



Village of Pinehurst Mayors Have Unique U.S. Open Experiences Three Mayors Share their Leadership Abilities through U.S. Open Planning

Tuesday, November 19, 2013

As a general rule, successful small towns are led by mayors and a council who adhere to budgets, worry about its citizens' well-being and participate in the occasional ribbon-cutting.

However, in the Village of Pinehurst, a trio of mayors has added a unique experience to their mayoral resume over the last fifteen years, leading North Carolina's golf mecca during three prestigious U.S. Open Championships dating back to 1999.

But in 2014, the award-winning and historically re-designed Pinehurst No. 2 will host both the Open and Women's Open on consecutive weeks in June. The United States Golf Association (USGA) chose Pinehurst to participate with them on this new concept.

Pinehurst Resort and Country Club President and COO Don Padgett II sees this as a higher distinction than hosting multiple Opens.

"The USGA has honored us by allowing us to go into something new and completely different with them, and the only reason that you do something like that (back-to-back events) is that you enter into it with a group of people and a facility that you trust," Padgett offered. "I think you only do that with people you can count on."

The local population was receptive and proud to have Pinehurst No. 2 selected for the 1999 Open. But Andy Wilkison, Village Manager for 25 years, acknowledged that addressing the expectations of the 8600 folks who lived here was high on the list of the Village's "To Do" list.

"There were businesses and homeowners who had economic expectations," he recalled. "They believed that the U.S. Open would benefit them to a certain degree. There were also

expectations from residents that their lives and daily routines would go on without any changes with the U.S. Open visitors being in town.”

Perceived worries included crowd noises, travel and parking around the Village center, water and sewer, garbage pick-up, and moving about without problems.

“We couldn’t say ‘yes, we’re going to have 45,000 extra people here in Pinehurst for a week, but you won’t notice, so don’t worry,’” quipped Wilkison, “but honestly, most people understood the reality that our Village leadership was involved with a plan developed by (then) Pinehurst Championship Management (PCM). It worked very well.”

Virginia “Ginsey” Fallon was Mayor from 1997-1999 and was proud to be chosen by her fellow council members to her leadership role. When the former New Jersey educator retired to Pinehurst, she brought her “people-person” skills with her, listening to her constituents’ concerns about traffic flow, fire and rescue, and police demands. Fallon helped develop the plan, with the Resort and PCM, which centered around having auxiliary parking lots outside the immediate area, with buses bringing the spectators to the large harness track adjacent to the tournament site.

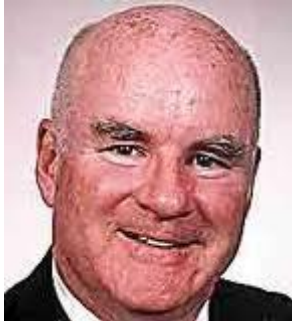


“We wanted the Village to be seen as a showcase, but we didn’t want our citizens to be inconvenienced. Most folks found that life went on almost exactly the same. There was a lot of planning with the Resort because we had never done something quite like this, and it was a big deal for our Village,” recalled Fallon. “I enjoyed being creative and solving problems, but I asked a lot of questions and delegated. We were very proud of the outcome.”

Wilkison said that Fallon’s communication and “people” skills served her well while working with the Resort and PCM to make a workable, successful plan for transportation.

“As mayor in 1999, Ginsey faced the ‘great unknown.’ We had never done a tournament on this level, but she could communicate with the folks who were very concerned about the preservation of their way of life,” Wilkison added. “Everything worked out fine.”

On the flip side, because the out-of-town traffic was diverted to satellite parking lots, the Village merchants didn't capture as many visitors as they had expected. So six years later when the Open returned, a few events were planned, including a performance by the North Carolina Symphony, to encourage folks to come into the Village while they visited the 2005 Open.



The late Steve Smith was mayor from 1999-2007, and George Hillier served as his mayor pro-tem. Smith had a strong professional/human relations background and served on boards locally.

“Steve Smith was a natural leader. He was a very intelligent and well-educated guy,” Hillier reminisced. “What we wanted to do was capitalize on what was done properly during the '99 Open, because it was extremely well-run.

“Steve, in his leadership position, wanted to make the Open itself, and the throngs of people coming in to the Village, as transparent as possible for the residents by working with the Resort, USGA and Pinehurst Business Guild. At the same time, he wanted to maximize the Village's image as a golf capital.”

Like Fallon, Hillier had a hands-on role as a tournament volunteer and saw up close how hard Smith worked and how much he enjoyed being mayor during the 2005 Open.

When Smith was mayor, the Village was evolving from more than just a retirement community, said Wilkison. The population had grown by nearly 2500 residents.

“Steve realized that and championed the change,” said the village manager. “He was from the perspective that ‘yes, this (the second Open) is a big honor for Pinehurst and a big event, and we may get inconvenienced some, but folks, that's the way it's likely to be.’ He benefitted from what Ginsey had done, but he also saw the big picture.

“In conversations with the USGA, I think they considered that one of their most successful U.S. Opens ever, as far as attendance. It was just different and bigger than 1999.”

Despite successes, there was a noticeable disconnect with some Village retailers who were still seeking visitors, as in 1999, and Wilkison is helping to address that concern.

He and current mayor Nancy Roy Fiorillo have been pro-active over the last year in putting together a committee to highlight the core Village in advance of the 2014 back-to-back events.

“We felt that a committee of community leaders could work with the USGA and the Resort to make our Village part of the U.S. Open experience. At this point, we feel that the solid relationships we have formed will lead to the best events and entertainment to showcase all that Pinehurst has to offer,” said Fiorillo, who has an extensive background in state and local government planning and management.



Fiorillo, the Village mayor through 2015, is also developing a “Pinehurst Ambassador” program aimed at showing guests local hospitality. She saluted the Village staff which will be providing all normal services for local residents, in addition to the extra efforts to host the event.

Wilkison noted that Fiorillo’s expectations are not only for the Village to be open for business, but she wants all visitors to know that.

“I have learned to put my goals in concrete and my plans in sand, but I am both resourceful and adaptable,” she smiled, “because I know what I’d like to see at the end of the Open. There may be many paths to that success.”

Don Padgett II thinks that one of those “paths” to the ongoing successes of US Opens in Pinehurst goes back to the 1994 US Senior Open.

“Certainly we’ve earned their (USGA) trust over the last 20 years,” said Padgett proudly. “I think that hosting that Senior Open started the tournament relationship, and we’ve continued to build on it.”

Mayor Fiorillo and Wilkison are excited to show off the Village Center. They know that most times people only need to step into the magical New England atmosphere to see the beauty.

“We aren’t likely to capture visitors who drive in for the day, but the folks who are in close proximity to the Village, in a rental property or with a corporate or media gathering, can see our

area,” said Wilkison. “They can become acquainted with our lifestyle, and decide to choose us in a residential or commercial sense.

“Folks who can live basically wherever they want – those folks are going to like what they see when they visit our Village.”