

Allen 'Oop' Willard of Bermuda Dunes CC



Allen "Oop" Willard was already one of the most popular volunteers in the SCGA's legion of committeemen when he joined the SCGA board of directors in 1994.

A native Californian, Oop was born in Hollywood and has never lived farther than 150 miles from his birthplace. He graduated from Burroughs High in Burbank in 1950 and attended Glendale College before joining the Navy. Upon discharge in 1955, he joined his father in the flower business in Indio.

"I played golf at a nine-hole golf course called Cochran-Odlum Ranch," Willard recalls "It was a hideaway for President Eisenhower and his golf game."

The desert was growing, and so was Willard's Indio Florist business. He acquired Palm Desert Florist from his brother, then opened Rancho Mirage Florist, and things were, so to speak, "bloom-ing" in the desert.

During the 1970s, Jim House nominated Oop to the SCGA Rating Committee, and he has been involved with course rating ever since.

Willard joined Bermuda Dunes Country Club in 1975 and he and his wife, Ann, built a home on the 11th fairway where they have lived for 16 years. The Willards have five children. Like Oop, all were born in California and each still lives within an hour of the Coachella Valley.

Oh, and 'Oop?' "The nickname came from my little brother," Oop explains. "He was in kindergarten and I'd read him Alley Oop from

the comic strips each day. It got to where a few of us acted out the episodes and I was Alley Oop. Later it was just Oop. I figured it would change when I joined the navy, but all my mail came addressed that way."

- **FORE:** Your handicap index?
- **OW:** 14.7

■ **FORE:** Can you identify a truly memorable golf experience or two?

■ **OW:** I was playing for the club championship at Cochran-Odlum Ranch and I was five down after the first 18 holes of the 36-hole match. Things changed in the second round. I chipped in on the last hole for an eagle to win 1-up. It was my first-ever round in the 60s, a 68.

In the mid-60s, there were two nine-hole courses in Indio (the other was Westward Ho). My mother-in-law was ladies champion at both and I held the same two men's titles, so a local sports writer dubbed us the inner-course champions.

- **FORE:** What's your best round?

■ **OW:** Down at Del Rio CC in Brawley during a tournament, somehow I rolled in a 66.

- **FORE:** Any aces?

■ **OW:** Five, three of them in the Coachella Valley, one at the Kings Course in Gleneagles, Scotland and one at Campestre de Mexicali in Mexico. I think that not only gives me three more domestic aces than (fellow director) Bob Lowe, but two more internationally than he has.

- **FORE:** Who's the best you ever played with?

■ **OW:** The late Dr. Bud Taylor (the last back-to-back California Amateur champion). One summer during the late 50s, he, a mutual friend and I spent a month solid playing golf.

- **FORE:** What's in your golf bag?

■ **OW:** It's a really mixed bag. My irons are Daiwas I bought used from a pal in 1984. My sand wedge is an old one designed by Mario Cesario of Redlands. Two other wedges are a lob and a 52-degree piece of junk. In fact, my only decent club is my driver, a Great Big Bertha that (former SCGA director) Bert Schaar made for me. The two fairways woods are from a grab bag. My putter is an old copy of the Arnold Palmer Wilson model. Actually, my black bag is the best value of the lot.

■ **FORE:** Suppose you had only one round to play — with whom and where?

■ **OW:** With my sons at Augusta National. I would really enjoy that.

■ **FORE:** Do you have an area of special interest in your work on the SCGA board; expound?

■ **OW:** The rating committee. I've been a member of that group for 20-plus years. Our rating methods today are outstanding.