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GC of Tierra Oaks: An Awesome Experience
It's not easy to awe Sandy Tatum. Tatum has served as president of the USGA. He helped design the Links at Spanish Bay with Tom Watson and Robert Trent Jones Jr. and had responsibility for restoration/remodel work at Cypress Point, Pebble Beach and San Francisco Golf Club. He traveled to Scotland and Ireland with Watson for a historical golf-playing junket. He is a member of two golf clubs, two of the best in the United States — Cypress Point and San Francisco Golf Club.

When Tatum is involved in the design of a new course, it's obvious he won't architect the golfing equivalent of a trailer park. But even he is overwhelmed by the creation of The Golf Club of Tierra Oaks in Redding, on which he collaborated with Jim Summers.

"I just have to be perfectly candid with you, and I'd like to think it'd be my view if I designed this course or not," said Tatum during a tour of the golf club, which opens this summer.

"I don't think there's a golf course in the valley—in either valley—where you can have this kind of golf experience. And if you go into the Bay Area, there are only two courses that can match it: The San Francisco Golf Club and The Olympic Club," said Tatum.

"I hope that doesn't sound presumptuous, but I think it'll be one of the top three outside of the Monterey Peninsula area."

So what is it doing in Redding, tucked hours away from population centers Sacramento and San Francisco?

How fair is it that Redding golfers can buy into this private golf club for $6,000 when big-city golfers must pay an average of about $30,000 for a new country club membership?

Well, it's not fair, but the locals certainly aren't asking any questions.

Golfco, a course construction firm headed by designers Tatum and Jim Summers, began working on the course idea four years ago when Harrel Davis developer enlisted Summers' help to layout a premier 18-hole golf course and 200-plus estate home sites on his 568-acre development.

The setting is a microcosm of Redding's best natural qualities—a creek with several small tributaries, rolling hills, ancient valley oak trees and huge digger pines.

"It's easy to ooh and aah on any golf course, but this is a real ooh-and-aher," said Tatum. "We

**GC of Tierra Oaks:**
**It's AWESOME!!**

*The tee shot on No. 11 will add excitement to your game.*

*Text by David Little of the Redding Record Searchlight*
*Photos by Christine Lesniak*
started with one of the best sites for a golf course that I've seen anywhere. All of those features, while stunning to look at, can make life tough for golfers.

The hills assure that lies out of the fairway—and sometimes even in the fairway—can be tricky.

The oaks and pines frame the fairways and guard greens. They also serve as an unforgiving reminder to wayward golfers to stay in the fairway.

The dominant feature, though, is Stillwater Creek and its tributaries. The creek provides the perfect ambience (and frequently for average golfers, becomes a hazard) in winter and spring.

Stillwater Creek lines the fairway on holes 1, 2, 14, 15, 16 and 18. Golfers must shoot over the creek on 2, 16, 17 and 18. Including the seasonal tributaries, shots must carry over these natural water hazards on 8 of the 18 holes.

The abundance of natural water meant no artificial lakes needed to be built, save for one marshy area that was turned into a water holding pond that guards the left side of the green on the par-3 third hole.

Cart paths will be made of granite sand. Almost no land was moved during construction.

"Preserving these lovely trees and leaving the terrain intact was an important feature, as we saw it," said Tatum. "We don't want to intrude on the landscape, so it looks like the golf course truly evolved from it.

The finished par-72 project measures 5,110 yards from the front tees, 5,721 from the middle tees, 6,375 from the regular tees and 6,767 from the championship tees.

Note the absence of the terminology "men's" and "women's" tees.

"We want people to play tees best suited to their game. Four sets of tees allow us to do that, because a hole can be dramatically different from each set of tees," said Dan Kowall, Tierra Oaks' general manager and the former GM at Chardonnay in Napa. "One thing (Tatum and Summers) have managed to do is, the farther back you get on each hole, the tighter the course appears."

The best example of this is the 411-yard (from the championship tees) first hole.

"I think it's one of the prettiest first holes there is," said Kowall, "especially the way it looks from the clubhouse site."

From the championship (green) tees, the hole looks narrow, with trees on the side, Bear Mountain in the back and mounds in the fairway. The approach shot to the elevated, rolling green requires a long iron. The omnipresent Stillwater Creek is sitting to the left of the green, but a flat catch area should stop most errant balls.

The 512-yard par-5 second hole could be the course's signature hole, and could also be the toughest on the front side. It also starts the beginning of the journey away from the real world. Once you leave the first green, it's your last view of the clubhouse, driving range and putting green until the 18th hole.

"You could be 9 million miles from civilization, even though many of the home sites have golf course frontage," Tatum says on the second tee.

If you can split two big Oaks with an average tee shot on No. 2, it will still leave you with 150 yards to carry over Stillwater Creek on the second shot. Even laying up is difficult because the fairway curves and slopes downhill to the creek. A layup will leave a 170-yard shot to an elevated green.

If the course sounds beautiful and
occasionay tortuous, well, it is. But Tatum and Summers tend to follow tough holes with easier ones, just to give golfers a break.

There is one exception, Tierra Oaks' version of Amen Corner: Nos.
10, 11 and 12.

No. 10 is a long 424-yard par-4 with a dogleg to the left and a small green nestled at the top of a knoll. No. 11 is a 215-yard par-3 over a tributary. On a day when the south wind is blowing, a 3-wood will barely get you there. No. 12 is affectionately known as Sumner's Folly, because Summers designed a 469-yard par-4 that is just one yard short of par-5 designation.

Every course has one hole that makes you shake. No. 12 is it.

But the course gets considerably easier following the experience of playing No. 12.

No. 14, a 495-yard par-5, has a unique double fairway around a stand of pines that, if you can stick a long drive in a small landing area, allows you to cut a considerable distance off the dogleg and reach the green in two.

No. 15 is a short (317-yard) par-4 that is reachable in one — if you can kick a field goal through the pines and roll the ball onto the green while avoiding sand in front of the green.

The round ends with a 551-yard par-5 and a green that's half-a-football-field long but only 10-15 yards wide.

Members, guests and reciprocal play from other Northern California clubs will be allowed after opening day which is scheduled for mid-summer. Golfers interested in playing Tierra Oaks should consult their home pro or call The Golf Club at (916) 275-0887... home site information is (916) 275-8725.

As Tatum will attest, it's worth the drive. ▲