

A Day With Pete Dye

By: Nathan Crace

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It was cold. And wet. And miserable. And I couldn't have been happier. As I watched the cold winter rain drizzle over the tidal marsh in the distance, it almost appeared that the tall upright marsh grass—turned a grayish-brown from the winter temperatures—was stretching out to meet the rain as it fell from the sky. This was Election Day 2000 and it was also the day I was to meet the man some call a living legend. You could even argue that he has had the most influence on the game of golf of any architect since Robert Trent Jones. I was going to be one of a handful of people spending the day with *the* Pete Dye regarding an upcoming project on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The Pine Island course (shut down since Hurricane Georges in October of 1998) was one of Dye's first courses. The course—then named Marsh Island—was built in the late 1960's for less than what we spend nowadays on eighteen green complexes. The owner felt that having Dye involved with the project again would not only bring notoriety to the Ocean Springs course, but that it was also the right thing to do since he was the original architect—good call.

I don't really know what I had grown so nervous about as we sat waiting on Mr. Dye to arrive—his plane delayed by the bad weather. I have met a number of "famous" people in my life such as actors, comedians, politicians, and professional athletes, but for some reason I had never been especially impressed by these others—let alone nervous about meeting them. However, meeting Pete Dye was going to be different. This insurance salesman turned golf course architect icon was self-made and time-tested for longer than I had been alive, with hundreds of golf courses around the globe to his credit.

To be honest, my first impression was that he wasn't as tall as I had envisioned him being from seeing pictures in magazines. In fact, to the untrained eye Dye might even go unnoticed in a large crowd. No flashy clothes or fancy shoes. Maybe I assumed he would take over the room when he walked in like some well-traveled celebrity. That's not to say he didn't have the attention of everyone in the room—he did. But it was more like the respect all of the family gives your Grandfather when he prepares to bless the Thanksgiving dinner. Pete Dye is more of the quiet, thinking type than some might assume of a person with his extensive background.

There we were: eight of us trudging through the weather following Mr. Dye across 18 holes of overgrown rain-soaked fairways, along acres of tidal marsh, and through countless puddles of cold water up to our ankles—all on foot because he likes to walk a course. We spent about three hours walking the property and I got the impression that some would have had a difficult time keeping up with the 70+ year-old Dye if he had not kept stopping to admire the views from the course and out across the tidal marsh. Remarkably, he remembered a great deal about the course he had not seen in thirty years, commenting of certain holes that stood out in his mind.

As sunlight began to fade across the bay, about five or so of us decided to get cleaned up and go out for dinner before Mr. Dye had to catch his late flight home that evening. Just as he had been the entire day, Mr. Dye remained conversational and "down to earth" at the restaurant as he shared stories from years of travel and hundreds of projects around the globe. I tried to keep quiet and listen—at first not even mentioning our Indiana connection (both of us having family roots there). I wanted to hear what he had to talk to about and, after all, I can hear myself talk anytime. I learned from my parents at a very early age to take the time to "listen" to the stories of older generations and not just "hear" what they had to say. So, notwithstanding his impressive resume as an architect, I listened. And I learned. And believe me: you cannot imagine how difficult it is to spend a day with someone like Mr. Dye and force yourself not to "pick his brain" at every chance you get. As dinner drew to a close and we all said our goodbyes, we snapped a couple of photos and I ran off into the rain-soaked darkness, climbed into my car, and drove two hours home to my family—appreciating even more the value of time well spent with people worth admiring.

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