

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PALM DESERT

SHADOW MOUNTAIN GOLF CLUB 1958-2021

73800 Ironwood St, Palm Desert, CA



Photo: GolfPass.com

The Shadow Mountain Golf Course was the first golf course in Palm Desert. It was developed by Shadow Mountain Park Inc., which was the group of Shadow Mountain Club members that purchased the Club from the Palm Desert Corporation around 1955.

Legendary and famed golfers Gene Sarazen and George Von Elm envisioned the course to be the design of the future. Their design was focused on providing a balance between being player-friendly and yet not overtaxing golfers.

GOLF COURSE DESIGN:
GENE SARAZEN
GEORGE VON ELM



Official Modernism Week Event

The History of the Golf Club

Originally the golf club was affiliated with the adjacent Shadow Mountain Club (now Shadow Mountain Resort and Club); it is now privately owned and run by its equity members. In October 1968 the resort and golf course were split and members had a choice to belong to one or the other. Upon separation the golf club received part of the structure to provide a clubhouse, pro shop, and enough land for a parking lot and access to Ironwood St.

In the late 1960's the two nines were switched. A new irrigation system was installed and protective screens were added around many greens and tee boxes.

In the early 1970's the clubhouse was redecorated and a small kitchen, which was called the "Pantry Kitchen," was added to provide short order lunches.

In 1976 heavy rain broke a dam support at the top of Highway 74 and tons of sand, rock and debris raged across the course. It took a concerted effort of the members' labor and dollar donations to restore the course to a playable condition.

In 1987 the Club purchased the Filmer mansion that occupied a large piece of property in the middle of the course. Purchase of this property allowed lengthening of the 15th, 17th and 18th holes.

The City of Palm Desert designated the Shadow Mountain Golf Club as an Historic Landmark in 2010.

In 2021 the Club was purchased by Palm Desert local, Lindi Biggi.



Photo: Desert Sun



Photo: Historical Society of Palm Desert Archives

Shadow Mountain Golf Club 1958 and today



Photo: Desert Sun

Gene Sarazen (Eugenio Saraceni) was born to Sicilian immigrants on February 27, 1902 in Harrison, New York. He began caddying at age ten at local golf clubs, and in his teens took a series of club professional jobs in the New York and Pittsburgh area. In April 1922 Sarazen visited Skokie Country Club to practice on the course that would hold the US Open; in July, he won the tournament. He then became a 'touring' golf professional and later that summer, he won the PGA Championship.

Sarazen became one of the great American professional golfers in the 1920s and 1930s, winning seven major championships. He, along with Ben Hogan, Gary Player, Jack Nicklaus and Tiger Woods are the few players to win the Career Grand Slam - PGA Championship, U.S. Open, Masters and British Open.

Gene Sarazen

Sarazen hit "the shot heard 'round the world" at Augusta National Golf Club on the fifteenth hole in the final round of the Masters Tournament in 1935. It remains one of the most famous golf shots in golf history.

Sarazen played well into the 1960s, and occasionally into the 1970s – still wearing the knickers, or plus-fours, which were in fashion when he broke into the top level.

Sarazen claimed to have invented the modern sand wedge, which he called the sand iron. Every top golfer since has utilized this wedge design and technique. It also began to be used for shots from grass, leading to a revolution in short-game techniques, along with lower scoring.

He also helped to popularized the sport with his role as a commentator on the "Wonderful World of Golf" television show, and was an early TV broadcaster at important events. He also had what is still the longest-running endorsement contract in professional sports – with Wilson Sporting Goods from 1923 until his death, a total of 75 years. Sarazen died at age 97 in 1999 in Naples, Florida.

The legendary Gene Sarazen crafted just eight golf courses in his Hall of Fame career. They are:

- Chateau Elan Golf Club, Braselton, Georgia
- St Andrews – The Kitting Course, St Andrew, Fife, Scotland
- Island Country Club, Marco Island, Florida
- Onward Talofoto Golf Club, Talofoto, Guam
- Shadow Mountain Golf Club, Palm Desert
- Slammer and Squire Golf Course, St Augustine, Florida
- Sunny Hills Golf Club, Sunny Hills, Florida
- Sunset Hill Golf Club, Brookfield, Connecticut

Sarazen is quoted as saying: "The new modern course of this type is shorter than most but is not easier to play," Sarazen said of his architectural aims for Palm Desert's first course, opened in 1958. "It will give the golfer who uses his brain a chance against the competitor who hits with power, and I think it will be one of the sportiest and most challenging courses in the entire area." (Source: Golf California.com)



Photo: Hulton Archive/Getty Images

George Von Elm

George "Gix" Von Elm (1901-1961) began his golf career as a caddy at the Salt Lake Country Club in his native Utah. His golf skills developed quickly; in 1926 he won the U.S. Amateur title and tied for third in the British Open. In the 1930s Von Elm turned professional playing out of Los Angeles and winning the 1936 Southern California Open and the 1938 California State Open.

Von Elm moved to the Lakeside Golf Club in the late 1930s where he oversaw the reconstruction of five holes following damage caused by flooding. In the late 1940s, he consulted to the City of Los Angeles, in the development of the Rancho Park Golf Course.

From 1950 to 1953, he was the head professional, as well as the head greenskeeper, at the Hacienda Country Club in Los Angeles, then moved back to Utah where he designed and developed, and then was the professional at the Blackfoot golf course. Von Elm is also credited with designing the Airport Golf Course in Idaho (1957), the Mount Ogden municipal course in Utah, the original nine holes at Sun Valley, Idaho, Shadow Mountain Golf Club in Palm Desert (1958), as well as the Juniper Hills and Highland courses in Idaho.



Photo: UCLA, Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library

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