





# Eldorado Country Club

*STAY TRUE TO AN IDEAL.*

BY JUNE ALLAN CORRIGAN

■ It's no secret the Coachella Valley is home to an enormous number of country clubs. They generally center around scenic, and often exceptional, golf courses, and increasingly many clubs vie to outdo one another in terms of luxurious amenities. In retrospect, it seems unfathomable that anyone would even think to fashion such green enclaves amid stark desert terrain — but fashioned they were and continue to be. Several early and now fabled golf course properties emerged in the 1950s. A sheltered cove in Indian Wells became home to one. It was named Eldorado Country Club.

Practically from the beginning, Eldorado was less about bricks and mortar — and even, daresay, the game of golf — and more about the special bond that intrinsically develops among its members. Truth be told, a couple of years went by before it even had a proper clubhouse — although when one was eventually built, in time for the 1959 Ryder Cup, it was the magnificent William F. Cody–designed salute to modernism that graces the property to this day. Yet the aforementioned special bond manages to transcend structures and fairways, no matter how impressive they may be. Could it be the near mythic quality of Eldorado's geographical setting that inspires such deep relationships to form? Members and guests describe feeling enveloped in a cocoon once they drive through the gates. They speak of leaving the world behind and immersing themselves in a stunning setting with a magnificently manicured golf course just 10 minutes from El Paseo. Could it be the very caliber of the people themselves? It's impossible to discern, but whatever forces converge, suffice it to say that membership at Eldorado Country Club is highly sought and much treasured.

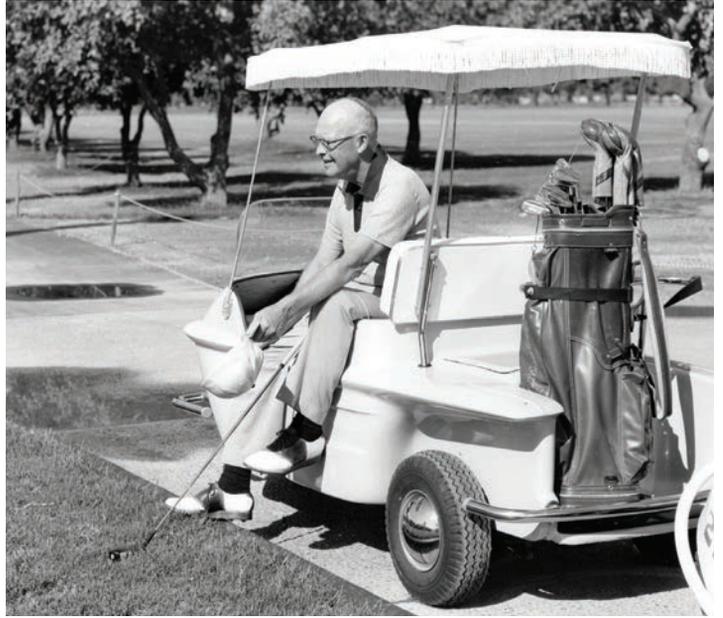
left: Eldorado Country Club's beautifully manicured golf course sits just minutes from El Paseo and offers stunning views of the surrounding mountains.

