



The Grand Hotel Golf Resort & Spa, Autograph Collection, has been named **Hotel of the Year** in the Distinctive Premium Brand category by Marriott Hotels! This prestigious award recognizes the best-of-the-best full-service Marriott Hotels, where exceptional leadership and flawless guest service are the cornerstones of success. ●

PEEHIP Costs Rise

BY JO MOORE, DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR ADMINISTRATION

Due to changes made by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and Congress' Inflation Reduction Act, federal funding for PEEHIP's Medicare Advantage (MA) plan will be significantly reduced starting in 2025. What does this mean for PEEHIP? **PEEHIP will be paying four times what it pays now** for the healthcare of its Medicare-eligible members starting in January 2025. These cost increases are solely due to the federal changes and are impacting all MA plans, not just PEEHIP.

Since our July *Advisor* article, PEEHIP has learned that, unfortunately, the anticipated direct subsidy from the federal government is not enough to completely offset the cost of Medicare's reduced funding and increased drug cost. Regarding increased drug cost, previously 80% of the cost of Part D brand drugs that accumulated to the most expensive threshold was paid by the federal government. **The Inflation Reduction Act shifted a large percentage of this cost to plans like PEEHIP by reducing federal liability from 80% to 20%.**

PEEHIP will continue to gather more information and seek the best path forward to continue providing exceptional healthcare benefits to its Medicare members. ●

History of RSA's Grand Hotel Near Fairhope

BY MARK FAGAN

The first hotel opened in Point Clear in 1822 and since then, there has always been at least one hotel open in this vacation spot over the last 200 years. The Grand Hotel (I) was built in 1847 as a two-story building with 40 rooms. Guests originally traveled to the hotel by steamboats. It has had many expansions and various owners through the years. The hotel has been damaged many times by fire and hurricanes. The hotel has hosted guests from American presidents to leaders and generations of families from around the world.

In 1863, a portion of the hotel became

a Confederate hospital during the Civil War. Most of those sent to the hotel for recovery were soldiers from Missouri that were injured during the Battle of Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1863. More than 300 Confederate soldiers died while at the Grand Hotel. These soldiers are buried in mass graves shoulder-to-shoulder in Confederate Rest, a cemetery on the resort property. During the Battle of Mobile Bay in 1864, Admiral Farragut, a Union naval officer, fired canons from boats onto the hotel grounds. A hole was found in the wall of the Gunnison House, which is the site of the Grand's Conference

Center today.

In 1871, a steamboat explosion at the hotel resulted in damage and sale of the hotel. The new Grand Hotel (II) opened in 1875 and was three times longer than the earlier building with two stories and 60 suites. In 1893, a hurricane destroyed portions of the hotel that were rebuilt. In 1901, the hotel and 250 acres east of the property were purchased. In 1906 and 1916, the Grand Hotel was severely damaged by storms. In 1939, the hotel was purchased with 25 adjacent parcels with

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History of RSA's Grand Hotel Near Fairhope

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plans for a golf course. In 1940, the old buildings were demolished, and the new hotel (Grand Hotel III) opened with 84 guest rooms in the main building in 1942.

As a donation to the WWII effort, the Grand Hotel was leased in 1944 to the U.S. Army Air Corps to be used as its Maritime Training School for servicemen who landed on the beaches in the Pacific. The cottages and rooms were converted to barracks. After WWII, a marina, two tennis courts, an 18-hole golf course (1947), and a swimming pool were built at the hotel. Ten cottages were added in the 1950s.

In 1966, a new owner constructed the Bay House (south) which increased the hotel to 172 guest rooms. In 1967, the first conference center and nine golf holes were added. In 1979, the hotel closed from Hurricane Frederic damage and reopened

in 1980. In 1981, a new owner added the North Bay House and the Marina Building, bringing the total guest rooms to 306. In 1986, the old Gunnison House was torn down to make way for the Grand Conference Center and nine golf holes were added for a total of 36 holes.

In 1999, the RSA financed the purchase of the Grand Hotel and The Lakewood Club. There were 306 guestrooms in four buildings on 550 acres, 22,000 sf of meeting space, three restaurants, 10 tennis courts, bike trails, a 37-slip Grand Marina, and 36 holes of golf with a clubhouse and driving range. In 2002, the RSA completed a renovation of the main lobby, restaurants, meeting rooms, and existing guest rooms. This included the addition of the four-story Spa Building with additional guest rooms, a 20,000 sf

Spa, indoor pool, fitness center, and new aquatics/beach center.

