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San Luis Obispo CC

THE MAKING OF THE BOSS OF THE MOSS

LEGENDARY PUTTER **LOREN ROBERTS** HONED HIS CRAFT ON THE IMMACULATE GREENS OF SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTRY CLUB | BY JERRY STEWART

Each November, you can count on 13-time Champions Tour winner Loren Roberts to play in the Straight Down Fall Classic at San Luis Obispo Country Club.

“I’m getting older, but it’s on my can’t-miss-it list,” said Roberts, also an eight-time PGA Tour winner.

One of the reasons Roberts has been a 15-year regular is his close friendship with Straight Down Clothing CEO Mike Rowley.

But it also has to do with the

venue, which is the home course of 2016 NCGA President John Ronca. For Roberts, San Luis Obispo CC is the place where his golf journey all began.

“That place started my golf life,” said Roberts, a native of San Luis Obispo. “It was my only access to quality golf.”

Nestled in the Eden Valley between rolling hills and vineyards, San Luis Obispo CC was built on a garbanzo field in 1957 by Bert Stamp.

Roberts first played the course as a sophomore in high school, when he “wasn’t very good.” But by his senior year, Roberts was a fixture at the club, and members took notice.

One of those was member Jim Swagerty, who was head pro at Oakmont Country Club in Glendale. “Jim really took me under his wing and helped me,” said Roberts, now 60.

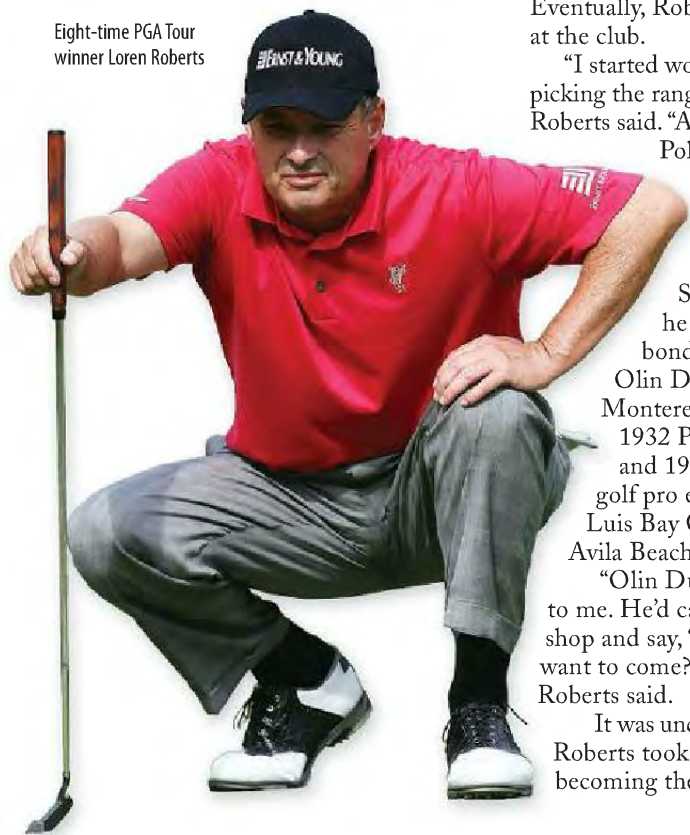
Roberts took his game to Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo, and the golf team regularly played the course.

The par-3 third hole



NCGA President John Ronca spearheaded the renovation of the club's Mediterranean clubhouse during his tenure as president of the club.

Eight-time PGA Tour winner Loren Roberts



Eventually, Roberts began working at the club.

"I started working in the bag room, picking the range and stuff like that," Roberts said. "After my days at Cal

Poly, the assistant pro left and I took the job.

That is when my game really took off."

As an assistant at

San Luis Obispo CC, he forged a strong bond with golf legend

Olin Dutra. The native of Monterey and winner of the 1932 PGA Championship and 1934 U.S. Open was the golf pro emeritus at nearby San Luis Bay Club, now known as Avila Beach Golf Resort.

"Olin Dutra really took a liking to me. He'd call me over in the shop and say, 'I'm going to play nine, want to come?' I'd run to my car," Roberts said.

It was under Dutra's tutelage that Roberts took his first steps toward becoming the "Boss of the Moss."

But he truly earned the nickname thanks to the greens at San Luis Obispo CC.

