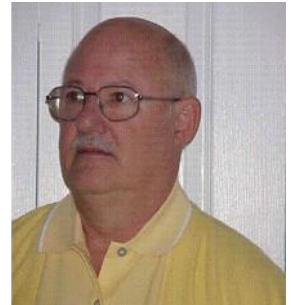


The Cape Royal Community is Founded on Resident Volunteerism

Meet our First HOA President, Bob Watson

We know a lot about the success which the Cape Royal Community has achieved during recent years, with the resident-led HOA purchase of the golf course and our success with leasing partner, Troon-GGP. However, the groundwork was actually laid at the community's inception through the efforts of many of our original residents. Bob was one of those individuals who, along with his wife Helen, have been Cape Royal residents for 27 years. He served as the community's first HOA President.

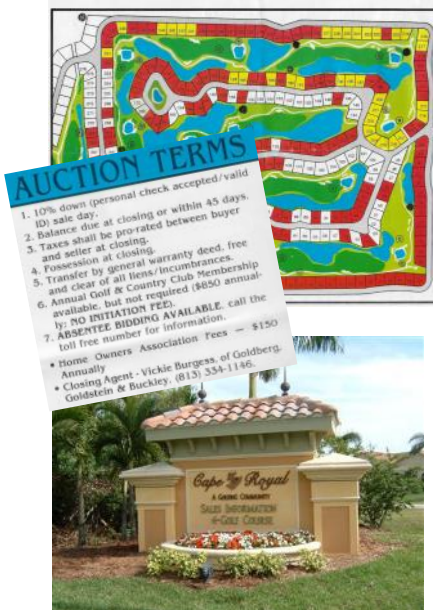


I sat down with Bob recently to revisit those years. It was 1993 when they moved to the neighborhood. For this article I wanted to know what was the same and what was different today.

As outlined in [the Cape Royal Success Story](#), Royal Tee was conceived in 1983 as a community of estate-size lots and homes surrounding water features, preserve lands, and a new 18-hole championship golf course. In 1984 construction began with the digging of ponds and grading for the 18-hole Royal Tee Golf Course. By 1985, a small number of custom homes had been built and lots were aggressively being marketed.



In 1988, the Watsons, who were seasonal residents living in North Fort Myers, responded to an advertisement for 'free golf' in a local magazine. Bob says there were about 10 homes in Royal Tee Golf & Country Club at the time, with section C and the Queen golf course not even a thought. Shortly thereafter, they purchased their first lot from the FDIC bankruptcy court for less than \$15,000 with a free golf membership thrown in from Povia-Ballantine Corporation (BP). At that point they started playing golf in earnest and became more interested in the community.



In 1991 - 1992, BP, the community's owners and development company, announced they were building 2 model homes in Royal Tee and had engaged an auction company to offer a prime section of the community as a pre-season opportunity to area residents. They offered a free golf and country club annual membership (an \$850 value) for the first 10 auction sales in order to encourage construction. Bob and Helen made some additional lot purchases at that time and auction lot sales averaged about \$29,000. In 1993, they built their own custom home, one of about 30 homes built or under construction in the community. The Royal Eagle newsletter, published by BP, touted golf and social activities, with the Pro Shop and clubhouse lounge serving as the central hub of activity.

The original Articles of Incorporation for Royal Tee were filed in 1990. The community Board of Directors (BOD) included Larry Povia, Ron Kapela, Dean Ballantine and Stephen Sloan from BP Developments. Beginning in 1996, all of the residents who lived in Royal Tee kept after Larry and Dean to have some say in the running of the community. BP finally agreed and two residents, Bob Watson and Patti Butler, were added to the Board as Directors at Large.

As indicated under Florida law, the HOA Board of Directors is controlled by the developer until such time as individual homeowners comprise the majority of lot ownership. While the 2 resident board members were in the minority, Bob said he felt they were able to add the voice of the residents into the developer's decision-making process during that time. Bob was on the HOA Board from 1997-2000, and was president in 1997 and 1998.

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Interview with Bob Watson (continued)

Bob's government and business background, along with his even demeanor prepared him well for this role. A Canadian by birth he initially worked in the public sector as a Legal Aid Investigator and as a Director of city social services agency, before moving to the private sector. As an entrepreneur, Bob first moved into sales for a home goods retailer, Phalens Place, in Ontario, Canada, and then after moving to Royal Tee in the U.S., founded his own company, Watson Industries, Inc. (WII). His U.S. company specialized in state and school contracts to supply audio, video and electronics products into places such as state toll plazas, police departments and schools in the southern U.S.

When asked what he liked best about Royal Tee, Bob said he's always liked the closeness of the neighborhood. Royal Tee was a very close-knit community even then, with neighbors welcoming neighbors at move-in and volunteering to spruce up the community, such as planting trees, much as we see today.