### A Varied and Stimulating Environment

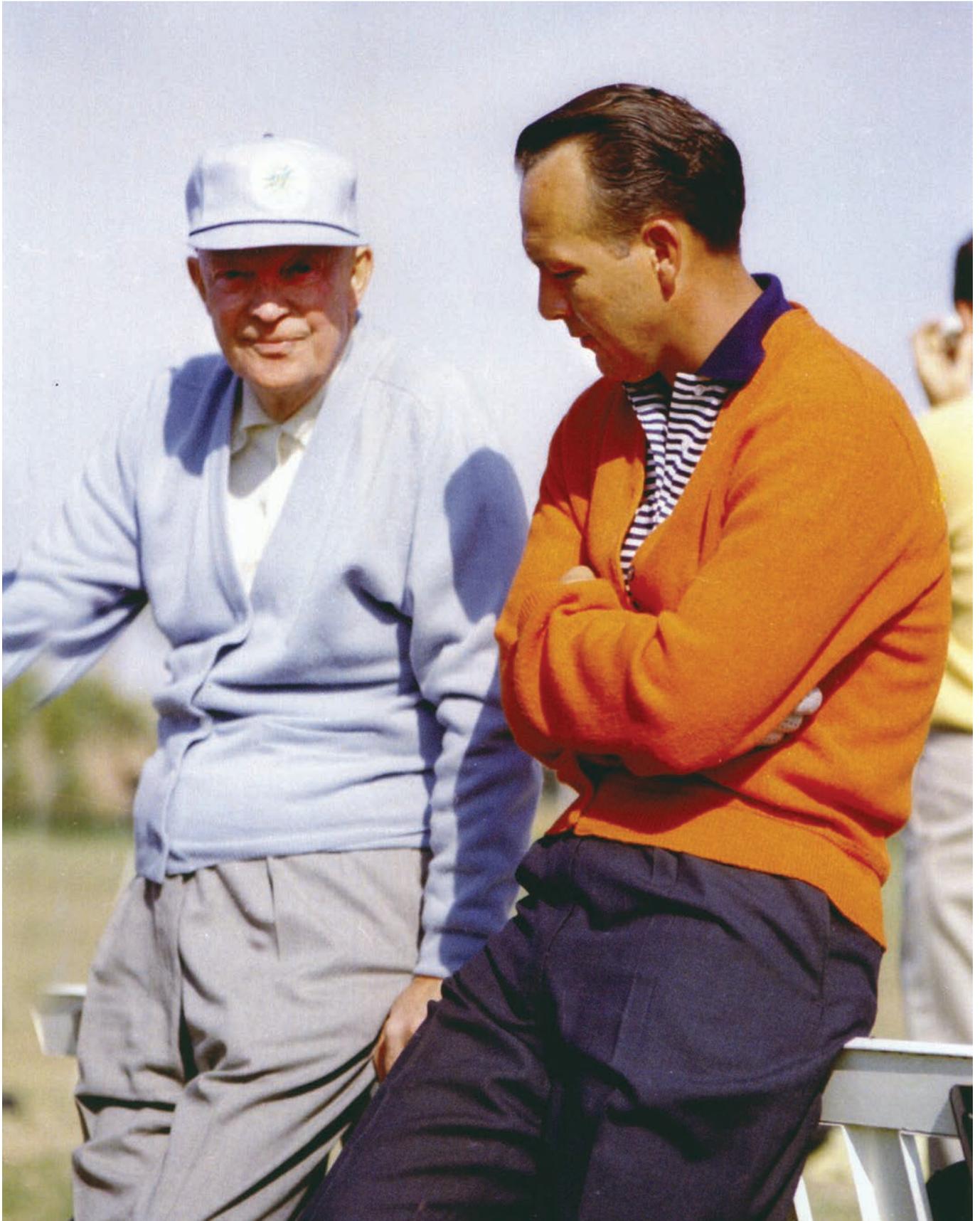
Often a country club's proximity to someone's home base influences one's decision to seek membership. Not so at Eldorado, where upscale members come from all over the United States to enjoy a locale like no other. Most of the 50 states are represented. There are Canadian members, as well as members from Europe and Asia. The melding of minds and personalities from around the globe promises lively discourse and accounts for some of Eldorado's desirability. Not that members have any shortage of options. The majority belong to several other clubs — oftentimes world-famous venues — and yet Eldorado's transcendent qualities and the unique relationships they have forged here draw them back time and time again. Notables among the Club's outstanding membership history include eight ambassadors and four past presidents, including President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

The Club hosts numerous social events throughout the season that are not only highly inventive but also incredibly attuned to the pulse of the membership. The parties and gatherings are always well attended and frequently accentuated with many thoughtful and personalized details. Weaving through this tight social fabric are the Club's countless activities — golf being one, of course, but complemented by no less worthwhile pursuits such as active fitness, hiking, bridge, book club, and those of several other special interest groups. In fact, Eldorado has one of the most active Women's Associations in the valley for both golf and social gatherings.

"The world-class cuisine and unsurpassed view from our dining room is compelling, as is the range of activities and social events," says Mark Miller, Eldorado's Gen-



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this page, clockwise from top right: Notables who have enjoyed Eldorado's fairways include President Dwight D. Eisenhower, President Richard M. Nixon, and TV legend Desi Arnaz.  
opposite: President Eisenhower shares a moment with Arnold Palmer.





eral Manager and COO. “Many new members particularly appreciate how easily they can obtain a golf game on a moment’s notice. The games are arranged by various welcoming members, as well as the longtime staff. New member participation is highly encouraged.”

There are two long-running and intellectually appealing events that have also been well received over the past few decades. The world-class Distinguished Guest Speakers Dinners continue to attract topflight individuals borrowed from the world’s stage who address the Clubhouse crowd on subjects pertaining to politics and world affairs. A second highly successful program of speakers known as the In-House Culture Series fills weekday cocktail hours with talks from outstanding Club members who lecture and field questions in their areas of expertise. Offerings from both the Speakers Dinners and the Culture Series at Eldorado frequently rival the lineup of showcased guests at ticketed lecture series around the valley and have included Lee A. Iacocca, Arnold Palmer, Tom Fazio, Steve Forbes, the Honorable Robert J. Dole, Michael R. Bloomberg, Dr. Condoleezza Rice, and many more.