While the par-72 course tops out at a manageable 6,710 yards (73.8 rating, 129 slope), the greens at San Luis Obispo CC are as good as they get. They're so good that former Masters champ Fred Couples, who also plays in the Straight Down Classic, once told the San Luis Obispo CC membership, "Augusta National doesn't have anything on you guys."

"The greens are very slopey. You have to be under the hole. That helped me visualize what to do on slopey, tough putts," said Roberts, who also routinely played with Dodgers legend and club member Sandy Koufax. "You really have to use your imagination, and you really have to control your speed. Growing up on those greens had a lot to me getting the nickname 'Boss of the Moss.'"

But it's not just the greens that shaped Roberts' game. The all-kikuyu grass layout, which was touched up by architect Robert Muir Graves in 1984, also forces you to think from the tees and fairways.

"You have holes that go a lot of different directions, and a lot of uneven lies. They didn't move a lot of dirt in designing it. They really took what they had," Roberts said. "You have every shot you'll ever see in golf. You have to hit the ball really well. If not, you really have to work with your putter."

Two of Roberts' favorite holes are the par-4 No. 12 and par-3 No. 14.

The 392-yard No. 12 is a slight dogleg left with a massive bunker protecting the right side of the green.

"Usually the wind is in your face, and you've got bunkers running up the left side of the fairway. The green almost has a false front. You've got to hit it really solid there," Roberts said.

Among the perils of the downhill 182-yard No. 14 is a carry over a creek, with a pond across the front of the green.

"If you miss the green to the left side there's a really steep slope. It's a very tough up-and-down," Roberts said.

THE MAKING OF THE
BOSS OF THE MOSS

As for how the course holds up to today's technology, take a look at the results of the Straight Down Fall Classic. The winners from last year's two-day, best-ball event, Scott Heyn and Corby Segal, had a total score of 12-under 131. Roberts and his partner, Justin De Los Santos, finished fourth at 136.

"You'd think that guys would go low, but it does great," Roberts said. "They get the greens running up to a 12 on the stimpmeter. If you're in the wrong spot, you can knock your putt 10 to 12 feet by the cup."

San Luis Obispo CC is also a very special place for Ronca, a Cal Poly alum and the current secretary of the Cal Poly Foundation. Ronca served as president of San Luis Obispo CC for four years, and has also been the chair of the Straight Down Fall Classic since 1996.

During his tenure as president at the club, Ronca spearheaded the 2001

renovation of the club's 20,000 square foot Mediterranean clubhouse, which overlooks the 18th green.

The Straight Down Fall Classic honors Ronca's good friend Donny Woodward, who died at a young age due to ALS. On the Friday prior to the Straight Down Fall Classic, the Woody Pro-Am is held in memory of Woodward. All proceeds from the Straight Down Fall Classic go toward ALS research.

"Watching Donny (Woodward) make his last putt on No. 18, the year before he passed, while he was fighting that awful disease, was so inspiring and so emotional, it will always stay as one of the strongest memories of the tournament for me," Ronca said. "His battle led us to choose ALS as the tournament charity."

San Luis Obispo CC's membership—which today includes former Giants pitcher Mike Krukow, former White Sox star Robin Ventura (whose brother Rick is the head pro) and ex-Raytheon CEO Bill Swanson

(who recently donated \$10 million to the Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo golf program)—is known for taking care of one another.

Just ask Roberts. During his time as an assistant at San Luis Obispo CC, Roberts once found himself trying to play in a tournament in Australia. To help fund his cause, the Ladies Club held a fashion show that raised money on his behalf.

"Their help got me there," Roberts said.

The same Ladies Club held another fashion show that sent Roberts to the British Amateur—and helped him meet his wife, Kimberly.

"I was in the fashion show to model men's clothes. One of the lady members invited a gal to meet two guys, me and another one of the male models," Roberts said. "I ended up with the date, and she ended up being my wife. I'll never forget what the membership did for me."

Whether it's great golf or great camaraderie, you'll find it at San Luis Obispo CC. ☺



The par-3 eighth hole

SAN LUIS OBISPO

IN THE **MIDDLE** OF EVERYTHING

The southern-most member club of the NCGA is **San Luis Obispo Country Club**, but the county is caught in no-man's land. Is it Northern California or Southern California? It's halfway between San Francisco and Los Angeles. You can get Giants games on the radio, but its Dodgers games that are on TV. Both rival fan bases manage to coexist — San Luis Obispo has been called the happiest place in America.

