



Buddy Phillips with son Tracy today and back in the days of disco.

Dedication

For 40 years, Buddy Phillips gave his all to Cedar Ridge Country Club

BY KEN MACLEOD

Back in his heyday “before they got rid of color,” you knew when Buddy Phillips entered the room. His clothes were always much louder than the man himself.

“I was a walking mannequin,” Phillips said. “If I went out to play a round with a member, I was going to sell something; a shirt, some slacks, a hat. . . just off of what I was wearing.”

Now 77 and getting set to retire in October as head PGA Professional from Cedar Ridge Country Club after 40 years of impeccable service to its members, Phillips’ attire is more reflective of our conservative times. The man the boys in the bag room respect-

fully call The Godfather is looking forward to his role as grandfatherly Don, spending more time with his two grandkids while keeping one eye on the empire he helped build by remaining on the greens committee at Cedar Ridge.

If there is one word that describes Phillips’ tenure at Cedar Ridge, it is dedication. Not just to the members, but to the course itself. Phillips has shared lunch with superintendent Mike Wooten most working days for the past 26 years. He has been Wooten’s strongest advocate in procuring what he needs to make Cedar Ridge the best it can be.

“I’ve spent 26 years working with Buddy

and he’s the best thing that’s happened for my career,” Wooten said. “He’s always put the golf course first and whatever would make it better is what he was focused on.”

For Phillips, that’s what it has always been all about. Since the day in 1972 that he moved over from Tulsa Country Club to take the reins at Cedar Ridge, Phillips has told anyone who asked that he had no interest in comparing Cedar Ridge with Southern



Phillips, in his pro shop left and sporting some color with Hubert Green and Chi Chi Rodriguez.

Hills, but was only interested in making Cedar Ridge the best it could be.

"The media always wanted me to compare the two and there's no reason to compare," said Phillips. "Southern Hills is Southern Hills and we've always tried to be the best Cedar Ridge that we can be. What's important is that we continue to improve what we have. Right now we're spending \$2.5 million on the pool and fitness center. We keep improving every year and that's extremely important.

"The golf course has held up very well. I don't know if you can make them long enough for the kids today, but we can stretch this out to 7,500 yards and set a few pins and this will be as tough as you want it to be. Yet on a daily basis it is a very enjoyable golf course. You never get tired of playing it.

"We do a lot of little things to make it better. It's the little things that make you look good and the little things you let go that make you look ragged."

Those little things have been adding up for Phillips for a long time. They are why long-time friends like recently retired Hillcrest Country Club head professional Jerry Cozby calls Phillips "the ultimate golf professional" Or why Cedar Ridge general manager Cleve Stubblefield said, "Buddy Phillips is Cedar Ridge. I've never met a man I respect more in my life."

"I don't think I've ever met a golf pro that was more dedicated to the golf course, the facility and the membership," said Cozby. "He put his heart and soul into it and he was very good at it. For a long time he was one of the top merchandisers in the country.

"He's never been out there to toot his horn.

He just does his job and does it very well."

Cozby and Phillips have been friends for more than half a century. Cozby grew up in Odessa, Texas, while Phillips was 90 miles away in the small town of Jal, New Mexico, where his father worked for El Paso Natural Gas. Phillips was a fine golfer and all-sport athlete growing up and he also went to work for El Paso. His supervisor, recognizing his love for golf, persuaded him to become an assistant professional at Jal Country Club to Hardy Loudermilk, the head pro who would also wind up mentoring Cozby later at Oak Hill Country Club in San Antonio. At the time in Jal, Loudermilk was tutoring a young Kathy Whitworth, the future LPGA Hall of Famer.

After working at Jal CC for 14 months, Phillips became a head professional at Artesia CC and stayed there five years before becoming an assistant at Cherry Hills CC in Denver. He and Cozby both moved to Oklahoma within a year of each other, Cozby to Hillcrest in Bartlesville and Phillips to TCC in 1969.

Phillips married his wife Doris at the age of 20 and they've been together for 56 years. Son Tracy was born in Artesia and was already a young phenom by the time they moved to Tulsa CC. Stricken with Legg-Calve Perthes Disease, a childhood hip disorder which essentially kept him hopping about on one leg for 2.5 years until the hip bone slides back into the socket, it didn't stop Tracy from practicing dawn to dusk.

For the next phase of his life, Buddy was torn between his duties to the club and the desire to nurture and watch his son, who quickly became one of the top juniors in the world.

