



The Greenville Country Club's Chanticleer course celebrated its 50th anniversary with the dedication of a special monument. Kelly Odom, the club's History and Traditions Chairman, was joined by Kay and Heyward Sullivan for the unveiling of the monument. Sullivan was a member of the club's board when the decision was made to build a second course. Legendary golfer Gene Sarazen played in the first group when the new course opened in September of 1970.

## Chanticleer celebrates 50th anniversary

### Robert Trent Jones designed course opened in 1970

The Greenville Country Club's Chanticleer course has made a great deal of history during its first 50 years.

Over the years, the course has often been included in rankings of top-100 courses in the country.

But how did it all start? Who had the idea to build a championship course? How did a club in the Upstate get the top golf course designer of the time, Robert Trent Jones, to build the course?

The best way to get the answer to these questions is to ask someone who was there and involved, Heyward Sullivan.

The South Carolina Golf Association Hall of Fame member was a member of the club's board that made the decision to add a course to the club.

"We didn't start out wanting to build a second course, we wanted to improve our course because club membership was getting pretty competitive in Greenville at the time," recalled Sullivan.

Some of the board members wanted to make minor course improvements while Sullivan and a few others wanted to make



Robert Trent Jones called his work at Chanticleer "the best course under 7,000 yards in the country."

"It took some convincing, but we managed to get the board to approve getting a big name architect to help us and there was no one bigger than Robert Trent Jones at the time," he said.

Spyglass Hill, Firestone, Hazeltine, Olympic Club, Baltusral, Old Warson were just a few of Jones' designs which became favorite venues for major championships.

When Sullivan suggested Jones, more than a few board members didn't think it was possible to get him to come to Greenville.

Sullivan made a cold call to his office and was told Jones would get back to him when he returned from a project overseas.

"It was several weeks and we were about ready to give up on the idea when he called back," Sullivan said.

Jones gave the club a date and a time

for his arrival.

"We took him from the airport straight to the club. We got in carts and rode around. He was making observations and asking questions," said Sullivan.

At lunch after the tour Jones gave his hosts some bad news.

"He told us he didn't think we had what he needed to turn our course into a championship venue. We all sunk down in our seats," said Sullivan.

But Jones offered a suggestion, instead of reworking the club's course why not build a new course, a second course.

Off the top of his head Jones told the club how he had seen a second course increase memberships to the point it could pay for itself. The new course could add 200 members to the club and the cost of construction would be covered.

"If we could find some land to work with he would come back and consider building us a course," he said.

Jones required about 150 acres and have access to water, which was one of his trademark design features.

The club looked at three sites.

One site was near Moonville, but that was considered too far from the club.

Another was on the Hollingsworth property, but Hollingsworth would only lease the land and that was a non-starter for the club.

The final property was just around the corner from the club.

Greenville developer Red Hughes was building what would be Chanticleer off Faris Road.

The property met Jones' wishes and when the club asked about the property Hughes made the club an offer they couldn't refuse.

"He gave us the land. The only stipulation was that if it ever stopped being a golf course it would revert back to his family's trust," said Sullivan.

The membership now had to vote on the project. Jones returned to Greenville to meet with the members.

"It was kind of funny. When he made his presentation some of our members thought he was Bobby Jones the golfer," Sullivan said.

Around 700 members voted on the proposed new course and Sullivan recalls there were less than 10 who opposed the project.

When the club was ready to begin construction it received another gift. All the grading work would be done at no cost.

"It was free, but the crews doing it were used to making things flat. Sometimes we had to go out and stand in front of trees to make sure they didn't run them down," he joked.

Jones was in Greenville often during the construction. While he was satisfied with the company moving the big dirt he wanted his own shaper to do the greens, tees and



Chanticleer's par 4 9th hole (above) and the par 3 2nd hole (below) incorporate many of Jones' favorite design characteristics

bunkers.

"I remember he said shaping greens needed an artist and it would cost some money, but it turned out to be money well spent," said Sullivan.

Sullivan recalls that Jones had most of the design in his head. He doesn't recall seeing him using a lot of charts and maps.

"He had such a great feel for the property and what he wanted it to look like. His personal attention shows on every hole," said Sullivan.

With no cost for the land and substantial savings on the physical construction, the course was built for around \$480,000. Jones fee was 10% of the construction cost.

"It was 50 years ago and money is different now, but who knows what it would cost to build a Chanticleer today," wondered Sullivan.

While the course is named Chanticleer the same as the residential development, it did not get its name from the property.

The name was suggested by board member Dr. Frank Wrenn.

Several members of the board were Clemson fans and objected to the idea of the course being named after a gamecock.

Wrenn convinced the objectors that Chanticleer came from the Canterbury Tales.

Chaucer described the Chanticleer as a proud and fierce rooster "for crowing there was not his equal in all the land."

And thus the name came to be agreed upon.

The course was opened in September of 1970 with a special inaugural round played by celebrities and members.

"We got Gene Sarazen to come to Greenville for the grand opening," Sullivan remembered.

Sarazen, who hit the shot heard round the world in the 1935 Masters, was at the time the host of a popular TV show, Shell's Wonderful World of Golf.

Sarazen played with Jones in the first group off the tee on the new course. Sullivan played in the second group.

After the round he heard Sarazen offer high praise for the course, the first of many compliments Chanticleer would receive over the next 50 years.



A major remodeling was completed in 2002. It was supervised by Rees Jones, the son of the designer.

He had worked with his father when the course was built and did the remodeling to maintain the integrity of his father's design.

Over the last 50 years the course has been a favorite venue for major amateur championships in the Carolinas. When a CGA or SCGA event is scheduled at the club there is often a waiting list of golfers wanting to play.

"I know the club is very proud of our role in golf in the Carolinas and especially how well regarded Chanticleer is considered," said Sullivan.

The course no longer appears on many lists of top-100 courses. Newer courses and high dollar lobbying campaigns are rewarded with a ranking.

Instead, Greenville Country Club members can take pride in the endorsement from the Hall of Fame designer of Chanticleer.

"Among all the courses he designed and the courses he had visited, Jones told us he considered Chanticleer the best course under 7000 yards anywhere. It is his course and he probably was a little bit prejudiced, but we agree we have a very special golf course we have thoroughly enjoyed for 50 years thanks to Robert Trent Jones," concluded Sullivan.