From the NCGA headquarters in Pebble Beach, it's a quick 2.5-hour drive to reach San Luis Obispo. Bring your clubs. Bring your family. Bring your camera. San Luis Obispo County sits on a spectacular corridor of the Pacific Coast Highway, winding through Ragged Point (the Gateway to Big Sur), the barking elephant seals in **San Simeon**, **Hearst Castle**, romantic getaway favorite **Cambria**, past the spectacular volcanic plug rising from the sea in **Morro Bay**, the lovely **Avila Beach**, ATV destination **Pismo Beach**, and your pick of two exploding wine regions — **Arroyo Grande Valley** and **Edna Valley**.

For a pampered experience, stay in Avila Beach at the **Sycamore Mineral Springs Resort and Spa**, a forest oasis that includes mineral water hot tubs in every room, a private waterfall lagoon, gorgeous hiking trails and even free yoga classes.

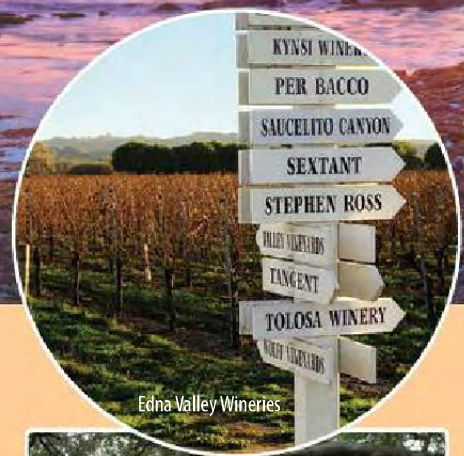
From the NCGA headquarters in Pebble Beach, it's a quick 2.5-hour drive to reach San Luis Obispo. **Bring your clubs. Bring your family. Bring your camera.**

If you aren't staying overnight, you can still take advantage of the **Silver Sage** winning spa, and hillside mineral hot tubs available by the hour.

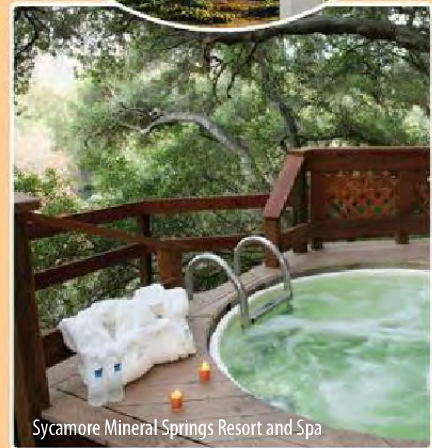
You can easily make a weekend simply by bouncing around from winery to winery. Take a 15-minute drive from downtown San Luis Obispo or Avila Beach to Edna Valley Vineyard (the oldest in the region) and **Baileyana Winery** (a fun tasting experience complete with a bocce ball court). In Avila Beach, be sure to check out the peacocks wandering around **Kelsey See Canyon**, and try some creative apple wines. **Moonstone Cellars** in Cambria is worth a separate excursion — it's where we bought the most wine. NCGA President John Ronca and his wife Tracy also co-own **Biddle Ranch Vineyard** in San Luis Obispo, and converted a two-room schoolhouse into a cool tasting room.

A trip to San Luis Obispo isn't complete without stopping at **Firestone Grill**. You have to order the tri-tip. (Do they have anything else on the menu? Most of us don't know.) For a swankier experience, **Novo** spills out into a beautiful back patio lining the San Luis Obispo Creek, while **SLO Brewery** is a surprising and fun upstairs find above a concert venue.

San Luis Obispo does great family golf, with the scenic nine-hole **Sea Pines** in Los Osos, and the revolutionary (and incredibly fun) 12-hole,



Edna Valley Wineries



Sycamore Mineral Springs Resort and Spa

two-flag Challenge Course at **Monarch Dunes** in Nipomo. Monarch Dunes also has one of the best championship courses on the Central Coast, the Damian Pascuzzo and Steve Pate designed Old Course. **Avila Beach** offers some of the most spectacular oceanfront views for golf in the area, while **Dairy Creek** is a links-style John Harbottle layout.

For more help exploring San Luis Obispo County, visit Highway1DiscoveryRoute.com. You're closer to perfect weather — and a perfect weekend — than you think! 🌞

— Kevin Merfeld