

Surviving The Fire

As we drove to the golf course at 3am on August 6, 2007, the night sky was bright from the flames devouring our clubhouse. Our neighbour had woken to a loud explosion and as she looked out her window she saw the roofline of the building on fire. It was the Holiday Monday of the Civic Holiday/Caribana Festival weekend and vandals decided to end it by spray painting racial graffiti on the 18th green and brick walls of the clubhouse. They also set a golf cart on fire that was parked on a concrete pad and locked up to one of the support columns for the patio. When the gas tank exploded, the cedar shake roof of the clubhouse caught fire. As dawn broke the reeking, charred remains of the building and its contents stood in stark contrast to the lush fairways and greens that surrounded it.

Our short term strategy was to get golfers on the tee - even though we didn't have a clubhouse, we still had two immaculately groomed golf courses to offer. Bell was able to reroute two of our four phone lines to our cell phones so we could answer calls and take reservations for the upcoming days. We used picnic tables and umbrellas to create a Pro Shop area under the catalpa trees between our putting and chipping greens.

Within two days we had a trailer set-up and had hydro and telephone lines rerouted to it and we were back in business with computers and high speed credit card processing. We immediately entered into a new contract for a point of sale system. We had two new portable toilets delivered but in hindsight we should have solicited better washroom options - we have a large female clientele and some of them stopped playing while we were rebuilding.

Once set up we were able to turn our attention to our long-term goals: filing a comprehensive insurance claim and building a new clubhouse. The key to our successful insurance claim was in hiring an insurance claims lawyer. Dominion of Canada Insurers paid out every claim we made, up to its maximum. We were also reimbursed for expenses we incurred getting our business back up and running after the fire - "Extra Expenses" that we wouldn't have known about without the claims lawyer.

We recouped every penny spent on the trailer, tent, toilets, cell phone bills and even advertisements that we took out weekly letting people know that both courses were still open. We were also able to claim an artist's rendering of our future clubhouse that we ran on our website and in our ads and even the cost of the nighttime security we hired to protect the contents of our temporary Pro Shop.

Once construction was completed on the new clubhouse, we moved into the new building one room at a time. Settling into the new space was bittersweet. The end of the golf season was upon us and it was no secret the devastating toll the senseless fire had on us financially and personally. We experienced significant declines in league play, we lost 80% of our tournaments for the 2007 and 2008 seasons, and regular green fee play dropped.

We didn't have profits and loss insurance prior to the fire, we always felt that food and beverage just broke even and that it would be difficult to prove loss of revenue because of the impact weather has on the profitability of a golf season. We now know that we could have claimed lost tournament and league revenue since they are relatively stable income sources.

We are a tightly knit family who worked hard to establish Oakville Executive in every way. The fire required us to hustle and put in long hours in order to move forward. We knew how to work hard so we persevered and got through it. We suffered emotionally though since we had poured our hearts into the business and considered the clubhouse our second home. We also felt helpless to prevent another attack and spent countless nights awake worrying and wondering how we'd be victimized again. On April 20, 2009 we hosted the official opening of the clubhouse and celebrated the 20th Anniversary of Oakville Executive.

We have settled into the new clubhouse with a new alarm system incorporating laser beams that surround the perimeter of the building and criss-cross our patios. Whenever a beam is violated either my sister or me get a phone call and we nervously go online to view our onsite webcams and see what triggered it. Thankfully, to date it's always been Rocky the Raccoon trying to jump into a garbage can.



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