

## IN CONVERSATION



... with *Len Barrie*

Len Barrie's take charge attitude is definitely present in his off ice ventures, and is exemplified through his investment with 15 past and present "NHLers", in Bear Mountain Resort on Vancouver Island, B.C. Born in Kimberley, B.C. and after 11 years and 184 games in the NHL with the Philadelphia Flyers, Pittsburgh Penguins, Los Angeles Kings and Florida Panthers he is now the CEO and President of Bear Mountain Resort.



19th hole at Bear Mountain, British Columbia.

*Can you summarize the steps that led to the development of Bear Mountain?*

It all came about due to a dispute over some trees with Royal Collwood; a golf course that our house bordered on. It was a member owned golf course and in the end we just felt we shouldn't be there. I wanted a place to play so it started out as 1500 homes and a golf course. Naturally, it has developed a life of its own, and has become 6,000 homes and 37 holes of golf. The 20 year project worth \$2.4 billion will include 180,000 square feet of commercial space, 2 or 3 hotels, a driving range and a Jack Nicklaus teaching academy, all there to give a first rate experience. One of the main reasons Bear Mountain Resort has been so successful is that I had no preconceived notions—no one told me 'you can't do this'.

*What would you consider to have been the biggest obstacle to the success of Bear Mountain and what would you have done differently?*

We went through the zoning process for 5 years. We have always had an excellent relationship with the city of Langford, who appreciated the job creation and added value to the community. However, while waiting for the rezoning from our neighboring community of the

Highlands the bulldozers had already begun taking down trees. That doesn't mean it went through without being challenged but what is great about our system is that everyone is allowed to have their own opinion. Some people like developers and some don't. I don't think we would have done things any differently.

*You have had to face a number of obstacles and some might say you've gained a reputation for pushing your way through them. Is this a fair assessment of your approach to facing obstacles?*

Barrie took on the Tsartlip and Songhees First Nations over a cave. "If we want to blow up a cave and put up a hotel, we will," Barrie famously told the Times Colonist. "I bought the property, I own it; we have the mining rights, so what?" The cave was blown up causing a dispute involving politics and legal issues. "What are you going to do, go around and get permission from the First Nations to do everything? Not a chance," Barrie told a reporter. "It's not how the world works. They're not the governing body here." Eventually Barrie reconciled with the First Nations.

"Not everyone's going to like you, but I've got enough friends."

I will do whatever it takes to get what I want it in a fair way. I haven't

done anything that I haven't been entitled to. I think you take a look at what it is that you're trying to achieve and work your way towards it. It's my property; I pay the bills and the taxes.

*Can you talk about the construction project? What was Nicklaus's role?*

It was great working with Jack and Steve Nicklaus along with Chris Cochran. The Mountain course is a challenging and tough championship course. The Valley course, opening soon, is designed to be easier to play and includes five par 3's. We plan to open the next 9 holes in August and the final 9 holes in September.

*What do you consider to be the signature hole or other highlights of the design?*

On the first course, hole 19, which is a par 3, 64 yard extra hole that Nicklaus snuck in has become the signature. It sits on a cliff but is on the scorecard as the 19th hole. You play it, mark the score, move on and decide what to do with it over a beer in the clubhouse. Maybe it'll come into play as a tie-breaker, to settle a bet or just as a conversation piece. The score is secondary. It's the view that matters here: From both tee and green is a 180-degree view of the Victoria city skyline, the Olympic Mountains, and the



Left to right - Jack Nicklaus, Len Barrie and Steve Nicklaus.



The Westin and clubhouse at Bear Mountain.  
The majestic 19th hole at Bear Mountain.



Pacific Ocean. On the new course I expect it will be hole 15; a par 5 with water along the left side. The way Jack designed the course there isn't one hole that feels the same as another. Signature holes aren't planned but they become that way from the spectacular views of the city and the ocean. At Bear Mountain there are 37 holes that are totally unique.

