



# At Home on the Course

BY / LARI POWELL HATLEY

**IT'S NO WONDER THAT BOB FARREN,** Director of Golf Courses and Greens Management at Pinehurst, is at home on the golf course. He grew up in West Virginia, splitting his time between the school where his mother taught and the golf course his father managed. "I loved it!" Bob says. "I always wanted to be in golf."

When Bob graduated from Marshall University in 1979, he went to work in the golf industry. He had never been to North Carolina, but he says, "I felt drawn to it." In 1982, he had the chance to interview here. "I was in awe: the history, the tradition. Then I walked into the dining room, and there was Ray Floyd. He was in his prime. It took my breath away! I was sold! I spent the day interviewing. I never got past the courses, but when they offered me the

position of Assistant Superintendent for Courses 1 and 4, I jumped at it.

The courses captured Bob's heart and so did the talented young Tournament Director, Kathy Crow. In 1984, Bob and Kathy were engaged. Thirty years later, they are still enjoying each other's company.

More than 30 years later, Bob is still delighted with the golf courses at Pinehurst. He has overseen lots of changes and renovations. Asked about the most recent renovations, Bob replied that working closely with the team of Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw, Pinehurst set out to return the strategy and thus the spirit of Pinehurst No. 2. "More than 35 acres of manicured turf removed from areas around the fairways, essentially eliminating the tall rough that previously surrounded the fairways.

In order to move toward native plants, the natural seed bank was left. That has been quite successful. Now there are more than 50 species of endemic flora growing in the sandy areas. In fact, Dr. Danesha Carley from North Carolina State University worked with Pinehurst on the idea of sustainable agriculture and its relationship to design."

One of the most advantageous aspects of using native plants is that the course is always changing. A player can come out each month and find completely different challenges. It is also different from year to year as the plants evolve. Even the weather makes the course different from day to day.

In 2014, Pinehurst has the honor of hosting both the 2014 U.S. Open and U.S. Women's Open Championships. It will mark the first time in history that both tournaments will be played on the same course in the same year. When complete, Pinehurst No. 2 will become the only site to have hosted all five USGA Championships.

Reflecting on why the area is such a mecca for golf enthusiasts and major tourneys, Bob says he thinks the keys are the climate and the good fortune of having Donald Ross do the early design. Bob says, "The sandy soil was similar to the soil Ross was familiar with in his native Scotland. This soil is workable. The sand just catches the spirit of golf."

When Bob accepted the position more than 30 years ago, it was the courses that drew him. Today, he still loves the Pinehurst courses. In fact, asked what he does to relax, Bob doesn't hesitate.

"I play golf," he says with a smile, but today his love is deeper. "The courses are great, but now I know it is the community that really matters. This community is fantastic. The citizens are civic minded. They give back. The people in this community volunteer at the hospital. They help with Meals on Wheels. For our Championships, we will have more than 6,500 volunteers, and my wife will be involved as one of the Vice Chairs. Kathy has also served on the Moore County School Board for over 10 years and is currently serving as Chairman. Kathy is chair of the school board and still there – wherever a volunteer is needed.

Kathy and I consider ourselves blessed to have had the opportunity to have our family grow here. We are active in our church, First Baptist Southern Pines. We also serve on the committee for YoungLife in the Sandhills, a mission that is focused on helping kids find Christ.

I love it here. I enjoy coming to work every day. Our staff is incredible – a real team of dedicated professionals that love what they do. Other people in my profession may enjoy building new courses. They may prefer attracting new tournaments. They may focus on putting together a strong staff. Then they move on to do their specialty in a new place. For me, I enjoyed getting to do all that in one place. My family was able to put down deep roots. Our two children were able to grow up in one place – one good, strong community. I have been blessed. The folks at Pinehurst Resort would say the feeling is mutual. ■

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