

# POLISHING A GEM

*The longtime CEO of Columbia Sportswear, Tim Boyle, has blown the dust off the oldest course west of the Mississippi*

*by Tom Cunniff*

**T**im Boyle is getting set to play the short, par-three 15th at Gearhart Golf Links in tiny Gearhart, Ore., when a couple of cars pull to a stop on the adjoining road. Four locals jump out with a cooler, including the mayor, Matt Brown, and the head pro, Jason Bangild.

“Anybody want a beer?” Bangild asks, as he cracks open the container of craft brews. “You guys look a little parched.”

The relatively rare visit by Boyle, 68, Gearhart’s affable owner, is always cause for celebration. The longtime CEO of Columbia Sportswear in Portland, Boyle has restored the 126-year-old layout—the oldest course west of the Mississippi—to its former, links-like glory with the help of a number of people, including Bangild, superintendent Forrest Goodling, and architects Jim Urbina and John Strawn, while also upgrading the restaurant and adding a boutique hotel.

“Everything Tim did has my total assent and confirmed my view of Tim as the patron saint of golf in Oregon,” says good friend Mike Keiser. “It’s astounding to me that Gearhart opened before 1900 in Oregon far from the madding crowd. Tim is the backer of this very special course.”

Boyle had been part of an investment group that bought the course in 2000. By 2010, he’d bought out the others and begun renovations, removing about 400 pine trees, planting fescue, and lengthening the course to 6,500 yards. He also got an old high-school buddy, Mike McMenamin, who runs a chain of eponymous pubs and historic hotels in the Pacific Northwest, to take over the restaurant and accommodations. But the real key was hiring Bangild, then the head pro at Nanea, a private club Boyle belongs to on the Big Island of Hawaii.

Helping to restore history was a big attraction for Bangild, but it was Boyle’s optimism and enthusiasm that lured him out of paradise. “I don’t think I’ve met anyone with more energy in my life,” says Bangild, a Canadian. “And he’s always in a good mood. I like that he is having so much fun with Gearhart because it is so contagious.”

Boyle, who owns a home in town, has been coming to Gearhart since 1989. “It’s fun,” he says. “It’s not like an investment in a diamond mine. I can go down here and have a good time.”

With the opening of the new hotel annex/cart barn this spring, as well as a 20,000-square-foot putting



complex and halfway house, Boyle has put about \$10 million into the facility, pocket change for someone worth an estimated \$1.74 billion. He was in his senior year at the University of Oregon in 1970 when his dad died suddenly of a heart attack and he and his mother, Gert, who’d fled Nazi Germany with her family at age 13, stepped in. Revenues plummeted and they came within a pen stroke of selling the company, which Gert’s father had founded in 1938. But with innovative products and some help, they turned things around; in 2016, Columbia recorded \$2.4 billion in revenues.

“He gives all the credit to his mom, so he’s a modest optimist,” says Keiser. “How do you get better than that?”

Boyle didn’t start playing golf until age 40 when one of his vendors invited him to play. “I was horrible, but I was hooked,” he says. He soon joined Pumpkin Ridge and Waverly in Portland, as well as Sand Hills in Nebraska and Nanea. Now a 10 handicap, he also got his two children, Joe and Molly, hooked on the game, so much so that they played on their college teams at Drake and the University of Washington, respectively.

Many of their most memorable rounds were at Gearhart. Just a couple of blocks from the Pacific (you can hear the crashing of waves as you play), it’s sporty, walkable, and plays a lot longer than its yardage.

“The course is in my blood,” Boyle says, “and I want to make sure it’s as close to first class as we can make it.”