

Several of our readers have been asking, "Would you tell the story of Forest Heights Country Club?" With the azaleas in bloom and men slipping away from their desks more often as warm weather beckons, we decided it's time.

On one such sunny afternoon, Charlie Olliff, Jr., Tal Calloway, Bo Hook, Dub Lovett, Don Hackett, and Stacy Webb gathered in the Founder's Room at Forest Heights to reminisce. The stories flowed thick and sweet, like Tupelo honey, as they remembered some of their favorites who've played the links at Forest Heights. Men like Jake Hines, a Hall of Fame athlete and prankster on the golf course, or of A. M. Seligman, who would always get sick when he was 2 or 3 down and have to go home, or of Datus Akins in his overalls and engineer's cap. While the men laughed at these dear memories from the past, they also talked with pride of how it all began.

Back in 1946, the editorial question above was posed to the community by the local newspaper. A group of young men soon were saying, "Yes!" And, in just days they found the perfect site. A little over a week later, with an overwhelmingly positive response, one hundred citizens had applied for charter membership. Within three years, another 100 issues of stock were approved, bringing membership up to 200, and Statesboro finally had a viable golf and social club with prospects for making it one of the best in the Southeast.

On April 12, 1946, the inaugural charter membership elected a Board of Governors made up of Dr. John Mooney, Sam Strauss, Paul Franklin, Jr., James F. Coleman, J. Brantley Johnson, Josh Lanier, Ike Minkovitz, Bill Bowen, Prince H. Preston, Jr., Robert Benson, and Sidney Dodd. They aptly named the rolling countryside with the tall pines Forest Heights Country Club.

The Board's first order of business was to purchase the land the men had picked out. According to *A Century of Progress*, the site consisted of 600 acres of land about 2.6 miles west of Statesboro on property formerly owned by Leon McElveen, as well as the 200 acres of land purchased by Bulloch County back in 1889 from Eugene Griner for \$700 to be used for the county's pauper farm. Today, the land that no one thought worth anything but to serve the needs of the county's paupers is now one of the most beautiful golf courses in the entire Southeast.

Only a golfer could envision what those acres of pine forest and idle fields would reveal with the right planning and lots of hard work. In July of 1946, Ike Minkovitz chaired the new golf course committee, and C. A. Mays of Augusta, a golf architect, was hired to design the nine-hole course. Work moved swiftly, and during the first week of January, 1947, the first foursome ever to play a round of golf at the new Forest Heights Country Club teed off. About a year and a half later, on June 18, 1948, the club held a formal opening of its new clubhouse.

The course had nine holes at first and was 3,260 yards long. The longest hole was 490 yards and the shortest 140 yards. Par was 36, and the first club pro was H. L. "Red" Roberts, who had been the golf professional at the Savannah Municipal Golf Course. In 1966, according to *Century of Progress*, "George Cobb of Greenville, North Carolina, one of the great golf course architects of his day, designed the new nine holes and made changes in the original nine holes. A sprinkler system was installed to assure perfect playing conditions on the greens." The Club now had a championship level course.

Today, covering 110 acres, it has a par 72 and plays 6,950 yards. With rolling hills, undulating greens, and scenic water hazards that join the non-parallel layout of the holes, the course offers a challenge to any golfer, even visiting professionals. Some famous faces to play here include Bob Hope, Vince Gill, and Lewis Grizzard. When we asked our group what the hardest hole to play might be, #10, with its elevation, narrow fairway, pond, and challenging green was the consensus winner, while the short

#6 yields several holes-in-one, it's tricky and can bite you when you least expect it. Others that vie for difficulty honors are #9 and #2.

The idea of a golf club or a country club had been around for over 20 years, beginning in 1925 with the "Lake View Country Club" about three miles north on the road to Blitch. When the dam for the club's lake gave way under the pressure of high water, it resulted in the first country club of Bulloch County being put up for sale in 1928.

Other efforts to have a local golf club included a nine-hole course built at South Georgia Teachers College in the early 1900s, with golfing privileges extended to community members. It became very popular, but in 1938 a contract was let to build the Marvin Pittman Laboratory School on the land occupied by the course.

About the same time period, the Pine Crest Golf Club built a nine-hole golf course on property belonging to the Olliff Estate and F. D. Thackston. Located where the Cone Homes on Northside Drive East are today, it only lasted about a year before the land owners began to sell parcels of the land. The organizers had only secured permission to create a golf course; they had not purchased the land itself.

Still, the idea of a golf club or country club would not die. Around 1939, the Statesboro Golf Club organized to build a course on about 86 acres northeast of town on the Dover Road (U.S. 301 North) on part of the old Waters Estate bordering Mill Creek. But war loomed in Europe, and the young men soon had more on their minds than golf.

