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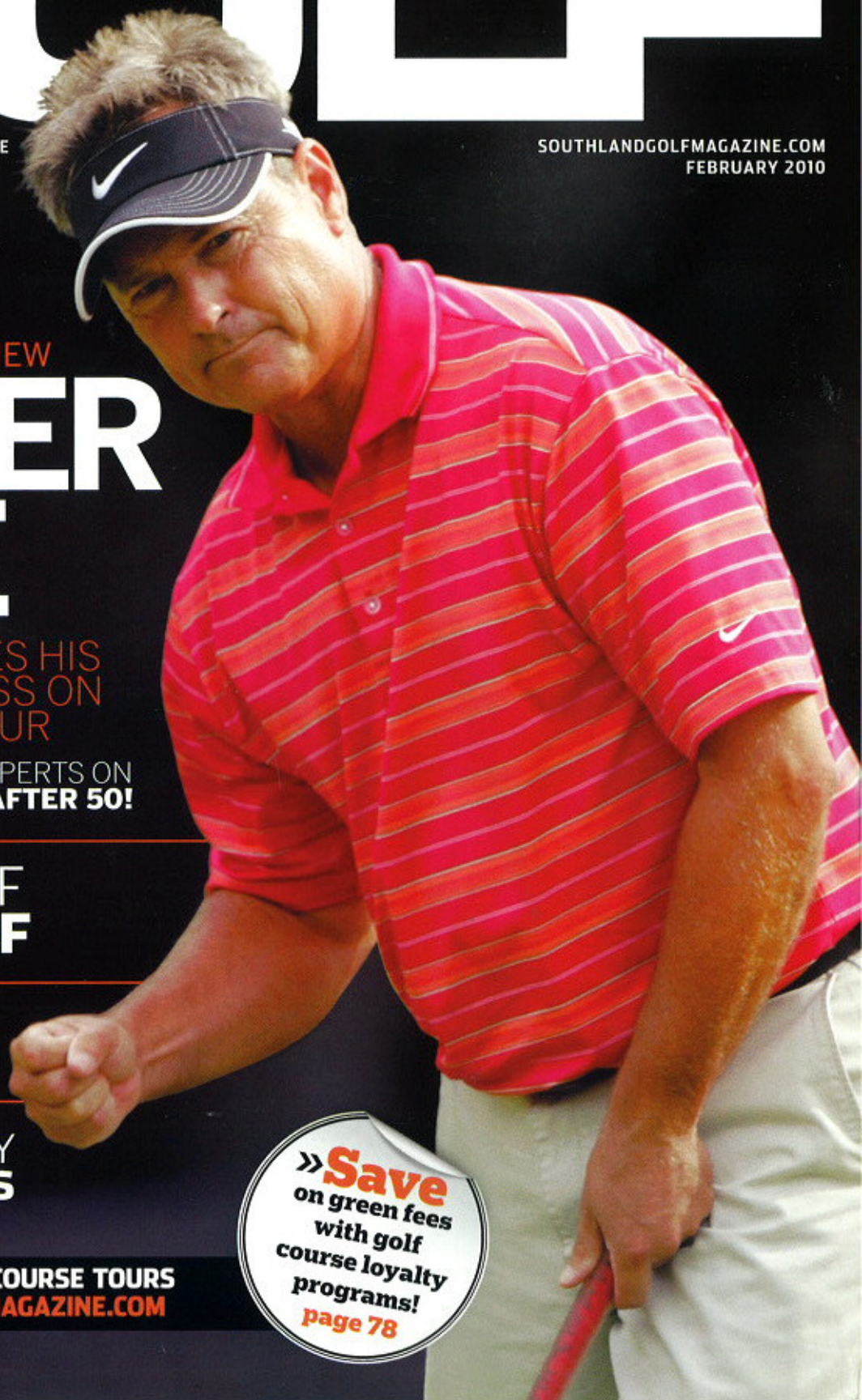
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» From left: Hickory golfers Jeanette Gilliland, Chris McIntyre, Jessica Delaney and Jason Egnatz.

Back to the future

RANCHO BERNARDO INN'S JASON EGNATZ HOPES THAT A **LEAGUE USING HICKORY CLUBS** WILL HELP PLAYERS EMBRACE GOLF'S SIMPLER TIMES. BY MICHELLE FLORES

Sweet spot? The size of a nickel.

Long drive? Maybe 220 yards.

In the bag? A fairway wood, four irons and a putter — all lacking grooves.

When Jason Egnatz first spotted a golfer carrying hickory clubs, he asked: "You're not going to hit with those, are you?"

But Egnatz was intrigued enough to accept an invitation to play a round of hickory golf. Eight years later, hickory-shaft clubs

are the only ones he uses. His personal set is by Tom Stewart, who made clubs for Bobby Jones before striking a deal in the 1920s to design for Spalding.

Egnatz, director of golf at Rancho Bernardo Inn, now hopes to grow the ranks of Southland hickory golfers by launching a league dedicated to how the game was played before 1935.

"Playing with hickory clubs reminded



Back **To The Future** (continued)

me of why I like golf in the first place," Egnatz said. "Hopefully, I can bring my passion for hickory golf to club members and guests."

The idea to start a league germinated last October when Rancho Bernardo Inn played host to a tournament and trade show for the regional chapter of the Golf Collectors Society. Sporting knickers and wielding niblicks, mashies and brassies, players took to the fairways while visitors perused items offered by 25 collectors of vintage clubs, apparel and other golf memorabilia.

