



OASIS IN TUBAC

By Mitchell Brown

It's a cool day in the southern part of Arizona, at least comparatively to the rest of the Grand Canyon State, but that's to be expected when standing at a higher elevation than Tucson or Phoenix. In the quiet town of Tubac, resting comfortably between Madera Canyon and always within view of the Tumacacori Mountains, is the aptly named Tubac Golf Resort & Spa. The Spanish Eclectic-style structure resides inside acres of fairways and back nines, framed by the banks of the Santa Cruz River. Within this resort, one old enough to have lived in two countries, is an unexpected history that goes almost as far back as the Revolutionary War.

In 1789, when modern-day Arizona was Pimería Alta, a Sonora y Sinaloa Province in the Viceroyalty of New Spain, the Spanish monarchy provided a land grant to Don Toribio de Otero to establish a homestead. "Don Toribio was granted the land by the Spanish because of the family's knowledge of ranching and farming," said General Manager Hank Swiggett. "Otero had received the title to a house-lot and four suertes [Suerte: an area of about 26.4 acres] of farming land. The grant had been made by the presidio commander of Tubac [Erran] under a 1772 Spanish regulation that allowed him to grant up to four leagues of land near the presidio to attract settlers." However, living in the area proved difficult due to regular raids by the Apache and eventually required the protection of the Presidio troops.

Through the decades, Otero's family grew (the eventual ownership going to Toribio's grandson, Sabino) and managed to keep their heads above water, even though ranching and farming was never a secure trade in the area. By 1853, President Franklin Pierce signed into law the Gadsen Purchase, which resulted in Pimería Alta (which included the southern portions of New Mexico and Arizona) and, by extension, the Otero family's land, falling under the jurisdiction of the United States. This proved to be an issue by the time the Civil War came around, and the control of the land went to the Confederacy, who didn't provide support against the Indian attacks that the family were forced to endure.

Eventually, Sabino moved the family across the border into Mexico. There, they learned cattle ranching and acquired a sizable herd, resulting in a prosperous business. But by 1879, news came of water and cattle available back in Arizona, so the family moved back to their homestead, and with the ever-approaching railroads entering the area, Sabino could sell livestock to a broader market; so much so that he became known as "The King of Cattle." After Sabino died in 1914, the business was handed down to his brother Teofilo.

Over the subsequent decades, the property fell under multiple owners. After some financial troubles, Teofilo sold most of the family's land and eventually parted ways with the homestead in 1937. After that, it fell into the possession of

the aviator Joanna Shankle Davis, and then a banker named Wirt Bowman, but the most famed owner, and the one responsible for transforming it into the resort that it is today, was entertainer Bing Crosby.

"Santa Cruz County is where a lot of stars came to visit during Prohibition, because they could go down to Mexico, party, and bring alcohol back," said Swiggett. "So, there were a series of ranches that were owned by major studio owners." Some of these executives were friends with Bing Crosby and his investment group, and eventually, they came out from L.A. to check out what all the commotion was about. This resulted in them purchasing the homestead in 1959, with Bing buying one share of the property for \$5,000. It granted him three lots east of the river, which is currently the original Rancho golf course.

Along with his friend and fellow entertainer, Bob Hope, Bing was an avid golf player, and eventually he decided to turn the property into a resort that included a nine and 18-hole course. While still preserving the historical integrity of the location, they converted the stables into a clubhouse bar and built 14 rooms that surrounded a pool. This proved a worthy investment because the area continued to become a booming location for movie stars and film productions. "One of the big ones, the John Wayne film *Red River*, was shot in Tubac," noted Swiggett. "A lot of movies in the '40s and '50s were filmed down here, so there was a big production effort. At one point, Nogales was a booming city with a lot of nightlife and a lot of Hollywood executives and entrepreneurs visiting. It was a very lucrative time."

After going through multiple more owners, several expansive remodels, a film shoot of the Kevin Costner film *Tin Cup* in 1995, and even a 100-year flood in the late '60s, in 2002, the resort fell into the hands of its current owner, Ron Allred. In the time since the Allred family has taken over, the resort has grown exponentially. It's seen an expansion of an additional 60 rooms, an expanded restaurant, and even a replica of an 18th Century chapel. The latter has become a popular location for hosting wedding ceremonies.

While it's come a long way from its modest roots, the resort is constantly growing and being renovated, while still maintaining its historical integrity. It's become an attraction for tourists — obviously including golfers — but it's also something of a shining beacon in the Arizona terrain. Its old-fashioned style of architecture and calm of the desert teleporting those who visit back to the 18th Century. A fact that's not lost on those in charge of its upkeep. "I kind of stumbled into Tubac," laughed Swiggett. "I've been coming down here for 36 years; this place, to me, is an oasis in the desert. We're one of the cores of this whole community. We are this beautiful oasis in the middle of the desert that brings people together."