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Cleve Stone (top) is the patriarch of three generations of superintendents: sons Owen, Lowell and Harold (center row, from left); and grandsons David and Rick (bottom row, from left).

## The Family Stone – dedicated to maintaining the best in golf

By HAL PHILLIPS

The story began as a classic might, perhaps the "Grapes of Wrath." It spun off into an agronomic version of "My Three Sons," and continues to please the golfing public through reruns of "All in the Family."

It's the story of the Stones, a three-generation family of superintendents who've cared for golf courses in California's San Joaquin Valley for more than 50 years. Apparently, it's in the genes.

"It's not unusual to find a family with two or three generations of doctors," explained Owen Stone, superintendent at San Joaquin Country Club. "But it's a little more rare to find three generations of superintendents."

Here's the Stone family line-up:

- Cleve Stone is 89 and, officially, he's retired. He became the first superintendent at Kern River Golf Club near Bakersfield in the 1950s, before moving on to Fort Washington Country Club in Fresno. He retired in 1973. But some habits are hard to break — he still works for son Owen in the shop at San Joaquin CC.

- 68-year-old Owen Stone has been at San Joaquin since 1973. He worked at Stockdale Country Club in Bakersfield for 10 years before taking the head superintendent's job at Belmont Country Club in Fresno, where he trained at least three family members in the trade.

- Rick Stone is the oldest of Owen's two superintendent sons. In the late 1970s, he carried on the family tradition by serving as superintendent at Cleve's old haunt, Fort Washington

CC. He recently accepted the head superintendent's job at Rio Bravo Country Club in Bakersfield.

- Rick's younger brother David Stone worked for his father at San Joaquin CC until 1979, when he accepted the head superintendent's position at King's River (Calif.) Country Club. He's been there ever since.

- In the 1950s, Lowell Stone was discharged from the Navy and went to work for brother Owen at Belmont CC. After learning the finer points of his trade, he accepted the head superintendent's position at Sunnyside Country Club in Fresno. After moving to Stockdale and staying for more than a decade, the 56-year-old Lowell recently took the top job at nearby Madeira Municipal Golf Course.

- Not to be outdone, Billy Stone — Lowell's son, Rick and David's cousin, and Owen's nephew — also pursued a career in golf course management. After working for a full complement of relatives, he's now the head superintendent in his own right, at Valley Road Golf Club in Wasco.

- Though he caddied for many years, Harold Stone didn't get into agronomy until 1963 when he went to work for brother Owen at Belmont CC. He left for the head superintendent's job at Visalia Country Club and eventually became head super at Sundale Country Club — the private incarnation of Kern City GC, where his father had toiled 40 years earlier.

The 62-year-old Harold joined his father in retirement and has since returned to where the Stone story begins, Blackwell, Okla.

Continued on next page

## Stone family legacy continues in 3rd generation

Continued from previous page

"It goes way back," Owen explained. "We had a lot of relatives who came out here to California during the Depression and worked at Stockdale Country Club in Bakersfield."

Lowell chimed in: "I really started with an uncle of mine, Odell Harvey, who came out here during the Depression and worked at Stockdale. I believe that was 1938. The rest of us came afterward."

There you have it: Okies moving to California during the Depression; three sons of Cleve; three more from Lowell and Owen; and all employed in the family field.

All of the Stone superintendents worked for Cleve or Owen at one time or another. And now Cleve works for his son Owen, who has assumed the role of elder statesman.

"They're competing against me all the time," Owen said of his younger brother, two sons and nephew. "But they're young and everybody's got to do their own thing. It's getting harder to keep up with them every year."

So, who has the best greens?

"Me," Owen said flatly. "My greens out here are fast. I've always been

known for fast greens. My son called me once and asked how I got them so quick. I told him I didn't know. When I die, these secrets are going to die with me.

"I've always told them, 'Take care of your greens.' They're your bread and butter. If you've got good greens, nobody's going to holler about a bad spot in the fairway."

In truth, intergenerational rivalry has given way to a healthy exchange of ideas.

"Anytime anyone puts up a red flag, we get together and hash things out," said Lowell. "I think the brothers share more information. Owen's two sons probably talk things over on the phone. Now that I'm in Madeira, Owen and I spend quite a bit of time talking on the phone."

Owen is convinced the family approach yields better playing conditions. He picks things up from his sons and brothers, and vice versa.

"You've got to keep trying things, learning new ways to handle a problem," said Owen. "I just put out an owl house because someone told me the owls will feed on gophers at night. Will it work? I don't know. We'll find out."

"We all work together. And five sets of eyes are better than one."

## Palmetto GCSA eyes better image

What is the perception of the golf course superintendent within the golf course industry? Architect Rees Jones likes to have a superintendent on the development team as early as possible. Gary Schaal, president of the PGA of America, said the superintendent is the most important person to an operation's bottom line in both income and expense.

These comments, by two high-profile people within the industry, can carry a lot of weight. To address these issues, the Palmetto Golf Course Superintendents Association — which covers the Grand Strand area of South

Carolina — has held two media days, featuring golf, a luncheon and a panel discussion with industry leaders.


This year, the panel consisted of Joe Baidy, president of GCSAA; Billy Fuller, consulting agronomist with Cupp Design and former superintendent of Augusta National; and Schaal.

The Palmetto association plans to continue with these Media Days to enhance the professional image of superintendents and improve the public perception of golf courses as an ecologically sound environment.

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