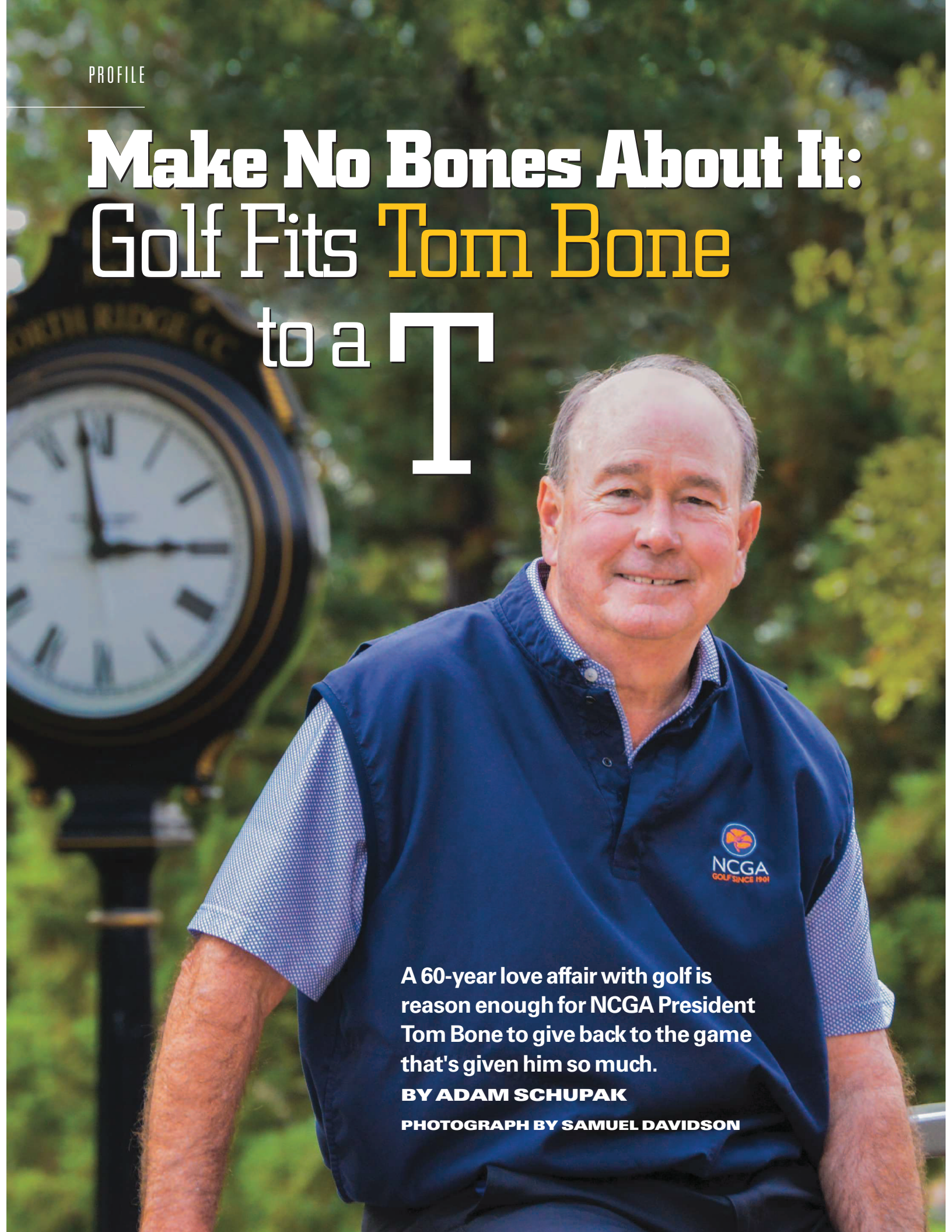


PROFILE

# Make No Bones About It: Golf Fits Tom Bone to a T

A photograph of Tom Bone, NCGA President, sitting outdoors. He is wearing a dark blue vest over a light blue patterned shirt. The vest has the NCGA logo and the text 'NCGA GOLF SINCE 1991' on the left chest. In the background, there is a large clock tower with a white face and black hands, and green foliage.

A 60-year love affair with golf is reason enough for NCGA President Tom Bone to give back to the game that's given him so much.

**BY ADAM SCHUPAK**

**PHOTOGRAPH BY SAMUEL DAVIDSON**

**P**ast NCGA president Kerry Gordon sounds like the general manager of a sport's franchise when he explains how Tom Bone, his fellow member at North Ridge Country Club near Sacramento, ended up joining the NCGA's board of directors in 2010.

"We draft by need and we needed a lobbyist," Gordon said. "I said I happen to know one who is passionate about golf."

Bone, 68, is a lawyer and he worked as a political advocate at the state capital for 43 years before retiring in 2016. A love of golf has infused his life ever since his father introduced him to the game at age 8, buying him six lessons—the only formal lessons he's ever had. Golf was a way to spend four hours of quality time with dad. Together, they learned the sweet mysteries of the game and a lot about each other.

"I cherished those times when I went out and played with him," Bone said.

