

In-House Innovators: Grayhawk Golf Club

Written by Jeff Locke

Tuesday, 15 January 2019 13:17 - Last Updated Friday, 18 January 2019 17:13



A look behind the scenes at the veterans of Grayhawk Golf Club.



For the last 25 years, a handful of mainstays at Grayhawk Golf Club managed to shape one of the most celebrated places to play golf.

It all started at the top with director of golf, Joe “Shoe” Shershenovich, although he would be the first to divert the accolades to his team and the club’s founders, Gregg Tryhus and Del Cochran. Shershenovich entered the project at the beginning staking out Grayhawk’s innovative experience. Chief among them was hosting prestigious golf events. When the club opened, December 1994, they hit the ground running a month later by hosting what is now known as the WGC-Dell Technologies Match Play.

“Gregg and Del envisioned the club as a premier venue for high-profile golf events,” says Shershenovich. “From the PGA Tour and PGA Jr. League to the upcoming NCAA championships, to this day, we still host big tournaments at all levels.”

Shershenovich and crew carved out a unique niche in the traditional golf landscape, which until then consisted of a binary choice between stiff private clubs versus raw public munis. Grayhawk combined the best of both with a dash of attitude: Classic Rock has ripped across the practice facility since day one.

Another day-one player, the club’s controller, Toni Dennerline, has been reckoning the financial health of the club since 1994. Her work throughout the years has meant as much, if not more, to Grayhawk’s success than anyone’s. “There’s just so many moving parts: retail, golf, food and beverage, the staff,” says Shershenovich. “Toni ties them all together; she’s the glue.”

The golf business, albeit in good shape of late, hasn’t always been “fairways and greens.” “We hit a couple big bumps in 2001 and 2008,” Shershenovich says. “We all had to make adjustments to keep things going in the right direction. Toni was a big part of that.”

Director of operations at Grayhawk, Brian Bevard, came to the party in 1997, a few years after Shoe and Toni, but he definitely made up for lost time. “F&B at public clubs was thought of as primarily for golfers,” says Bevard. “We have the luxury of attracting both golfers and non-golfers at the restaurants and for special events and parties.”

And guests dining at Grayhawk also have the luxury—of choice. Quill Creek Café, Phil’s Grill, The Morning Joint and Isabella’s Kitchen each offer unique culinary experiences with similar come-as-you-are ambiances and flexible indoor-outdoor settings.

Somewhere in between the last swig in Phil’s Grill and the first tee, golfers usually mosey through the Golf Shop & Trading Company. Director of retail, Kelly Azama, took the helm in 1998 to push the shopping experience way beyond the standard to a unique golfer’s boutique. “We get golfers from all over with different tastes,” says Azama. “We stay informed to keep our fingers on the pulse of golf merchandise to anticipate trends and brands that will grab their attention.”

According to Shershenovich, “surface and service” also gets their attention. Ernie Pock handles the surface side of the equation for Grayhawk’s two golf courses as well as the surrounding grounds and Sonoran Desert.

Luckily for Ernie, agronomy runs in the family giving him a wise perspective beyond his years, which is especially helpful in the harsh and fickle Desert Southwest. “The hot, dry conditions are perfect for golfers who don’t want to get rained out, but growing grass can be a challenge,”

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says Pock. "It's important for us to be in championship condition for everyone, not just when we're hosting a championship."

A sentiment Shershenovich echoes on the service side: "We treat every golfer the same way we treat tour players. They can even store their stuff in lockers with names on them like Tiger Woods, Ernie Els, Phil Mickelson or Gary McCord, although nobody picks Gary's."

Twenty five years of service is a long time for any industry, especially the golf and hospitality industry. Combined between them, Shershenovich, Dennerline, Bevard, Azama and Pock have logged more than 100. Along the way, they managed to mold one of the most recognized brands in golf with their own bare hands.

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Grayhawk Golf Club grayhawkgolf.com.