accidentally kept her foot on the gas pedal, and drove right through the shed. Dave Gunderson, who they believe was around 14 or 15 at the time, and several of his friends lifted the cart back in for her and Frances Doherty replaced the boards.

Gene Hall made the first hole-in-one on the course and Jacki Labhardt was the first reporter for the paper. Dolores took over the "Over the Teacup" column when the Labhardts transferred to John Day.

As near as Dolores and Lowell remember, the first members of the club included John and Vivian Williams, Coramae and Ray-



Lowell on John Deere in 1966

Dolores in the next election and defeated her but then asked her to become his secretary. He eventually decided he didn't want to complete his term, so asked the court to appoint Dolores to the position. Dolores then ran and was elected. She spent 12 years

as justice of the peace until she retired to travel and the present justice Charlotte Gray filled out her term.

Lowell is now president of his own company, Ultrasonic Predictable Maintenance, which troubleshoots for machinery.

Stokes Landing plans concert

The Stokes Landing Senior Citizen Center in Irrigon will host the Blue Mt. Old Time Fiddlers on Saturday, April 11. All kinds

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