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Happy 100th
The Broadmoor, host of this summer’s U.S. Senior Open, celebrates its centennial in rarefied air.

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When Jack Damioli, president and CEO of The Broadmoor, speaks to new employees during orientation, he likes to share the story of the resort’s 78-year-old owner, Philip Anschutz.

As a child, Anschutz occasionally visited The Broadmoor with his parents. Around the age of 10, Anschutz was chewing on a hamburger in The Broadmoor’s tavern, just off the main lobby, when he told his parents that he planned to buy the resort. Anschutz, who shared that story in the foreword to a new book on the resort, accomplished his lifelong dream in 2011. Anschutz is only the third owner of what is arguably America’s most-decorated resort, which is celebrating its centennial this year. It was on June 1, 1918, that Spencer Penrose opened The Broadmoor with an enormous gala.

Penrose was a larger-than-life Easterner who thrived in the rugged West around the turn of the 20th century. He made his fortune mining copper, and he built the road to the top of Pikes Peak, which dominates the city’s western skyline. But he is best known for having built The Broadmoor. Around the resort, he is still referred to as “Mr. Penrose.” Penrose was a hard-charging, hard-drinking man who, when he needed a glass eye later in life, ordered that it be made to look bloodshot so that...
it matched his good eye. Penrose loved big events with lots of celebrities, so the U.S. Senior Open in late June would have been his kind of party. It will be the highlight of the resort’s year-long centennial celebration.

Everything changes at The Broadmoor. Nothing changes. Perhaps that’s the secret behind The Broadmoor’s success. The resort’s historical timeline documents a constant whirlwind of change – new lodging, new amenities, new restaurants, new concepts, renovations and remodeling. It never ends. And yet each year, without fail, The Broadmoor collects the Forbes Five Star (58 consecutive years) and AAA Five Diamond (42 consecutive years) awards. No other U.S. resort can match that record of sustained excellence. Since it opened a century ago, there have been only three owners – all of whom seemed to share a common vision for the resort – seven presidents, eight directors of golf and six executive chefs. Yet complacency never has been part of the formula.
Damioli borrows from one of his predecessors, Charles L. Tutt Jr., the resort’s president from 1940–1961, when he says, “The Broadmoor has never been finished. It is a constant evolution.”

If anything, the pace of change has accelerated under the Denver-based Anschutz, whose vast portfolio includes oil, railroads, telecom, sports franchises, entertainment venues and real estate. Under Anschutz’s direction, the main resort campus has undergone expansions and renovations. Meanwhile, he’s overseen the addition of a whole new category of boutique properties in and around Colorado Springs for guests seeking authentic Western experiences. At the same time, Anschutz, who also owns Sea Island in Georgia, put both resorts in a 100-year trust to ensure that they would remain under family control for the next century. Change will remain a constant, but it will be overseen by people immersed in the culture and history of the resorts.

Striking historical parallels keep emerging. Unlike Penrose, Anschutz shuns the spotlight – Google searches provide little insight into his thinking – but he plainly shares his predecessor’s grand vision for The Broadmoor.

Under Anschutz the resort launched its Wilderness Experiences – essentially three separate boutique properties, all under The Broadmoor’s banner, yet each offering a distinct setting and experience. Two of those, Cloud Camp and The Ranch at Emerald Valley, have direct ties to Penrose. “There’s always a connection back,” Damioli said. (A third Wilderness Experience, the Orvis-endorsed Fly Fishing Camp, is located 75 minutes west of the resort.)

At 9,200 feet above sea level, Cloud Camp sits 3,000 feet above the main campus on the site of Penrose’s old Cheyenne Lodge, which opened in 1926. Remnants of that adobe-style structure can be seen on the mountainside beneath Cloud Camp. To reach Cloud Camp, most guests are escorted up Penrose’s “Ladder to the Sky,” the $1 million road he built more than 90 years ago, in Cadillac Escalades. Drivers keep ginger treats on hands in case guests get queasy from the 17 switchbacks, the altitude or the cliffside views of the distant valley below.