At that time the cluster mailboxes by the four-way stop was the place to find out the latest news. You knew everybody because you all went to the "cluster box" each day. Most residents played golf and the clubhouse was the big social area of the community. Tournaments, league play and fun golf events, such as "Fright Night" were available, followed by chili cheese dogs and hamburgers grilled on the screened porch (which is now the Patio). Catered food from area restaurants, such as DeBono's Stop & Go, was also ordered in for golf tournaments and other social events.

In his role on the HOA Board, Bob said he was instrumental in establishing the original eight (8) volunteer committees which included, Finance, ARB, Roads and Drainage, Landscape, Rules & Regulations, Security, Animal Control and Signage and Lot Mowing.

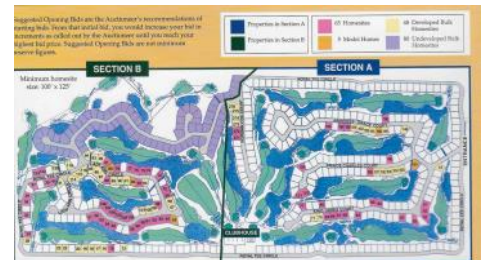
Bob said, *"drainage was a huge concern then as Sandoval was just a field. During the rainy season the community roads would flood with up to 2 – 3 feet of water."* He said, *"With very few homes in the community and limited street lighting, it could become quite dangerous to drive in the community, especially after dark."*



In 1997, BP held another auction to sell the remaining homesites and model homes through an "Auction Accelerated Marketing Method", to complete a close-out sale in one day. A total of 65 homesites and 5 model homes were offered individually. Twenty homesites and 2 model homes were to be sold "Absolute Without Any Minimums or Reserves," which means they would be sold to the highest bidder regardless of the price. In addition, BP was offering the opportunity for developers and investors to purchase 48 developed homesites in bulk and another 80 undeveloped homesites, now called Section C, to the highest bidder at or above a minimum of \$750,000 in bulk. The suggested lot price was \$59,000.

He does want to give credit to BP Development for turning over all of the HOA funds they collected from homeowners from the start up to and including 1997. Much of this was used to repave all of the community roads, when Gerry Siddall was the Roads and Drainage Chair, thus avoiding a large assessment.

Bob said Royal Tee started changing in the early 2000's when BP Development sold all of the remaining owned lots to Realmark, who changed the community name to Cape Royal. Will Stout of Realmark spent a lot of time, effort and money to improve our residential image across Lee County, promoting Cape Royal as *"the place to be and the place to live."*



Interview with Bob Watson *(continued)*

After Realmark owned the properties for several years, they sold it to Tousa Engle SCC Canyon/Engle in 2004. This was a land bank, who sold lots back to Engle as homes were to be built.

A management company was brought on board, which raised the HOA fees. Bob feels the demeanor throughout the neighborhood became more transactional in nature as the developer focused on property sales and cash flow to get the community ready to support itself.



At the same time BP, which still owned the golf course and associated assets but was no longer the Declarant, was not keeping it up as expected. Community members became increasingly concerned that the Tousa/Engle's management decisions were not prioritizing the lifestyle that residents had enjoyed and thought they had secured.

A private lawsuit was initiated against the Declarant, Tousa/Engle, after the Mitchell/Wovas homeowner team unsuccessfully attempted to secure documentation from the then Tousa/Engle controlled Board of Directors. The goal of the Mitchell/Wovas lawsuit was to allow the homeowners control of the HOA Board of Directors. Following multiple successful rulings in favor of Mitchell/Wovas and facing the final ruling in favor of Mitchell/Wovas, Tousa/Engle, in order to not set a statewide precedent for developers, turned over control of the HOA in 2007.

Bob said that *"the community was truly in troubled times during the period of the lawsuit, which he felt was warranted as the HOA was being taken advantage of financially."*

Bob says Cape Royal is still the greatest place to live and he feels we've come a long way. He credits all of the residents who have stepped up to volunteer their time and talent over the years to get through both the good and difficult times, including, but not limited to, other HOA Presidents at the time he was on the board, including Hank Ellison and John Reher.

After the Wovas/Mitchell lawsuit successfully resulted in community control of the HOA in 2007, Ed Harrington was elected President. The following community members, in order, who also served as President included, Elaine Mitchell, Bill Schulte, Jim Wheeler, Ed Harrington, Don Weigand, and currently Deb Davidson. The 2016 Board of Directors successfully negotiated the acquisition of the Royal Tee Golf Course.

Bob feels that the facilities are in much better shape since the HOA took control of the golf course and associated assets, and he is pleased that the "can do" volunteer neighborhood spirit is back and continues throughout the community.

Today, Bob provides part-time accounting services to a former client and enjoys euchre, golf and dining at the Caloosa Club in his spare time. He's pleased that he once again knows his neighbors.



Please thank Bob for his service to the community the next time you see him!

This story was first published in The Royal News, our Cape Royal Community Newsletter, Volume 3, May 2020. [Click Here](#) to learn more about Cape Royal visit our website.

