



COLLECTOR SPOTLIGHT: RON LYONS

*Creating
a legend*

BY JIM DAVIS

Sixty-two-year-old Ron Lyons has spent his entire life in Edmonton, Canada. The capital of the Province of Alberta, Edmonton has just over a million people.

"I was the middle child of seven kids, six boys and one girl," Lyons says. "I grew up in North Edmonton in one of the typical neighbourhoods that sprouted up after the second world war. My father had just finished his training as a Spitfire pilot in Calgary. He arrived in England for duty two weeks before the war ended. He joked he was there for the party but missed the war."

After high school, Lyons enrolled at the University of Alberta with the idea of becoming a physical education teacher. That summer, however, he started a landscaping company that was so successful, the college career was put on hold. He spent the winter in Mexico with friends.

"For the next seven years I worked hard landscaping in the summer months and then escaped to someplace warm in the winter months," he says. Along the way Lyons studied Landscape Design and Architecture at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology and married his sweetheart, Christine.

The couple's first child, Amanda, was born in 1980. "Two years later we added a son, Shaun," he says. The two have been married 38 years and have four grandchildren, all boys.

Parenthood prompted Lyons to look for more serious, year-round work. With a friend, he completed coursework in auctioneering at the Missouri Auction School in Kansas City. Back in Edmonton the two rented an 8,000-square-foot warehouse, scoured far and wide for suitable antiques, and began holding regular auction sales.

"It was a great business to be in during tough times as our economy was sour and lots of businesses were going broke," he recalls. Though successful in the auctioneering field, Lyons eventually tired of the unrelenting pace and turned to real estate, studying for and acquiring a license.

Rather than simply list properties, Lyons preferred to work with motivated buyers and find them a good deal. "I wasn't afraid to snap up a good deal for myself if the opportunity arose," he adds, and, as it happened, in the late 1980s Alberta Province was awash in good deals.

"Local governments bailed out more than 4,000 properties from failing banks and credit unions," he says. "I formed a good relationship with a number of the government employees whose job it was to dispose of them."

Lyons purchased a variety of properties, including a small airport, and set up golf driving ranges on two of them.

One day a customer brought in a wooden shafted golf club and asked him about it. His curiosity aroused, Lyons found a copy of Mort Olman's *Encyclopedia of Golf Collectibles* and the former auctioneer felt an immediate attraction.

In April 1991, one of Lyon's government contacts alerted him to a foreclosed property that had been a gravel operation. There were 160 acres, three sizable ponds, and frontage



RON LYONS at the helm of a 1962 club car, one of 84 in his Edmonton, Alberta, museum of restored pre-1969 golf cars. The museum is open to the public one evening of the Canadian Hickory Open Championship in August, to which all are welcome.

along the North Saskatchewan River. Lyons checked with his real estate partner, Eddie Chan, and the two purchased the property with the intent to build a golf course and sell it.

He spent the next months clearing governmental and environmental hurdles while examining the land. "I looked at the design and construction of the golf course like a giant landscaping job," he says. "Eddie and I couldn't afford to make any mistakes. I read as much as I could to help with the routing and basic fundamentals and picked a lot of brains along the way." (See a sidebar on the course on page 7.)

The first nine and clubhouse opened in 1994, followed by a second nine in 1995, and a third in 2004, after the purchase of an additional 220 acres.

Lyons chose the name "Legends" and decided to decorate the clubhouse with old golf collectibles. Learning of a "giant group of golf collectors" in the U.S., he traveled to an annual trade show and was "elated with what I found."

Originally focussing on patent clubs, his interests turned to tees, then books, and finally golf cars. He thought of finding a half a dozen of these and lining them up along the first tee of the Champions nine on the Legends.

"Talk about opening up a can of worms," he says. "I have around 15 favourite golf cars in the collection of 84. The first patent was awarded in 1949 and all the cars in the collection were manufactured before 1969 – that's where I drew the line."

"Joe Black, [former PGA Commissioner] gave me one of the nicest compliments when he said that he thought I was rescuing a piece of golf history," Lyons says. "I also appreciate what some of our members have accomplished with the books they've written – Jeff Ellis' book for patent clubs, all the books Pete Georgiady has done, the Olmans... the list is a long one. I'm hoping my golf car book will add to their accomplishments in promoting the history of golf."



An original Model 7 Par Pony. "They made a trailer that you could pull with your car but the little trailer I have was made by taking another Par Pony, chopping it in half and using the back end to house the cooler," Lyons says.



A 1950s Cushman, nicknamed "The Snarknose," was found in Wisconsin.



A 1962 Mardicar found in Toledo, Ohio. Lyons says the original buyer thought he was purchasing an amphibious vehicle. Mardicars were made in Warren, Mich.