The hotel was damaged by Hurricane Ivan in 2004 and Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Repairs included reroofing, boardwalk replacement, the pier and Julep Point replacement, and replacement of air conditioning equipment.

In 2018, buildings at the hotel were transformed to higher quality as part of Marriott's Autograph Collection. All of the guest rooms were renovated, as were the meeting and conference spaces, spas, pools, pier grounds, and restaurants.

In 2024, the Grand Hotel Golf Resort & Spa, Autograph Collection is named "Hotel of the Year" in the "Distinctive Premium Brand" by Marriott Hotels! ●

Alabama's Trailblazer

RSA helped bolster the state's image through the creation of the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail

BY CARY ESTES, *BUSINESS ALABAMA* | BUSINESSALABAMA.COM

In 1990, the state of Alabama was only a few decades removed from some of the most violent visuals of the civil rights era. In fact, a mere four years earlier, George Wallace — known throughout the country primarily as a staunch 1960s segregationist — had not yet finished his fourth term as the state's governor.

Those memories could not be easily erased from the national consciousness. But...the Retirement Systems of Alabama (RSA) was determined to try to move the state past its reputation. He decided the best way to accomplish this was, of all things, to build a series of golf courses forming a sort of Trail across the state.

Nearly 35 years later, [the] vision — the 26-course Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail — has become one of the leading tourist attractions in Alabama. A total of approximately a half-million rounds of golf are played at the 11 RTJ sites each year, and the Alabama Tourism Department has estimated that about half those rounds are by golfers who live outside the state.

"When we started the project, George Wallace was all some people knew about

Alabama," [RSA] says. "RTJ gave us the opportunity to talk about something else. I wanted to see if we could change the world's impression of Alabama through the use of a sport. I wanted something that would give us a constant flow of a positive image."

At first, Bronner simply was trying to come up with a way to effectively diversify the assets of the RSA pension fund. In the process, he decided he also wanted to help change the conversation away from Alabama's controversial past and instead focus on the state's attributes, namely as an outdoor recreation location for tourists and a business-friendly environment for industry.

"Back then, when recruiters in Alabama were looking to bring in industry, businesses still had visions of fire hoses and police dogs," says former Jacksonville State University Professor Mark Fagan, whose book "The Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail: Its History and Economic Impact" was published in 2016 and updated and re-released this year. "He wanted a quality-of-life attraction for industries and their employees, and a tourism attraction

to get people to stop here and spend money instead of just passing through on the way to Florida or New Orleans."

Once the idea was formed, Bronner needed places to build the courses, as well as somebody within the industry to create them. He says he chose the approximate locations simply by sticking pins in a wall map near the cities he thought should be represented on the Trail. "I didn't know the exact site," Bronner says. "I just knew the areas I wanted to be in."

Finding a golf course architect willing to take on such an enormous project was a bit more challenging, and Bronner admits that a few people turned him down [thinking it was just a big dream]. But he found a willing partner in Robert Trent Jones, a British-born designer who had worked on more than 500 courses in 35 countries throughout his career.

"If I was going to establish an animal like this in Alabama," Bronner says of the trail concept, "then I needed somebody with credibility in the world of golf. [Trent Jones] had just finished a project in [North

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Alabama Success Story

“Beyond a War”: Former Viet Cong Soldier, U.S. Marine Create University Partnership

Beyond a War,” the moving documentary portrait of university presidents Dr. Jack Hawkins, Jr. and Dr. Lê Công Cơ, will make its U.S. debut this fall at Troy University’s Montgomery Campus. The film will premiere at a special celebration on Sunday, September 29, at 2 p.m. at the Davis Theatre for the Performing Arts.

“Beyond a War,” produced by Duy Tan University (DTU), has opened to praise in Vietnam and among key stakeholders for its powerful message of reconciliation.

More than 50 years ago, Dr. Hawkins and Dr. Lê Công Cơ were on opposite sides of the Vietnam War. Hawkins served as platoon leader in the U.S. Marine Corps, and Lê Công Cơ fought against American forces as a member of the Viet Cong. Today, they lead Troy University and Duy Tan University, respectively, and are working together to ensure a brighter future for students in both the U.S. and Vietnam. “Beyond a War” captures their personal stories of combat and survival during the war and their drive to bring about change through the power of education and international collaboration.

“This documentary is riveting – informative, interesting, inspiring, involving – and I think it will be well received in this state and in the country by audiences who see it,” said Dr. Jim Vickrey, film critic and former president of the University of Montevallo.