His father took him to play when he could, but as a pharmacist and owner of three drug stores he worked long hours. So his mother dropped Bone off at Haggin Oaks, and a host of father figures whose authority he respected helped look after him. They taught him the rules and etiquette of the game.

"They said if you want to become a gentleman you have to learn and understand the right way to play the game," said Bone's wife, Carol.

It made an impression on Bone, which may explain why he and his wife have devoted their energies to the NCGA's Youth on Course program. In college, Bone worked at Davis Golf Course, where he did everything from cooking hamburg-

ers and hotdogs to working the counter and picking up range balls. He played whenever he could and became good enough to shoot in the low 70s. Today, his handicap hovers around 7, and he plays frequently at North Ridge, where he's been a member since 1996, and is known for organizing an annual trip for 32 golfers from his home club to play Poppy Hills Golf Course.

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**"I've finally found the one thing that I love so much that it doesn't feel like work."**

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Bone says he can never repay the game for what it's meant to him. He watched the way Gordon and others served on the NCGA board and wanted to do his part, too. Bone's lobbyist background and knowledge of tax codes made him a natural in this role. He impressed with his worker bee, roll-up-the-sleeves mentality. The more he volunteered, the more they leaned on him. It didn't take much to convince several members of the nominating com-

mittee that he was a consensus builder and had the management skills and dedication required to lead the association.

Why has Bone devoted so much time to the NCGA and the game? The response when that question is posed to those who have worked with him and know him best is a popular refrain: He simply loves the game. It's an answer that is hardly revelatory; so do many of us, but do we ever lift a finger to help organize the junior clinic or do we spend our time beating another bucket of balls? Gordon may have put it best. It occurred to him that this is Bone's way of ensuring the sport he cherishes as much as anything passes to the next generation. Bone remembers those first rounds at Pacific Grove and Pasatiempo; how working at the muni in Davis taught him the value of a dollar and a hard days work; and how club and NCGA competitions taught him that success in tournaments (as in life) is determined by courage and will at least as much as by talent. Bone wants other NCGA area kids to learn those same lessons and many more, and perhaps the game will become part of the framework of their lives the way it has become part of his.

"A wise man once advised, do what you love and you'll never work a day in your life," Bone said. "I've finally found the one thing that I love so much that it doesn't feel like work." 🍷

## 2018 NCGA President **Tom Bone**

**Hometown:** Sacramento (born and raised)

**High School:** Rio Americano

**College:** U.C. Davis/McGeorge School of Law

**Occupation:** Political lobbyist (retired in 2016). "I did it for 43 years, which explains why I'm short and bald. No one comes out of it looking the same."

**Family:** Wife, Carol and daughters, Tracy and Haley.

**Joined NCGA board:** 2010

**Handicap Index:** 7.3

**Why You Love Golf:** I love the social aspect, the time between shots to get to know people. My golf buddies are among my best friends.

**Favorite Golf Memory:** Playing with my dad. I still remember my first nine holes during a family vacation at Pacific Grove Golf Links and playing at Pasatiempo. That was it. I was hooked for life.

**Favorite Golf Courses:** Pacific Grove and Pasatiempo hold a special place in my heart. So does Spyglass. San Francisco Golf Club is my No. 1 that I get to play every once in a while.

COVER STORY

# A Star is Reborn

Sacramento's North Ridge Country Club gets a tuneup with help from a native son.

BY RON KROICHICK



**M**ore than 65 years ago, at its birth, North Ridge Country Club was surrounded by vast expanses of farmland. Aerial photos show a decidedly rural setting east of Sacramento, vacant land with a smattering of trees and precious little population.



It's a new era at North Ridge, a club steeped in history. Top: January 1962, the clubhouse viewed from Madison Avenue after a snowstorm. Middle: From 1970, the Ladies Invitational with "Grand Prix de Golf" theme. Bottom: Model of proposed North Ridge course, circa 1954.



Two snapshots tell the story of North Ridge's rise from farmland to local treasure. Top: From October 1952, looking east; San Juan Avenue across foreground. Bottom: From April 2000, Madison Avenue along left side of photo, San Juan Avenue across bottom.

Fast forward to early 2018 in Fair Oaks, and the scene could not be more different. Madison Avenue bustles with traffic and activity, a snapshot of American commercial suburbia—until you turn into the club and drive along a picturesque entrance road flanked by trees on both sides—a Northern California version of Magnolia Lane.

This is the beauty and appeal of North Ridge, an oasis of serenity in a congested world. The club boasts a rich history dating to 1952, when William P. “Billy” Bell and his son, William F. Bell, designed the course. And now it steams toward a reshaped future, in the wake of a Robert Trent Jones Jr. renovation headed by senior project architect Mike Gorman.

The \$3.5 million redesign mostly was meant to give North Ridge modernized greens and repositioned bunkers. Gorman realized the course is set on an exceptional piece of land, rolling hills with gentle elevation changes, so no dramatic work was necessary.

Or, as general manager Rink Sanford put it in quoting Jones about the project, “They were looking at putting a new dress on a grand old lady.”