RON LYONS wrote about his golf car collection in the March 2012 (No. 190) edition of the Bulletin. He hasn't slowed down. As of now, there are 84 and counting, he says, most of them housed in a 6,000-square-foot building. "I've chased them all over the U.S. and Canada," he says. "I have a big flat deck trailer that can haul five at a time." His longest trip was an eight-day 6,600-mile odyssey to Iowa, Pennsylvania, and Provincetown, Mass. He estimates that he's traveled about 50,000 miles on golf car runs and that the cars themselves might total about 138,000 miles in shipping to Edmonton.

Lyons is nearing completion of a book on the history of the golf car. It's at 300 pages, he says, and "can only be described as a labor of love."

Now 62 years old, Lyons says he is beginning to feel a bit of urgency about the future of his golfing treasures.

"Like most collectors with large collections, I think it would be nice to sell the collection before we croak and save our wives the work and worry of disposing of it," he says. "The golf cars have added a new dimension. That being said there probably isn't anyone out there crazy enough to buy everything I have in one shot."



A 1959 Walker Executive with art deco top in the shape of a leaf. Max Walker began making his golf cars in 1954 in a remodeled chicken coup on his farm in Fowler, Kan.



RARE AND UNUSUAL CLUBS are displayed in racks, bags and stands throughout Lyons' golf club and office. Above, a display of rare clubs. At right, one of his favorites, a Bullet Brassie. The club belonged to a Scottish immigrant who sold it to Henry Martell, one of the great golfers of the Alberta Province. Martell sold it to Pat Little, the first Canadian member of the GCS. From there, it came to Lyons' collection.



BALL WASHERS, top shelf, above, are displayed along with a collection of golf instructionals. The washers, all hand-held, about 15 of them, are variously of rubber, tin, brass, pewter, plastic, and aluminium. At right, a collection of golf cleats. "If I found something different I would buy it and add it to the display," Lyons says. "Many of these are what I call 'Green Chompers.' We've come a long way from such styles."

CURVED OAK VENEER BOOKCASE – In 2006, Lyons purchased more than 3,000 books from the collection of Gordon Prest of Calgary who had spent time in England in the late 60s and early 70s. “I bought his collection because I thought that if I was going to have an important golf collection it should include books,” Lyons says. He culled the best single copies, choosing to display mostly pre-1935 books in the case. The rest are squirreled away in boxes and waiting for a good home. Once he decided on building this curved bookcase, he went right to town on it, the job taking only one week. “I had an air nailer and shot over 40,000 nails,” he says. “It took 40 layers of 1/4-inch plywood strips to skin the wall – one layer at a time – and create the consistent curve and shelves. It’s all skinned in an oak veneer.”



GOLFER’S MANUAL. One of Lyons’ favorite books is “The Golfers’ Manual,” by Henry Farnie, under the sobriquet of “A Keen Hand.” “It’s the first golf instruction book and dates to 1862,” Lyons says. “The book came with a hand-written note of provenance from Farnie’s nephew, David Farnie.”



GOLF TEES – “My tee collection took a big jump about eight years ago when I purchased Paul Biocini’s collection and married it with mine,” Lyons says. “Paul wrote a book titled The Golf Tee Collectors Guide. Every time he finds one he’s never seen before he adds it to the pages in his book. There have to be at least 6,000 different tees in his book.” Lyons estimates he has some 4,000 tees in his collection, including some rare sand tee molds, pictured on the back cover of this issue.



FROM THE RON LYONS COLLECTION

A tireless and enthusiastic collector from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, Ron Lyons is well known for his unique collection of pre-1969 golf cars. His curiosity for golf history doesn't end there, however. Lyons, who built and owns the Legends Golf Course in Edmonton, with partner Eddie Chan, has several displays around the clubhouse and its offices that incorporate a wealth of golfiana from tees to clubs and books.

At the top are a sampling from a collection of practice balls. From top left they are wool, silk (Japan) yarn, sea foam, two-piece rubber, and

Indian rubber. The early practice balls were often patterned after the balls of the day as can be seen in the examples on the bottom row.

At left above is a home-made golf trolley dating from the mid-1920s. The bag displayed on the trolley holds two clubs used by Jack Nicklaus during the 2006 Telus Skins Game, held at the Banff Springs Hotel. The players, including Sergio Garcia, John Daly, Greg Norman, and Stephen Ames, were asked to hit hickory clubs on the famous fourth hole, called the Devils Cauldron. This was Lyons idea and it was he who provided the clubs. In the middle photo above right, are two clubs Nicklaus chose to play. On

one, he wrote "Jack's club," on the other, his signature. See a story on this Skins Game and Devils Cauldron hickory hole at:

www.thelegends.ca/hickory2006/skinsgame/skins2006.html

In the photo above right are a sampling of sand tee molds, including a rare Piper mold, bottom left, made in Montreal.

See pages 12-15 of this issue of the *Bulletin* for more of Ron Lyons' collection.