



Perfect Balance

By Joe Barks, Editor

Robert E. Jones, II, CCM, CCE, certainly qualifies as an “old school” club manager in the best sense of the term. His father, R. Ray Jones, was a prominent figure among the previous generation of leading club managers, classically educated at Cornell University’s School of Hotel Administration and achieving distinction as General Manager of several top clubs, including Midland (Texas) CC and Denver CC, before becoming an executive with the Neiman Marcus department store company.

Inspired by his father’s early advice that “the great thing about club management is that it’s never a boring business,” Bob Jones followed suit and graduated with honors from Florida International University’s Restaurant and Hotel Management program, before returning to his native Texas to start his own successful club career, which has included tenure as General Manager of Eldorado CC, the Dallas Athletic Club and the Northwood Club in Dallas.

For the past 16 years, Jones has been General Manager/Chief Operating Officer of the Desert Mountain Club, Inc. in Scottsdale, Ariz.—a stretch that’s brought him, and the club



With six Jack Nicklaus Signature golf courses and an equal number of clubhouses and pro shops, plus major tennis, aquatics and fitness facilities and 10 foodservice locations, running the 8,000-acre Desert Mountain Club property for its more than 2,150 member families was described in 2012 by club President Paul Wutz as “in essence, [like operating] a small city.”

PHOTOS COURTESY DESERT MOUNTAIN CLUB

Achievements

AT DESERT MOUNTAIN CLUB
THROUGH BOB JONES' LEADERSHIP



■ Opened a state-of-the-art Golf Performance Center in March 2012; instructional technology in the \$1.6 million, 6,500-sq. ft. facility includes 3-D motion capture and four-camera video motion and analysis.



Desert Mountain Club's new Golf Performance Center emphasizes instruction for players at all levels, including beginners.

- Transitioned to member-owned club in December 2010, when members purchased the property's six golf courses, amenities and developable land for \$73.5 million—the largest private residential transaction recorded that year. The negotiated price was one-third less than the developer's asking price.
- Hosted Charles Schwab Cup Championship in 2012 as the season-ending event of the Champions Tour; the tournament is scheduled to return in 2014 and 2016.
- Has been selected as a Platinum Club of America every year since 2000.
- Celebrated property's 25th anniversary in 2012.

industry, into a fast-changing new era where being “old school” is not always viewed favorably. But as someone who led Desert Mountain during that period through ownership by three different commercial real estate firms and finally, in late 2010, to becoming a member-owned club, no one disputes Jones' credentials or ability to keep pace with the times,

Through all of these stages, Jones led the club's steady growth into what its President, Paul Wutz, described in 2012 as “in essence, a small city”—with six Jack Nicklaus Signature golf courses, an equal number of clubhouses and pro shops, plus major tennis, aquatics and fitness facilities and 10 food-service locations, all spread out over 8,000 acres and used by 2,150 member families. And for his steady guidance of the property into what is now a \$63 million operation with a positive bottom line, Jones was named the 2012 recipient of The James H. Brewer Award for Country/Golf Clubs with More than 600 Full-Privilege Members, as part of the Excellence in Club Management Awards co-sponsored by the McMahon Group and *Club & Resort Business*.

Lighting the Fuse

Desert Mountain, where 150,000 rounds of golf are played annually, might appear to be a place where what's now defined as “old school” club management, with everything revolving around one kingpin activity, might still apply. And certainly,

golf will always be the most prominent part of the property's profile, especially after it has been bolstered in the last two years by significant developments that have included:

- the opening of a new state-of-the-art, \$1.6 million Golf Performance Center;
- the arrival of a new Director of Golf, Mike Scully, who brought 10 years of Head Professional experience, including involvement with a PGA Championship and Ryder Cup, from the prestigious Medinah Country Club; and
- the return of professional tour exposure (Desert Mountain hosted The Tradition tournament, from 1989 through 2001), with the Charles Schwab Cup Championship coming to the club in 2012 and scheduled to return in 2014 and 2016.