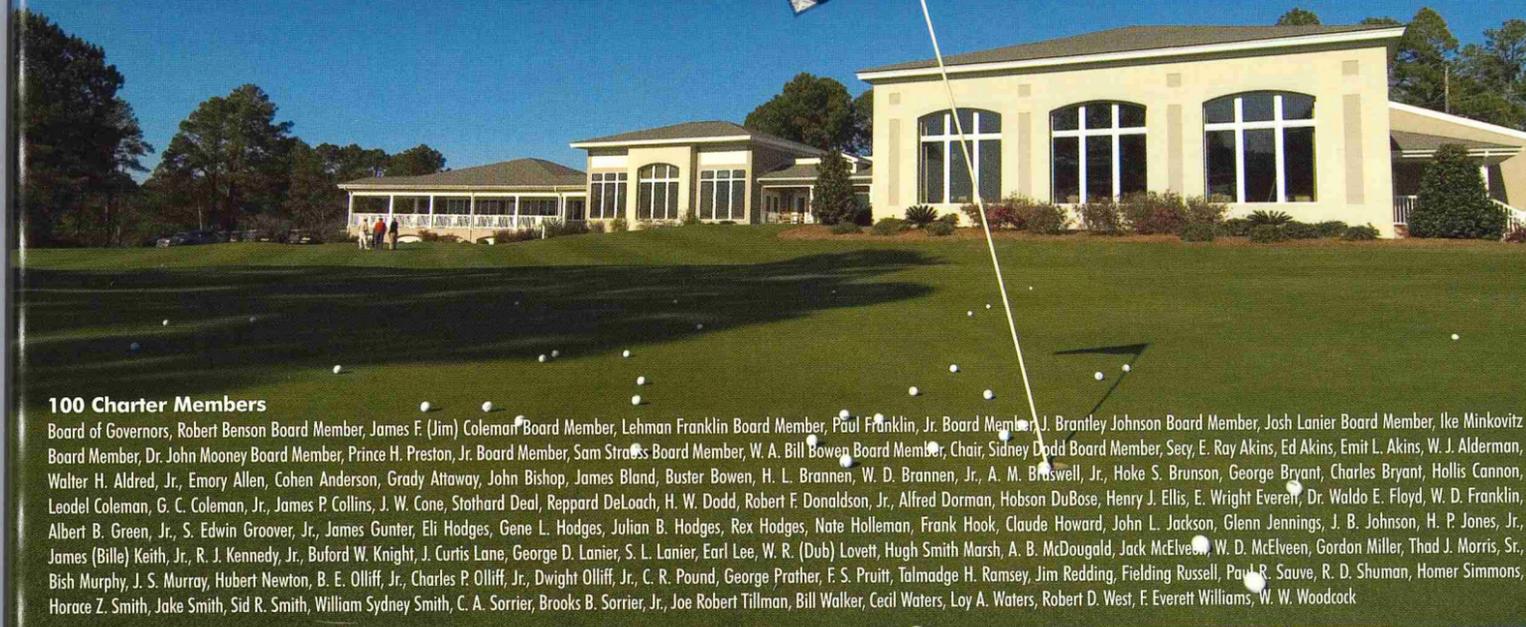


L-R: Stacy Webb, Tal Calloway, Bo Hook, Don Hackett, Dub Lovett, and Charlie Olliff, Jr.

"Are You Interested in a Country Club?" The Heritage of Forest Heights

Written by Karen Powell

Photography by Frank Fortune and Geoff L Johnson



100 Charter Members

Board of Governors, Robert Benson Board Member, James F. (Jim) Coleman Board Member, Lehman Franklin Board Member, Paul Franklin, Jr. Board Member, J. Brantley Johnson Board Member, Josh Lanier Board Member, Ike Minkovitz Board Member, Dr. John Mooney Board Member, Prince H. Preston, Jr. Board Member, Sam Strauss Board Member, W. A. Bill Bowen Board Member, Chair, Sidney Dodd Board Member, Secy, E. Ray Akins, Ed Akins, Emit L. Akins, W. J. Alderman, Walter H. Aldred, Jr., Emory Allen, Cohen Anderson, Grady Attaway, John Bishop, James Bland, Buster Bowen, H. L. Brannen, W. D. Brannen, Jr., A. M. Bruswell, Jr., Hoke S. Brunson, George Bryant, Charles Bryant, Hollis Cannon, Leodel Coleman, G. C. Coleman, Jr., James P. Collins, J. W. Cone, Stothard Deal, Reppard DeLoach, H. W. Dodd, Robert F. Donaldson, Jr., Alfred Dorman, Hobson DuBose, Henry J. Ellis, E. Wright Everenr, Dr. Waldo E. Floyd, W. D. Franklin, Albert B. Green, Jr., S. Edwin Groover, Jr., James Gunter, Eli Hodges, Gene L. Hodges, Julian B. Hodges, Rex Hodges, Nate Holleman, Frank Hook, Claude Howard, John L. Jackson, Glenn Jennings, J. B. Johnson, H. P. Jones, Jr., James (Bille) Keith, Jr., R. J. Kennedy, Jr., Buford W. Knight, J. Curtis Lane, George D. Lanier, S. L. Lanier, Earl Lee, W. R. (Dub) Lovett, Hugh Smith Marsh, A. B. McDougald, Jack McElveen, W. D. McElveen, Gordon Miller, Thad J. Morris, Sr., Bish Murphy, J. S. Murray, Hubert Newton, B. E. Olliff, Jr., Charles P. Olliff, Jr., Dwight Olliff, Jr., C. R. Pound, George Prather, F. S. Pruitt, Talmadge H. Ramsey, Jim Redding, Fielding Russell, Paul R. Sauve, R. D. Shuman, Homer Simmons, Horace Z. Smith, Jake Smith, Sid R. Smith, William Sydney Smith, C. A. Sorrier, Brooks B. Sorrier, Jr., Joe Robert Tillman, Bill Walker, Cecil Waters, Loy A. Waters, Robert D. West, F. Everett Williams, W. W. Woodcock



L-R: Steve Collins, Stacy Webb, and Walt Garvin, Jr.