Egnatz is a friend of GCS regional director Chris McIntyre, a Rancho Bernardo resident who began collecting hickory clubs nine years ago and founded McIntyre White Authentic Golf and sister company Play Hickory Inc. in 2004.

As McIntyre built his hickory club collection, Rancho Bernardo Inn became an "R&D lab" of sorts, said Egnatz, who provided feedback on McIntyre's slight modifications to the antique clubs for their use by modern golfers.

"Today, golf is about the power swing," Egnatz said. "There's no feel to the game. The romance is gone."

Hoping to spread the love, Egnatz has set Tuesday, March 2 as the start date for a weekly nine-hole event at Rancho Bernardo Inn, with play beginning at 4 p.m. The \$40 fee includes the use of rental hickory clubs that have been slightly modified.

"The results are quite good when you make good contact," Egnatz said. "You get a lot of vibration and shock when you don't, because the sweet spot is much smaller."

Egnatz anticipates offering a range of hickory golf events and formats, including match play, skins games, foursomes and partners, as well as charity tournaments with "beat the pro" contests during which the pro plays with hickory clubs.

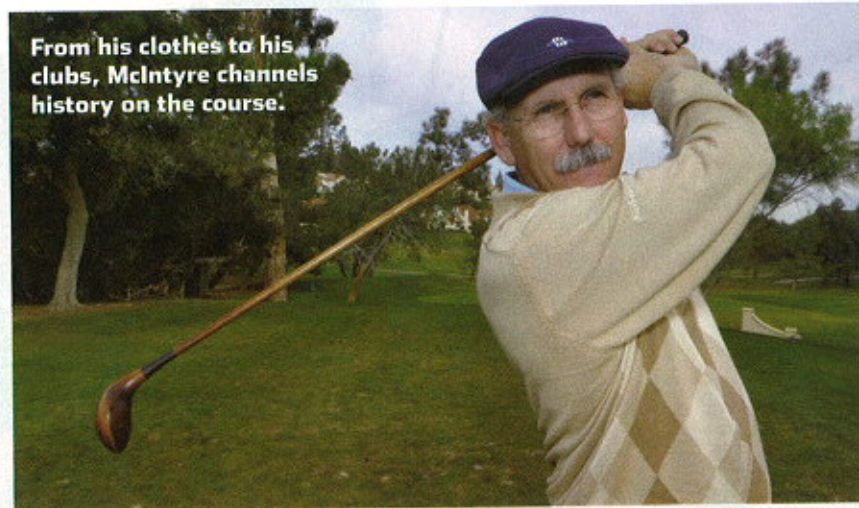
He believes Rancho Bernardo Inn is the ideal home for a hickory golf league, given the facility's reputation for originality. The resort keeps a 1,900-bottle wine cellar, bakes its own bread, creates natural elixirs for the therapeutic treatments at the spa and maintains an herb garden for its El Bizcocho restaurant.

Players can sign up for the hickory golf league by calling the pro shop at (858) 385-8733 or by sending Egnatz an e-mail at jegnatz@jrcresorts.com. **SG**

in **the news**

Old-time fun

CHRIS MCINTYRE HAS FOUND HIS CALLING — INTRODUCING OTHERS TO HICKORY GOLF. BY MICHELLE FLORES



From his clothes to his clubs, McIntyre channels history on the course.

What's the growth potential of golf played with 80- to 90-year-old, hickory-shaft clubs?

According to a San Diego-based director of hickory golf tournaments, business is increasing as many Southland courses approach golden and silver anniversaries and centennial celebrations. And interest is mushrooming, said Chris McIntyre of Play Hickory Inc., as players find hickory golf leagues and events where they can rent antique clubs and dress the part of a golf pioneer.

In fact, some golfers who try hickory-shaft clubs never go back to metal alloy. Count McIntyre among them.

"Golf has been a little stale in recent years and the economy hasn't helped," said McIntyre, who co-founded Play Hickory and its sister equipment company McIntyre White Authentic Golf. He noted that for some players, the thrill has subsided for hitting "gigantic power drives of 300 yards all the time," thanks to the advanced technology of modern clubs.

McIntyre felt his game had grown stale after years of playing his country club course several times per week. He became curious about hickory clubs after spying an 85-year-old club in a friend's garage. Struck by its worn-out

beauty, he bought it for \$15. That led him to learn about the club's maker, renowned Scottish designer George Nicoll. McIntyre was driven to learn more golf history, particularly the period when the game took root in America at the turn of the 20th century. He also began collecting hickory clubs, which were used through the mid-1930s.

"Now I'm one of the more involved guys in the country," McIntyre said of his vocation, which includes leading the regional chapter of the national Golf Collectors Society, organizing tournaments and manufacturing reproduction balls, clothing and accessories through McIntyre White Authentic Golf.

McIntyre said it's been a gratifying experience to be a history guide of sorts. For national hickory golf tournaments, McIntyre often grows a long beard and dresses in knickers, waistcoat and cap of yesteryear to play the part of Old Tom Morris.

"Most people are surprised that they can hit quite well with a hickory club," McIntyre said. "I'm often asked, 'Can I buy this club? I hit it better than with my own.'"

For more details, call (858) 382-4810 or visit mwhiteauthenticgolf.com. **SG**