In Vietnam, the documentary has received rave reviews from critics, said Dr. Hang Le, Vice Provost of Duy Tan and daughter of the University’s founder. She said the idea for the documentary grew out of her admiration for Troy University and the relationship she saw between Dr. Hawkins and her father.

“In the beginning, we did not mean to make this documentary for national broadcasting,” Dr. Hang Le said. “We just thought that it is a good story to tell, and we hope that we could record our partnership between Troy University and DTU through which our students could learn from the examples of [Dr. Hawkins] and my father... The reception of the documentary is beyond our expectations.”

Jack McManus, President of the Vietnam Veterans of America, said “Beyond A War” was a testament to the humanity and opportunity for mutual respect with our former enemies in Vietnam.

“This insightful documentary illustrates how extremely far

the people of Vietnam and the U.S. have traveled together in friendship since our long-ago war,” McManus said. “The use of historic footage, along with the counterpoint interviews, illustrates what we have long known, that at the heart, we had much in common with the enemy against whom we fought.”

Dr. Wayne Reynolds, Treasurer for the Vietnam Veterans of America and a member of the Alabama State Board of Education, said he was impressed with the quality and messaging in “Beyond A War.”

“I served in DaNang Vietnam in 1968-69, and the partnership with a university in that region is impressive and indicative of a healing and brotherhood of former combatants,” Dr. Reynolds said. “As an educator, this is a significant addition to the body of knowledge about Vietnam. It shows how former warriors are continuing to serve in civilian capacities. It exhibits aspects of our individual and organizational involvement in Vietnam 50 years after the end of the war.”

Troy University first established academic programs in Vietnam in 2002 in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. In 2008, Troy awarded the first baccalaureate degree ever by an American university in the history of Vietnam. Today, Troy enrolls 1,200 students

in classes and has 2,000 alumni in leadership roles throughout Vietnam.

Troy’s formal partnership with Duy Tan began in 2017.

“What excites me about the documentary is it shows the transformation of the relationships between two countries that a half century ago were at war,” Dr. Hawkins said. “Today, not only do we recognize each other as countries, but we are working together as partners. While we came from different backgrounds and certainly different sides of the war, our goal now is unity and a common focus on students. Lê Công Cơ is committed to building a great university and that is exactly what we are committed to doing at Troy.”

The film’s trailer is available on the Troy University YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/2Tn3ldTZKPU>.

This is a series of articles about Alabama Success Stories. Please let us know if you have a similar success story you would like to share with the RSA membership. You may contact us at communication.correspondences@rsa-al.gov. ●



Dr. Lê Công Cơ and Dr. Jack Hawkins, Jr.

Alabama’s Trailblazer

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Carolina]. I went and looked at it and said, ‘Let’s try to get [Trent Jones].’ What did we have to lose?”

[Trent] Jones accepted, though he was 84 years old at the time and unable to handle some of the on-site work involved in creating even a single golf course, let alone seven at one time. So, he enlisted

a younger course architect, Roger Rulewich, for assistance. Then, as Fagan puts it, Bronner gave the duo “a canvas so they could do their artistry.”

In 2012, during an event at the RTJ Oxmoor Valley course in Birmingham marking the 20th anniversary of the Trail’s opening, Rulewich recounted how

the project formulated quickly, and progressed into a rare opportunity for elaborate creativity from the course designers.

“I was over in Ireland at the time,” Rulewich said, “and I get a call from [Trent Jones] and he says, ‘There’s

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- September 8-9, 16-17, 22-23 • October 1-2, 6-9
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- September 8-9, 16, 22-23
- October 16-17, 20-21, 27-28, 30-31
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- October 6, 20-21, 27-29
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Alabama's Trailblazer

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something going on in Alabama, I think you'd better get there.' So, I came directly here, met Bobby [Vaughan], and he took me out to this very site....

"It can be very difficult to do things that take longer than a week or two to develop," Bronner says. "When you elect politicians, you want them to get rid of 20 years of errors in an hour and a half, but it can't be done. You have to go step-by-step.

"We're just part of the big puzzle. You need politicians, mayors, economic development people. But you also have to have something to sell to industry and tourism to get them to come here. When Mercedes and the other automotive companies started coming here (in the 1990s), I saw the impact the Trail could have. I think it has made a positive difference in Alabama." ●



Cambrian Ridge, in Greenville, has 27 holes on three courses. Pictured is one of the holes on the Canyon course.



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