"Tracy started winning tournaments around age 11 and it just was unbelievable," Buddy said. "He still has about 80 trophies over at the house. Tracy was a very natural player. I worked with him until he was about 15 and then took him to see Harvey Penick in Texas."

Although it was Doris who shuttled Tracy to most of his events, Buddy did get to watch him win the PGA Junior Championship in 1980, one of his fondest memories. Tracy was one of three future Oklahoma State golfers to win the event in a nine-year span, joining Willie Wood in 1978 and Brian Montgomery in 1986, all managing to do what even Tiger Woods could not (he finished second in 1990 to Chris Couch who shot a final round 63.)

Buddy, meanwhile, was busy helping Cedar Ridge get established on the national stage. The club was host to the 1983 U.S. Women's Open won by Jan Stephenson. The tournament was held in August then and it was brutally hot, but the course performed beautifully. Phillips remembers the event being a lot of work but a lot of fun and that posters of the lovely and scantily clad Stephenson were, in today's terms, going viral.

Cedar Ridge has had a long history with both the USGA and the Oklahoma Golf Association as well as the LPGA. It helped Southern Hills host qualifying for the 2009 U.S. Amateur and as recently as late July held local qualifying for the 2012 U.S. Amateur. It has been the site of numerous state and high-school championships including the 2010 OGA State Amateur and 2011 Class 6A State Championship. It hosted the SEM Group Championship on the LPGA

Tour from 2004-2008.

"Every pro has learned something from Buddy Phillips," said OGA Executive Director Mark Felder. "I remember in 2002 at the state amateur, I'm introducing the players and Buddy is there next to me polishing the trophy. That's just one of the things that stuck with me. If something needed to be done, he would find somebody to do it or do it himself."

"I've never been one to take anything for granted," Phillips said. "If something needs to be done, do it. I don't like to take other people for granted and I don't like to be taken for granted."

Those who have worked for Phillips have learned his lessons well and it's helped them down the line.

"I've learned much of what I know about the golf business from Buddy," said Rob Yanovitch, director of golf at Shangri-La Resort in Afton. "His leadership has been something I've modeled since he gave me a chance to learn how to serve and manage. Great leaders have a heart to serve, and Buddy has served his membership, club, staff and association with consistency and a sense of fairness like none other I've seen. He is an old school PGA professional who embraced the role of mentorship to his as-

sistants by always striving for excellence. Buddy has always been a man of his word and always followed through on what he promised."

"He's one of the best," said Rick Reed, director of golf at The Oaks Country Club and an assistant to Phillips from 1977-89. "He really enjoys his job and loves what he does. Customer service is what he always done better than anybody else. He just ran a great golf operation."

"He just loved Cedar Ridge and always wanted it to get better and improve."

That daily drive is going to be hard for Phillips to give up. Despite two major open-heart surgeries, Phillips is still driven. Asked what he is thinking about when he reflects on his career, he says, "What the heck am I going to do next?"

The answer, everyone hopes, is enjoy his lifetime membership at Cedar Ridge, give an occasional lesson and play a lot more golf.

Although he said one of his regrets looking back is not having played more with the members over the years, Phillips did make time for travel most years and played a lot of golf with friends such as Cozby and former Oaks head pro Larry Crummitt.

One trip he took back East stands out, as he and three companions played eight

courses, including five that have hosted U.S. Opens (Baltusrol, Bethpage, Shinnecock Hills, Merion and Oakmont.). He recharged his energies most winters with a trip to Hawaii and has been fortunate to play other great courses around the country.

Tracy, who runs the Buddy Phillips Learning Center at Cedar Ridge, will have an office waiting for his father when he retires. The two share a close bond and Tracy was thrilled to be able to win the PGA South Central Section Championship at Cedar Ridge in 2011, giving his father a get-well boost in his recovery from his second heart surgery.

"He's definitely an old school pro," Tracy said. "He and Mike (Wooten) have formed a great team and have gotten a tremendous amount accomplished."

"To a lot of people, Buddy Phillips is Cedar Ridge."

NOTES: Cedar Ridge will be having a tournament in honor of Buddy Phillips on Sept. 21 and a black-tie roast at the Spirit Event Center on Oct. 22. Call 918-252-2501 for more information on either event.

Phillips will be replaced by David Bryan, formerly director of golf and general manager at The Patriot in Owasso.

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