It’s called Cloud Camp for a reason. Guests have their own cabins, but mingling is not just encouraged, it is central to the experience. Everyone gathers in the main lodge before dinner for drinks and socializing, then moves out to the balcony as Mark Streander, who manages the camp with his wife, Lisa Thomassie, lowers the American flag to the playing of “America the Beautiful.” It’s a hat tip to Katherine Lee Bates, who was inspired to write the anthem after summiting Pikes Peak. Then everyone sits at one long table to share dinner and conversation. After dinner, guests are encouraged to gather around the fire pit for s’mores, drinks and more conversation.

It requires a certain buy-in from guests: “You want me to talk to people I don’t know?” But there’s a certain charm about it – a call-out to a simpler era. On a recent night, your correspondent enjoyed the company of a retired couple from Texas and the management team from a Denver-based energy company. It might sound odd – a Five Star property without private dinner tables, cozy cabins with no televisions – and yet it all seems to work.
“It’s like a little escape from society,” Streander said. The Ranch at Emerald Valley, 10 miles south of the main campus, was what Penrose used to call Camp Vigil – a comfortable retreat from the city, primarily for corporate moguls. After Penrose’s death, it was passed along to the city, then to a private owner. Anschutz bought it back in 2012 so that guests had a place for fly fishing, horseback riding, hiking and biking.

The parallels with the past don’t stop there. Just as Penrose used to supply the resort with beef from Turkey Creek Ranch, his farm 20 miles south of the city, so too does Anschutz provide the Wagyu beef from his ranch in northern Colorado.

One of Anschutz’s savviest moves was to snap up Seven Falls, just a short walk from The Broadmoor, after 2013 flooding shut down the park. The idyllic setting of the falls and the fabulous Restaurant 1858 sometimes is fractured by the gleeful screams of the more adventurous guests zip-lining through two courses in South Cheyenne Canyon.

Damioli is a big believer in “experiential travel,” and he hints that ideas for new activities are percolating, though not yet ready to be aired.

This year also marks the centennial for The Broadmoor’s East Course. When Penrose decided to build a golf course, he naturally summoned Donald Ross, arguably the most prominent architect of that era, to design it. Ross promptly informed Penrose that he needed more land, and Penrose, never one to cut corners, purchased an additional 80 acres. The East Course was one of Ross’ rare design efforts west of the Mississippi River.

Over the years The Broadmoor’s East and West Courses came to blend the work of Ross and Robert Trent Jones Sr. The East’s first six holes and final three are attributed to Ross; the remainder to Jones.

For the Senior Open, the East Course will play as a 7,264-yard par 70. If the 2008 Senior Open of a decade ago is any indication, players will have to pick up shots on the front side; eight of the nine most difficult holes were on the back, according to Ben Kimball, the USGA’s championship director for the U.S. Senior Open.

“When you look at the golf course, it’s pretty straightforward, it’s right in front of you,” he said. “But when you start to factor in some of the nuances of it, it really becomes quite a test of golf.”

Those nuances include the elevation and its impact on both the ball and the body. But the East’s biggest defense remains its greens. As an example, defending champion Kenny Perry recently drove the 339-yard second hole during a practice round, then told director of golf Russ Miller, “I probably won’t try to do that (in the Senior Open). If you’re pin-high right, you’re dead. It doesn’t matter where the pin is. I’d rather be short or in the front bunker.”

Kimball wants the greens to run at about 11 on the Stimpmeter for the Senior Open, keeping in mind that they’ll be significantly faster on downhill putts.

“Everything is a speed putt. Distance is your priority,” head pro Mark Kelbel said. As an example, he pointed toward the 15th green. “Keep the flag between you and the mountain. You’re much better off being 25 feet right of the pin than left of the pin putting downhill.”

