

Twenty-Five Years of the Dubai Country Club

David Roberts, a former British Ambassador to the UAE, once observed that “it is an admirable trait of the British to set up ‘clubs and societies’ wherever they go”.

Twenty-five years ago, six Europeans and one Arab – Khalifa bin Juma Al Naboodah became the early inspiration and motivators for the Dubai Country Club, with their names featuring on the original decree.

The idea for a club was first talked of in 1969. Discussions lead on to a meeting in a villa, attended by approximately 150 expatriates, to discuss the general feeling that “to have a club would be nice”.

A Committee of eleven was formed in 1970 which included the original seven petitioning members. The Constitution was written in March 1971 and under a Charter issued by the Government of Dubai. Signed by His Highness Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum on the 23rd June 1971, the Dubai Country Club was officially founded. The ruler generously bestowed a significant plot of land and the building of the Club began.

“The Ruler very kindly gave us the land out here”, reported Tony Higham, Secretary of the Committee to Roger Sargent of the Khaleej Times in 1981. “I must say we gulped a little – you have no idea how far the land was out of town in those days! But we were very happy with it”.

The area was already popular for picnics under the moon – people travelled there to get away from town – but the idea that they

would come out regularly was one that caused concern. It was a long way. The only access to the area then, was a narrow single lane dirt track along which massive rock-laden trucks menaced life and vehicles. Cars were forever getting stuck in the sand on the approaches to the Club, so an early request to the Ruler for a road to be built to the Club was also granted.

Mr. Naboodah recalls that the Club grew out of a desire by expatriates to have somewhere to get together to talk quietly, have a picnic and enjoy themselves. The golfing fanatics amongst them desperately needed to find another golf course – the only one in Dubai was substandard and only had five holes. Not surprisingly, the first thing to be built at the Club was the golf course, which became the only desert course in the world ... and with water hazards!

Nevertheless, the Club needed more than holes in the sand. It required money. The decision to build a Club House was made and members were asked to contribute Dh 5000 each. For many expatriates at this time, this represented between a quarter and a third of their monthly salary!

The members themselves built the fencing that was the first delineation of the Club territory. The telephone company refused to put in a telephone line, so the members brought in the timber and the telephone poles and put it in themselves.

It was soon apparent that more money was obviously needed to make the Club attractive enough to have members and their guests wishing to come out to it. The

Commercial Bank of Dubai stepped in with a magnificently impressive gesture of a Dh 20,000 loan, although the Club had no collateral, no stocks, bonds, shares or individual valuables.

To repay the debt to the Bank meant that the Club had to think of attracting family members. A swimming pool was built and the Club really started to establish itself. Attracting wives and children to the Club enhanced the needs and requirements for other activities such as tennis, squash, football, netball, basketball and snooker. The original picnics and barbecues had to be abandoned for a more appropriate restaurant facility.

From the original 50 founding members and a membership limit of 250, the Club has blossomed to a registration of over 1,000 members. With families included, there is approximately a total of 5,000 people using the extensive facilities of one of the largest recreational and sporting complexes in Dubai.

Iain Valentine, a former Chairman of the Club, reported that "the Dubai Country Club has become part of Dubai's folklore. The Club has retained its popularity, despite the added attractions in Dubai of ice rinks, grass golf courses, saunas, bowling alleys and beef-burger outlets. The Dubai Country Club is going to survive - and it is going to be here for a very long time!"

Since the formation of the Club's first Committee in 1970, it is being taken that the Club will celebrate its 25th Anniversary this year. This milestone will not, of course, pass by unceremoniously. We have commenced a number of months brainstorming our way towards an extensive and happy birthday jubilee later in 1995.

Polly Healy
Social Secretary – December 1994