

GENE LAVAN STORY

In continuing our discussions with long term Cloquet Country Club members, this month we focus on Gene and Betty Lavan. The Cloquet Country Club originated in 1923; Gene Lavan was BORN on February 24, 1922. So, Gene is 96 and the Country Club is 95. Betty is a few years younger, but, impressively, this fall, they will have been married 70 years. I recently went to their home on Big Lake Road to catch up with them and to listen to some CCC classic stories.

Both Gene and Betty grew up in Cloquet. Betty actually worked at the Club as a waitress while she was still in High School during World War II. She had the privilege of waiting on Mr. Weyerhaeuser who was in his later years but who was one of the original founders of the Club. Gene served in the Navy during the War as a mechanic on an aircraft carrier. Gene didn't pick up a golf club until the late 1940's when he got home from the service when he was asked to play at Nemadji in Superior by his brother in law...his interest in the game took off from there.

In those years, a person needed a "sponsor" to join the Club and each individual application was reviewed and voted on by the membership (Fred Arbuckle was his sponsor). It was quite a process, and Gene joked he was surprised he ever got in. The whole family wholeheartedly took up golf, Gene and Betty and their two kids Tom and Beth. Gene and Betty both loved the Men's and Women's leagues and the kids played in the youth leagues. Betty, with a smile on her face, talked of some of the great "theme" nights they had after women's league golf and dinner....costume parties, holiday extravaganzas, etc., with lots of laughing and fun. Gene said he always seemed to have great matches with Jerry Cran in League play.

Gene has had much success over his golf career and pointed to the wall where he has plaques from winning five Minnesota state VFW championships. (Two were in Mankato and two in Perum, Minnesota.) He's also has had five holes in one. For many years he played with Roy Hagen not only at CCC but traveled around to various courses in the Region with the formation of the North Lakes Golf Association. He also played for several years with Moose Pastika and myself. He had doors on his golf cart and a heater and cookies and used to let my boys ride with him while we were playing. He's not sure he could fit Andrew and Ryan in the cart with him now! Gene is also very proud of being, at least in a small part, a contributor of getting the new nine built at Cloquet— it is a great addition to

CCC. He hasn't played this year, however, his back has given him a few problems.

He played in a few Invitationals also and enjoyed the festive atmosphere and playing "one of the finest" courses in the area. He still reflects on one year when he won his first two matches and went into his flight finals. Gene says he can't remember his opponent but their match was tied after regulation and went to sudden death. They both parred #1 and Gene boomed a drive on #2 within 7 iron distance. His opponent had to hit a three wood on his second shot but put it within one inch. Gene had a 2 putt par, but lost, such is the game of golf.

For many years, long after he had played with various youngsters, Gene and Betty received invites to graduations, weddings and other special events. They were invites from these kids that Gene had played golf with and offered them golf and life assistance. In particular, Ed Morreim, who played college golf, would call Gene and ask questions about his swing over the phone....it made Gene feel gratified.

Betty and Gene brought out another trophy they were very proud to blow the dust off. In 1975, they were in the last group in a Maggie and Jiggs club tournament. These were alternate shot, husband and wife tournaments. Gene said ALL thought another couple and perennial champs would be crowned the victors. The "press" had even taken pictures of this couple and put the cameras away. To surprise many, Gene and Betty shot one over par and were the champs!