“The national exposure we're getting again [through the Schwab Cup] really lit the fuse for an exciting new upcycle here,” Jones says. That's presented Desert Mountain, he adds, with valuable new opportunities to further enhance its reputation among already-fervent enthusiasts as a place for “great golf that's second to none.”

Just as importantly, he feels, it has heightened the need to be at the forefront of the movement to help develop new interest in the game. This goal is being pursued by ensuring that the new Performance Center devotes ample programming, time and space to help occasional players reconnect with golf, while also attracting non-playing members and creating a top-notch youth training environment. Additionally, Desert Mountain is using its close ties to the Jack Nicklaus team to take a leadership position in the Play It Forward movement, with a master plan in place to build over a dozen new forward tees across all six of its courses in coming years, to offer more enjoyable playing opportunities to beginners, seniors and younger players.

Even for a well-established golf property, these efforts are

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Jones encourages everyone on Desert Mountain's 650-person staff to develop their own individual "Brand You" identities that can help bring special distinction to their contributions to the team.

critical, Jones explains, because trends have clearly pointed to the need to "diversify and expand" traditional golf programs so they can be more all-inclusive. Desert Mountain has also had positive feedback, he reports, from efforts to revamp its golf event schedule to "draw in the less-intense" player by reducing time and cost commitments and adding more social aspects.

At the same time, Jones has shown he's definitely not "old school" in recognizing that securing commitment from today's full range of club members requires diversifying and expanding beyond golf as well. In addition to the development of walking trails and other successful facilities and programs, so that golfers and non-golfers alike can fully enjoy, and use, all that the Desert Mountain property has to offer, ambitious plans are percolating for further expansion of wellness, activity and social/dining centers throughout the club that could include such progressive programming as computer, art and photography classes, as well as health clinics—in essence, providing the "small city" with its own mini-community college.

"Something for everyone, and balance in what you offer, is the name of the game in today's club business," says Jones. "You have to do all you can so people don't stay in their homes, or go elsewhere, because you're not offering all that they need.

"With a property like ours, where it can be a 30-minute drive just to get some fast food, there's a great opportunity to capture member loyalty for all aspects of their lifestyles," he adds. "We're seeing a tremendous new influx of people who



Ideas

IMPLEMENTED SUCCESSFULLY

AT DESERT MOUNTAIN CLUB UNDER BOB JONES' DIRECTION

■ Four private mountain trails have been opened since late 2011 on the northern portion of the property, using land deeded to the club by the Desert Mountain Master Association (saving \$100,000 in property taxes). Two more trails are scheduled to be opened, for a total of 15 miles.



A private trails system developed in partnership with the Desert Mountain Master Association is enhancing the club's appeal.

■ IBM Analytics software used to conserve water, energy and manpower by integrating four agronomy department software programs; projected savings are 5%-10% for energy, 20% for reallocation of reclaimed water to other parts of the property, and 50% time savings for the irrigation manager.

■ F&B program (\$7.1 million in annual sales) re-configured to provide multi-dimensional and functional menus that satisfy golfing contingent during the day and offer individual culinary themes, and a variety of pricing options, for each of 10 clubhouse restaurants in the evening.

are interested in moving here not only from throughout the U.S. but the world, and who represent a much wider variety of family types. That's all good—but if we don't secure our future by making sure we have everything that can appeal to as many of these families as possible, and win their long-term commitment by showing how they'll get tremendous value for their monthly dues, some other place is likely to attract them."

Jones also puts a big emphasis on balance in preparing and leading his staff to follow through on these missions. Here, he's unashamedly "old school," encouraging his managers to make reading management and motivational books an ongoing part of their responsibilities. His current emphasis is on the "Brand You" theme, which stresses how individuals should strive to develop and implement their own distinctive identities in the context of their role and contributions to the team.

"That's really the future of success in club management, especially as we diversify what our properties offer," he says. "All of us have to stand out as having something special ourselves to offer to our members, in addition to whatever might be special about our club and its facilities." **C&RB**

The Cochise-Geronimo clubhouse (left) was the first of what are now six clubhouses on the property and is still the largest, at 52,000 sq. ft.