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Bell was selected as the course's original architect, in part, because he had previously designed layouts

such as Stanford Golf Course, historic Tamarisk Country Club near Palm Springs (where Ben Hogan was the first head pro) and Del Rio Country Club in Modesto.

But Bell died nearly a year after he started working on North Ridge, before construction began. His son already was involved in the project and took it over; he later would design Torrey Pines in San Diego, a future U.S. Open site.

The Bells were prolific, with a long list of courses in California and the West to

their credit. Their ties to North Ridge provide some cachet, and a connection to an earlier, golden era in golf.

“For a private club, the history is huge,” Sanford said. “It makes us stand out in the crowd. We have a saturated market, and I think that’s one of the things that makes us special.”

All these years later, it’s fitting for Gorman to play such a central role in refurbishing the course. He grew up in Sacramento, played Ancil Hoffman Golf Course (another William F. Bell design) in his youth and occasionally participated in high school tournaments at North Ridge in the early 1990s.

Construction on the redesign began last April and stretched into November. North Ridge hopes to unveil its new greens for play in April 2018 (all holes currently have temporary greens), assuming Sacramento’s winter weather cooperates.

“It’s a beautiful walking course with long, flowing terrain,” Gorman said. “It was always a treat to play in high school. In my mind, the strength of North Ridge is the routing. It’s got great bones.

“The direction we were given was that the greens had sort of deteriorated over time. They were push-up greens, with no sand layer, so they really took a beating in the winter.”



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It is holes such as No. 16 (above) that make North Ridge an oasis of serenity. Summer 1954, the locker room-office-pro shop wing of North Ridge's first clubhouse under construction. Inset: Quonset Hut in the maintenance yard, the first building constructed by the club in 1953.

Gorman and his team also created some fairway banks and hollows around the putting surfaces, rather than only rough and bunkers. Their idea, essentially: make the course more enjoyable for high-handicap players and present more options to low-handicap players.

That's perpetually the challenge for architects. They must appease the majority without alienating the vocal minority. No easy chore.

The removal of approximately 215 trees should help. Gorman wanted to highlight North Ridge's grand, sprawling oak trees, but the streamlining also should make recovery shots more realistic.

"Now if you hit a shot off line, instead of being buried in trees you have a chance to advance the ball to the green," said Mike Galli, the club's head pro for the past 11 years.

And we can all agree that's a good thing.

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Longtime PGA Tour pro Kevin Sutherland knows all about North Ridge. Sutherland, winner of the 2017 Charles Schwab Cup on the PGA Tour Champions, grew up in Sacramento and returned there after graduating from Fresno State in 1987.

North Ridge soon gave him an honorary membership, which he used for more than 10 years. He showed up almost every

day when he was in town, either playing the course or working on his wedge shots in the practice area.

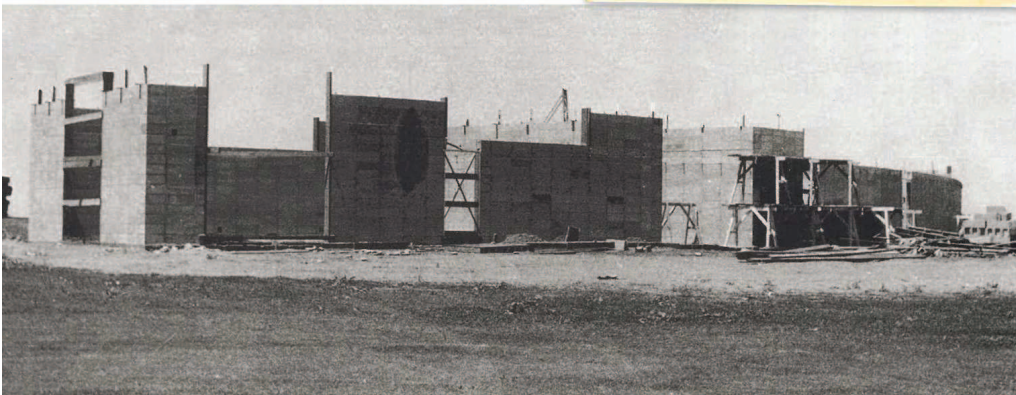
"I liked the course because you had to think your way around it and keep your ball below the hole," Sutherland said. "You had to be aware of where you were hitting the ball on the greens. It's pretty tight and tree-lined, so you had to hit it straight."

Not much has changed, even with fewer trees. The redesign merely makes the course look more sophisticated, including the long retaining wall guarding the green at No. 16, a cool short par-4; and the par-5 closing hole, twisting uphill past a new, large fairway bunker on the left side.

Galli compared North Ridge to Lake Merced Golf Club in some respects: an old-school layout with trees, rolling hills and challenging greens. The new greens will have a wider variety of subtle slopes.

North Ridge still sails below the radar, possibly because it hasn't hosted many marquee events beyond occasional USGA mid-amateur or junior amateur qualifying.

"I think North Ridge is definitely a hidden gem," Galli said. "Maybe it gets overlooked because of the yardage on the scorecard (6,553 before the redesign), or it doesn't have new, modern greens. But we're fixing both of those." 🍁



**Ron Kroichick** covers golf for the San Francisco Chronicle.