**Is the new course family friendly?**

It is if you pick the right tees and remember to "think the game". Jack set it up not to just smack the ball but so players have to think about the game and make good decisions. As for family golf; my wife, Kristy, and my daughter, Victoria, are starting to play. My son, Tyson, at age 17, plays defense with the Kelowna Rockets of the WHL but we will often play golf once a week.

**Where do you see the golf industry going considering the BC boom in courses being built, particularly in the Okanagan & Kooteney's?**

Golf is a game that is always going to be around. It is going to have highs and lows. I think that BC is maybe more isolated from it because our demographics include retirees who have some resources and want to enjoy themselves.

**Can you recall your most memorable game of golf?**

I had a game with Jack Nicklaus here at Bear Mountain and hit my best shot on the 9th hole when I hit a 3 wood into the middle of the green for a 3 foot eagle putt. He said I was a good player but I'll just leave it at that! I have had two hole in one's and they matter only because when it comes up in the conversation it's better to be able to say you've had them rather than not.

**What is more difficult - being a successful athlete, or being a successful developer? Are there specific lessons you learned in hockey that you've brought to the business?**

It is much more difficult to be a successful athlete. When only .6% of young players make it to the NHL it is something special. But it is all about team work. If you surround yourself with good people who work together then you'll find success. As for advice to give to other golf facility owner/operators I am uncomfortable doing so because I only have my experience. I unfortunately haven't had the time to connect with other owners. I keep thinking I am going to find the time and then I don't.

**You are the owner of a local hockey team, the Victoria Grizzlies. What other community initiatives are you involved in?**

The Bear Mountain Fund has been developed to support children's charities in Victoria and on the island. We have partnered with Ronald McDonald House Charities and it is very exciting for

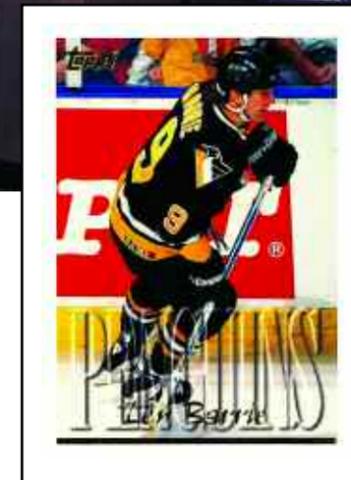
us to create the very first North American family retreat donating land worth over \$1 million. We made a commitment early on that Bear Mountain would work hard at giving back to the larger community that has supported the building of our own destination resort community. While our partnership with Ronald McDonald House Charities is arguably our largest donation to date, people can expect to see more from Bear Mountain as we grow and develop.

**What is the key to growing the game of golf in Canada?**

We need to get younger players to the game and the younger we can get them to start the better. The problem is that many courses are not friendly to juniors. In fact it is currently a challenge we face at Bear Mountain because we are a "cart required" course. We are working out the specifics of that with the new course and plan to offer no carts after 4 pm. We are fortunate that our local community of Langford has a free shuttle so the kids can get here easily.



Left to right: Steve Stamkos (no. 1 NHL draft pick) Len Barrie and Oren Koules; the 2 principal partners in the Tampa Bay Lightning purchase.



Len Barrie's trading card.

**Who are your target markets and what advertising strategies work best to reach them?**

We attract people who are out to enjoy their lives, to live a certain lifestyle. We have an exceptional staff and we have created a culture here where we go out of our way to treat our members with first rate service. We believe membership is a privilege but at the same time, members have it pretty simple here: if they're not happy then we will give them a refund and they can be on their way.

**You became part owner and president of the Tampa Bay Lightning in June of this year. Where is the excitement around Tampa Bay going?**

We expect to move away from the traditional GM role and embrace free agency and I intend to be hands on with lots of time spent in Florida. With the number one overall draft pick of Steven Stamkos, we think we have a great team in place to challenge for the Eastern Conference. We have 6 young guys in place as the top forwards.

**How different is your life now compared to how you dreamed it would be?**

It's hard to imagine that I could have dreamed about my life looking like this. It has certainly taken on a different scope now with Tampa but it all feels like it has been a natural progression. *It definitely appears as though Len will move forward with increasing success as he is going to continue his pattern of independent thinking.*



JANET JONES

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