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*GREETING THE 1980 golf year with big smiles are new officers of the Austin Senior Golf Association. From left, Paul Gillett, past president; John Walker, rep. to Park & Recreation; Tom Hutchson, secretary-treasurer; Bart Elich, vice-president and Ted Edwards, president.*

*The club now has 280 members. First event, 4-ball select shot, drew so many applications that only the first 144 (course limit) were accepted. The association plans 40 events, 54 days of play offering 18 different types and using all four Austin public courses. Types include 4-ball, 2-ball, flags, strings, medal, Chicago, and "Katy, bar the door, the course limit is 144."*

# Austin Seniors show there's strength in numbers

PHOTO & STORY BY ROGER SWANN

*AUSTIN—Blessed with a golf climate which permits almost year-round play, has four public courses: Lions Municipal, Jimmie Clay, Morris Williams and Hancock. Numerous smaller cities and glamorous private clubs in Central Texas offer additional facilities.*

# PROS SHOULD LOVE THE WAY THAT SENIORS PROGRAM WORKS

WHILE NOT a retirement center, fast-growing Austin is attracting many families of fun-loving seniors with its varied strokes for different folks, from golf to country & western fiddling around.

Seniors relate to the heroes of the annual Legends of Golf tournament at nearby Onion Creek. Reportedly joining the Sneads, Toskies, and other ancients this year is Arnold Palmer.

But in 1976 senior golfers were glum. Annual fees were \$150 and predicted to go higher with restricted play on weekends. Hancock appeared to be being put out to pasture and might suddenly shelter a covey of condominiums. Realtors were looking lustfully at Muny's rolling, tree-shaded acres of prime residential terrain. Morris Williams, a sand wedge away from the city airport, could help solve their landing and parking problems, letters to the editor pointed out.

Alarmed by the threat of lost courses, higher fees, and deteriorating conditions, individuals were checking costs and programs at comparable Texas cities and quietly crying in their Coors, but there was no group effort.

INTO THE PICTURE came Lawrence West, a retiree from the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. His portfolio was a colorful mixture of round-the-world travel and adventure, too lengthy to document here, but "when he talked, people listened."

As a newcomer and Yankee, he had two strikes on him when he started pleading the Senior case with Parks and Recreation before moving onward and upward through the fog to the City Council.

SOMEWHERE ALONG Pilgrim's Progress, somebody told him (tactfully) about what Rhett told Scarlett: "Frankly, my dear, we don't give a damn (about solos)! You need a bigger sound, a choir, and a congregation."

So West became a combination Billy Graham, Johnny Appleseed, and Marathon Man, walking 15 or 20 miles a day over Austin courses, spreading the seeds of unification. He envisioned a powerful voice; it would be called "The Senior Golf Association of Austin."

The child was born at Muny in March, 1976; with Buddy Hamilton, then of Parks & Recreation assisting as mid-wife, assisted by 19 or 20 recruits. A whole lot has happened since then. The group has grown and in 1980's first event, 15 of us wept bitterly in four-part harmony when we learned that 144 characters, the course limit, had already signed up.

THE MORAL of this story: Many other Texas cities and smaller communities are invited to consider (a) a Senior Association, (b) the 4-ball, and (c) the magic mix of strange ingredients, four strangers (cranky old men) working together toward a common goal.

For those who think winning is everything, the 4-ball is not the answer, but to find new friends, desert the tube, and to quit singing "Ol' Rockin' Chair's Got Me," it can be terrific!

You remember the story of the dog food sales meeting? The sales manager say, "Who has the shiniest, most attractive labels, the best organization, the best salesmen, the cheapest price? Why aren't we No. 1?" And the little guy on the back row says: "Dogs won't touch the stuff."

To be successful, several ingredients are indispensable. One is the course professional and his staff. Pros should love it for mercenary as well as sentimental reasons. Play can be scheduled for otherwise dull days. Customer money can rent carts and help buy groceries. These gladiators stock up on all kinds of golf gear before going into combat. One member has 23 wood clubs; many others change putters after each disaster. They buy hats, caps, shoes, socks, sweaters, slacks, everything but tees.

EVEN THE PRIZES are merchandise. This helps move white elephants off the counters at good profit and best of all it protects the amateur status of the 62 to 80-year-olds who have seen the goodies in "Animal House," plan to re-enter college, join a fraternity, and try out for the golf team.

Pros give events a professional touch, are ethically bound to be impartial, and sensibly averse to killing us geese who lay golden eggs. Pro Joe Balander (Jimmie Clay) has a neat system for selecting members of 4-ball teams. Memorabilia of fact (winners) and fiction (handicaps) are spread on the floor and Joe and tournament committee members walk solemnly back and forth discussing long-knockers, chippers, and putters and verily one without the other is doomed for the outer darkness.

Entry fee (\$3) is so low that all may enter. Husbands borrow butter and egg money from wives; bachelors seem to have their own money, and all agree "What else is so nice for the price?"

## 'Honey, I won!'

Prizes filter down to 7 or 8 levels so that 32 happy hookers (or slicers) can hurry home and tell somebody, "Honey, I won." It is alleged that winners of eighth place get one-half interest in a new golf ball which must be shared.

AN EXCELLENT telephone committee, headed by Travis Brown, has made thousands of calls. Reminders: Get entries in by noon Monday; time and pairings are ready Monday afternoon. This could tie up phones all day, but many participants play the day before to ease the course and pick up starting times. This adds another day to course receipts.

The SGA has thrived on enthusiastic leadership and good response. Annual fees have dropped from \$150 to \$100. The Board of Directors for 1980 includes Ted Edwards, president; Bart Elich, vice president; Tom Hutchison, secretary treasurer; John Walker, representative to Parks & Recreation and Paul Gillett, past president.

COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN include Travis Brown, telephone; Madison Taylor, handicaps; and Lee E. James, tournaments and rules.

These competitive events are bright spots on monthly calendars for frequently neglected middle-class Americans; they are not federally financed or politically controlled, and are highly recommended for communities and small cities in search of inexpensive entertainment. Age limits are flexible, 62 and rising and rules are strict: "Never pocket an opponent's moving ball (and) never tee up in the fairway while under enemy surveillance."

Dangers include: Overloading winners till they can't win, losing losers who loathe losing, and solving an elimination problem which involves the ERA. Austin courses are uncanny, and "Breathes there a man with soul so dead who never to himself hath said, 'I don't believe I can wait 'til I get to the clubhouse.'"