### **A Generous and Giving Atmosphere**

As with many proceedings inside — not to mention outside — the Club, members are quick to act should opportunity for philanthropic endeavors arise. It's simply inherent to their nature. The scholarship fund that was launched in conjunction with the In-House Culture Series serves as a perfect example. It quickly grew to a million dollars by 2007, thanks to contributions from approximately 200 members with some funds also coming from the Distinguished Guest Speakers Dinners. That year, Eldorado awarded over \$400,000 distributed among more than 30 scholarships to employees and their children to attend four-year colleges, community colleges, or trade schools. It's a program that continues. Other country clubs in the area have since followed Eldorado's lead and established similar scholarship programs for staff members and their dependents.

Meanwhile, Eisenhower Medical Center has long benefited from the generosity of Eldorado members. Accounts of their donations or photos of them attending fundraising galas rarely make the news, which is just how members

like it. "Eldorado is about giving back and doing so anonymously and quietly," Miller says. It's little surprise the hospital should be a main focus of their generosity given the history of the Club. President Dwight D. Eisenhower visited and played golf at Eldorado several times toward the end of his second term as president. Upon retirement in January 1961, he accepted an invitation to spend winters at Eldorado and become an honorary member of the Club. The prestigious Ryder Cup Matches played at Eldorado in 1959 may have put the Club on the map, but it was Ike's presence that caused the membership roster to skyrocket. Later, the new hospital slated to bear his name prompted a surge of civic involvement on the part of Club members and subsequent fundraising efforts that continue to this day.

### **Flying Below the Radar**

Although countless captains of industry, prominent political figures, and other luminaries maintain memberships at Eldorado, mention of their accomplishments seldom come up in conversations around the Club, which is precisely why these kinds of individuals

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above: Hole No. 5 on the Eldorado course, redesigned in 2003 by Tom Fazio. opposite, from top: An aerial view of the property; the founders of Eldorado staking the ground for their new country club.

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seek to obtain memberships in the first place and then treasure them so dearly. “This is where members choose to spend their leisure time,” Miller says. “Therefore, we do everything we can to make sure they enjoy this precious interlude. We want to ensure when members come through the front gate, they exhale. For many, it is almost cleansing when they pass through.” It’s worthwhile to note that no identifying sign adorns the street entrance.

Membership at Eldorado is by invitation only. It is not tied to real estate in any way whatsoever, although approximately 70 percent of members do own homes on the premises, according to Membership Chair Jack Clevenger. Initially, people gain access to the grounds because they know a member and are invited as a guest. Several visits later, there’s a good chance they too will fall under Eldorado’s spell, like many before them. It is simply that kind of place. During prime season, many members live golf-cart

distance from the Club and support activities seven days a week, not just occasionally when they are in town.

### **A Defining Moment**

Perhaps nothing speaks better to the nature of the membership at Eldorado than this example offered by longtime Director of Golf Terry Beardsley. When renowned golf course architect Tom Fazio did an entire redesign of the Eldorado course in 2003, even Fazio was surprised at how well his remodel was received by members. Reaction to the dramatically redesigned golf course was overwhelmingly positive. “The general attitude among members was ‘Well, Eldorado has been so great, and I’ve enjoyed it so much, I want the next generation to enjoy it even more than I did,’” says Beardsley. “That was their way of thinking, and it’s a perfect measure of the spirit at Eldorado.”

— Eldorado members enjoy a life of luxury. opposite, from top: Afternoons at the Clubhouse; morning reflections, poolside.





The Club has always been a standout. Between 1961 and 1989, the Desert Classic, which became the Bob Hope Desert Classic and later the Bob Hope Chrysler Classic, was played here. More recently, the Club was awarded “Merchandiser of the Year” by the Southern California PGA.

Dictionaries around the time of the Club’s founding in 1957 defined Eldorado as a place of fabulous wealth and opportunity, a gilded land and a golden state of being. The founders set out to make the Club all of those things, and it seems apparent they have more than succeeded. “Kindness is the main thread running through Eldorado,” Miller says. “Acts of kindness to one another, acts of kindness to the staff, acts of kindness to their friends. It’s a place where you can spend time with people you may not even have formally met yet but know they’re going to become your friends.”

Still, one more phrase sums up Eldorado succinctly. It’s the following sentiment, which has been heard on more than one occasion around the Club: “Our membership is the difference. It’s home to us.”

