

Colonial Country Club

Colonial Country Club was founded in 1936 by Marvin Leonard chiefly out of a desire to introduce Bentgrass greens to the area. Some people viewed Mr. Leonard's determination to see Bentgrass greens succeed in the Southwest as a sign of his tenacity, but those who knew him better, recognized it as pure bullheadedness.

In 1927 at the age of 32, Marvin Leonard became enamored with the game of golf, playing regularly at both Glen Garden and River Crest. He developed his own game to the point where he shot in the low 80s consistently and dipped into the 70s when his putter was hot.

Leonard's interest in golf became intense to the point he studied all aspects of the sport, including golf courses - how they were built, how holes were designed, all about grass and sand. Unlike the bumpy native Bermudagrass greens in Texas, Bentgrass greens were as smooth as a billiard table. Leonard made up his mind that Texas courses should have Bentgrass greens. Everyone told him Bentgrass was too fragile to withstand the unforgiving Texas heat. Leonard persisted to the point he told the River Crest governing Board that if they'd let him convert two or three greens to Bentgrass, he'd underwrite the cost. If the experiment didn't work, he'd pay for the conversion back to Bermudagrass. The then president of River Crest grew weary of Mr. Leonard's harping about Bentgrass greens and finally told him, "Marvin, if you're so sold on Bentgrass, why don't you go build your own golf course and put them in?" The idea of Colonial Golf Club was borne.

Mr. Leonard engaged John Bredemus of Texas and Perry Maxwell of Oklahoma to assist with the course layout by asking each to submit five alternative plans for the course. After reviewing their recommendations, he asked them to submit five more from which Mr. Leonard began picking and borrowing from both designers to create the Colonial design.

By 1935 the golf course and first clubhouse neared completion. Mr. Leonard busied himself by contacting friends and business associates in Fort Worth to extend a personal invitation to play the Bentgrass greens at his "Colonial Golf Club." The first members of Colonial were not charged a membership fee, rather they had to put up a security deposit of \$50. When the club opened in January 1936, about 100 Fort Worth residents had joined Colonial Golf Club.

Mr. Leonard's travels and his appreciation of golf had provided him the necessary insight to put Colonial Golf Club on par with the best courses in the nation; his dream was to put his club on the national map of golfdom. In the late 1930s, Mr. Leonard began lobbying the United States Golf Association to conduct the U.S. Open, golf's most prestigious event, at his club. Getting the USGA's attention was no easy feat, but with help from well-connected leaders in Fort Worth and by guaranteeing

the USGA \$25,000, the 1941 Open was headed to Fort Worth, Texas.

From the beginning, Colonial Golf Club was the private domain of Marvin Leonard, but in late 1942, Leonard had a different idea for Colonial; he decided to sell the club with a specific buyer in mind - the members of Colonial. He believed by giving them equity in the club, it would ensure its long-term success. His first pitch to the members was rejected almost unanimously. Not accustomed to the word "no" he continued to insist that selling Colonial to the membership was the best way to ensure the club's future. He offered to sell the club at his own cost - an investment of about \$300,000 - and was willing to forego the appreciation on the property. After many discussions, some heated, about 300 Colonial members voted on Mr. Leonard's offer and approved it by a margin of less than a dozen votes. Thus, Colonial Golf Club became Colonial Country Club on December 31, 1942.

For a detailed history of Colonial's first 75 years, check out "Colonial Country Club: The Diamond Jubilee Celebration" by Frances Trimble.