



NEWS RELEASE

April 17, 2014

Bill Hensley: I Remember Hound Ears

Note: As Hound Ears Club celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2014, the Club will publish a series of feature articles about the Club's history and the many people who make the Club such an amazing community. In this installment, Bill Hensley, former N.C. Director of Travel and Tourism, shares some first-person reflections about his experience with Hound Ears Club. Bill was inducted into the [North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame](#) in 2008.

By Bill F. Hensley

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Hound Ears Club which, since its inception, has become one of North Carolina's premier recreational communities. I can look back on 49 of those years, having missed the first year of the renowned mountain resort that was built on a whim.

In 1965, I was Director of Travel and Tourism for the state and living in Raleigh.

Early that summer I got a call from Grover Robbins at Hound Ears who I knew by reputation but had never met. He invited me to come up for a week end and bring my family. He was anxious for us to see what he had created in the beautiful valley alongside the Watauga River.

We stayed in a house overlooking the golf course and toured the scenic area from top to bottom during a two-day stay. My wife and I played golf while the kids spent the day at Tweetsie Railroad, also a Robbins brothers' creation.



We met Grover, Harry and Spencer Robbins for the first time and shared lunch and dinner with the creative brothers. In short order, we were discussing marketing plans for the resort and how to tell the world what awaited tourists in the NC High Country.

That winter the family went back for a second visit and everyone learned to ski, a skill that became a family tradition that has lasted until today. Our instructors were Kitty and Willi Falger from Austria, brought over by the Robbins' in what proved to be a highly successful public relations venture. The Falgers and their Austrian instructors quickly became a hit with members and guests.

It was during the winter weekend that Grover Robbins took me up in his short

takeoff and landing (STOL) aircraft which took off and landed on the 18th hole of the golf course. A bird's eye view of the area was an unforgettable experience.

From the beginning, Hound Ears had a list of characters as members and employees. One of the most notable was Bert Shraket, a colorful and memorable bartender. He was a bald-headed, middle-aged curmudgeon whose sarcastic barbs could sting like a bee. But he could take it as well as dish it out so the repartee was hilarious. His favorite comment to me when I can in the bar was "what the hell do you want? Don't you have a home?" And the fun would begin.

After Bert left the club, he was replaced by Jay Little, a handsome professional dancer who left his duties behind the bar frequently to dance with the ladies. He became one of the club's best-known and most popular amenities.

During the early days, Bob Kepler, the retired golf coach at Ohio State, became the golf professional, assisted by a popular Boone native named Tom Adams. Kepler's wife Gert ran the golf shop and made starting times which were seldom necessary. The golf course was designed by George Cobb and became an immediate asset as it is today. The scenic layout was often referred to "as the friendliest and most fun course in the state."

In those days Mildred Bunting was the club manager -- her husband Dick was the chef and her sister Ann Ellis ran the dining room. It was a smooth working family affair that lasted for at least a decade.

An often-sassy Dorothy Smith, a London native, handled reservations and event planning for the plush 24-room lodge. Her life was made more interesting by the tricks that Harry and Spencer played on her. After she bought a car from one of the employees and bragged on what good condition it was in, the playful brothers told her "we didn't know it could be fixed after the wreck," which sent her into a frenzy. And then Spencer poured a quart of oil on the pavement under the front of the car and showed her how much the engine was leaking. She hit the panic button!

Fortunately, Mrs. Smith survived the Robbins' humor although she lived with it daily for 20 years or more.

I like to think back to the many members I met and played golf with. There was former governor Terry Sanford; Charlotte Observer columnist Kays Gary; Glenn Causey, who played the role of Daniel Boone in the outdoor drama "Horn In The West"; Colin Stokes, who was president of the R. J. Reynolds tobacco company; Jim and Paul Broyhill; Ron Fallows, Bragg McLeod and Charles Brady.

When *Southern Living* magazine began publishing in 1967, the first cover of the magazine featured the Brady house on the cover. The club has been in the publication many times since then.

Over the years many celebrities were Hound Ears guests. I vividly recall TV personalities Charles Kuralt and Bob Schieffer; NY Yankee great Mickey Mantle; evangelist Billy Graham; broadcaster Paul Harvey; movie star Debbie Reynolds; golfing great Jack Nicklaus; and governors Dan Moore and Jim Holshouser.

I may have played as many as a thousand rounds of golf on the great golf course. My all-time low was a 78, and I had a hole in one (my fourth) on the across-the-water 7th hole. Every time I play the par five sixth hole, I remember playing with a long-hitting dentist from Knoxville, whose name I can't recall, hitting a driver and a nine iron to the green and making an eagle.

And in a round with Spencer Robbins, he was even par after eight holes and hadn't made a par. He had made four birdies and four bogeys. He finally made par on the ninth hole for a hot 36.

And the memories go on, including dozens of travel writers visits to promote the place, bringing in some of the nation's top journalists; great dinner parties with Kenneth and Gerry Wilcox, Bill and Pat Beck, Ty and Pat Boyd, Betty Jane and Johnny Dillon, Margaret and Jerry Moore and countless others, and working with golf pros Peter Rucker and Kent Shelton and long-time golf course superintendent John Tester.

I'm delighted that Grover conceived the idea to create a resort/club on a whim because a golf course he was playing in the area was crowded and slow. He gave me a lifetime of precious memories.

Centrally located near Boone, Blowing Rock and Banner Elk, N.C., Hound Ears Club comprises 750 acres nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Established in 1964, the private community's golf course was recently named a "Top 100 Tar Heel" course by Business North Carolina for the sixth consecutive year.

Hound Ears will celebrate its Golden Anniversary in 2014 with a variety of events that truly express the Club's unique position as one of the region's most celebrated "escapes" from the hectic pace of modern life. Envisioned in 1964 as a refuge for those seeking a gentle, yet playful, lifestyle, Hound Ears Club will look back at its heritage even as it looks forward to a healthy future as the premier mountain experience.

For more information, visit the Hound Ears Club website at houndears.com.

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