The distractingly beautiful par-3 16th, with Garden of the Gods in the backdrop seven miles to the north, should be the best birdie opportunity coming home, if 2008 data holds true. But there will be slim pickings on the final two holes – the 545-yard par-4 17th and the closing hole, with a new back tee that will bring the bunkers on the inside of the dogleg into play.

The Senior Open won’t be the biggest championship on the USGA’s summer schedule, but it almost certainly will be the most festive. Unlike most tournaments, where players scatter at day’s end, the vast majority of the field will stay on the resort’s main campus with other guests. This will be the eighth USGA championship held at The Broadmoor, the third in the past decade.

“It’s just a great experience from top to bottom for everyone, including the players, when you factor in the hotel and the accommodations and amenities,” Kimball said. Gwk
Nearly a decade ago, I visited The Broadmoor and played golf with Mark Kelbel, the head professional. I was there to write about the resort and its golf courses, but Kelbel was comfortable steering the conversation in other directions, such as books and travel.

Kelbel grew up in the golf business – he’s the son and grandson of golf pros – but his interests go well beyond sticks and balls. You don’t get to be the 2017 Colorado PGA Professional of the Year simply by fixing a few students’ slices.

“I want to have influence, not just effect,” Kelbel said recently. “I can have effect on people if I hold them at arm’s length and I talk to them about the weather and their 7-iron and how fast the greens were. But if I want to have true influence, I can’t be afraid to pull back a layer or two to find out what makes them tick. I think it’s important to have that curiosity.”

When we met a decade ago, Kelbel mentioned that he had been spending time in China building junior golf exchanges. And he told me he recently had started a charity to provide shoes to people in need.

Hemisphere Charities grew out of Kelbel’s friendship with Colin Francis, The Broadmoor’s outside-services manager. Francis grew up in Jamaica and said he and his four siblings each had just one pair of shoes per year. Sitting on a golf cart along the first fairway of the East Course recently, Francis recalled how he would come home from school, take off his shoes, clean them, put them away and walk barefoot the rest of the day.

Years later, when Francis would return to Jamaica at Christmas, friends assumed he was “living the good life in America,” and they would ask him for his shoes. So he’d give them away. One year, he said, Kelbel bought him a pair of tennis shoes before Christmas. Francis also gave those away.

“I said ‘Mark, I grew up without shoes. It’s important for kids to have shoes, for everyone to have shoes,’” Francis recalled telling Kelbel.

On a subsequent flight, Kelbel had a chance encounter with a podiatrist, who explained the health problems that arise from walking barefoot. From that was born the idea for Hemisphere Charities. Kelbel said it reflects a lesson he learned from his late father, Ed Kelbel.

“It’s more than just writing the almighty check,” Kelbel said. “You have to be willing to get your nose dirty on behalf of other people in need.”

Over the past decade the charity that Kelbel and Francis created has delivered more than 30,000 pairs of shoes to people in, among other places, Peru, China, Uganda, Philippines, Nicaragua, Jamaica, Dominican Republic and Mexico. Hemisphere Charities also has supplied shoes to cities such as Houston and Joplin, Mo., following natural disasters.

Kelbel sometimes personally delivers the shoes. In China, Kelbel came across Ashun Wu hitting “balls” made of rolled-up leaves in the rice paddy. Wu now is ranked No. 314 in the Official World Golf Ranking.

In Jimani, Dominican Republic, near the Haitian border, Kelbel delivered shoes to children in an orphanage.

“The second we put the shoes on them, they raced,” he said. It also was in Jimani that he delivered shoes to barefoot prisoners whose cell floors were covered in water.

“The prison officials would say, ‘We want shoes on their feet so they don’t get sick, so we don’t put them in the infirmary, because we don’t have the money to take care of them,’” Kelbel recalled.

Companies such as Walmart, Payless, Stride-Rite and American Airlines have partnered with Hemisphere Charities, though Francis said many of the shoes are donated by members of The Broadmoor Golf Club.

“We don’t turn away anything,” Francis said. “We’re thankful for everything.”