



Apples and Oranges

By Jennifer Jolly

Jim Applegate is back on the scene here in Boca Raton helping Mark Gensheimer on his Via Mizner project. Applegate is a golf course development executive and was the original General Manager here at Boca Grove. We all know Gensheimer as the kingpin of development in Boca Raton who is currently building the Residences at Mandarin Oriental and the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, a real coup for east Boca as the brand only has six in the US. But did you know this isn't the first project the two have collaborated on?

Applegate now works for Gensheimer as a Vice President at Gensheimer's Penn-Florida development company and runs the day to day operation at Santa Lucia River Club but, in the beginning, Gensheimer worked for Applegate. Jim hired Mark to work at Boca Grove – Mark was one of our first Golf Professionals along with Don White.

Having Jim working locally a few days a week has led to some discussions, conversations and stories about the days of ole here at your club. Some pretty amazing things happened here. Last issue we shared a visit we had from Gary Player, as you would imagine, Jim has some stories of his own.

I know we talk about how Boca Grove was Gary Player's first American home, but do you know how that came to be? Gary Player's signing fee was paid for by a YMCA event held at our tennis center, a two-story building that was located where Fitness is now. The event was scheduled for 10:00 am and, as sometimes happens with the best laid plans, the club team was still installing carpet just 90 minutes before the opening.

Jim tells the story with a glint in his eye and a smirk on his face remembering the chaos of the day. He admits that the best way to deal with the unfinished areas was to camouflage them with plants. The plants were later dispersed through property with extras sold to members or staff. Two of those plants, affectionately named Gary and Arnold, continue to thrive today at Jim's home.

Our Honeybell, Honey

As a citrus plantation, the main crops produced here were Honeybell oranges. The Honeybell is actually a hybrid between a Darcy tangerine and a Dunkin grapefruit with more juice than flesh, producing a very refreshing sweet and sour flavor. Our golf carts were equipped with citrus bags so members could collect oranges during their round of golf.

Another fact you may not know, it was Arnold Palmer who witnessed the signing of Gary's sponsorship agreement with Boca Grove. His arrangement was to wear the club logo while playing in tournaments and during practice for 5 years, after which time his home in Boca Grove would be his, free and clear. Gary honored his commitment and a photo of the signing (donated by Mr. Applegate) will be hanging on our new history wall in Chippers by November 1, alongside a signed copy of the painting (donated by the Janouras) we have of Arnie and Gary at the Quadel.

Other photos that will be adorning that wall include an event held at Boca Grove for Sam Snead. In the photo is Sam Snead, Gary Player and Jim Applegate during a gold coins presentation. This was in recognition of all Snead's tournament wins.

Two Grand Master Tennis tournaments were held at Boca Grove. Pictures from these events will also be on display along with an oldie but a goodie of Bobby Riggs and Richard Centerbar, with a fashionable 80s inspired mullet.

We are excited to have reconnected with Jim Applegate and love our connection to the rich history of oranges, honey and citrus farming in south county. There is an entire section in the Boca Raton Historical Society library on Boca Grove Plantation, you can bet I will be doing some digging. For those historians among our membership, please join me in documenting our past by sharing your stories so we may cherish our traditions.

What's in a Name?

Boca Grove was a working orange plantation when it was purchased by the LaBonte family of Montreal, Quebec. Jim Applegate worked for the LaBontes as well as the two successions that took place from mid 1981 through 1985. The original street names were inspired by oranges; Mandarin, Orangewood Lane Valencia, Hamlin, Bellechase (Honeybells), Boca Grove Boulevard, but that changed a bit when Robert Campo purchased the property from the LaBontes, hence Campo Florido. Irwin Levy, the final owner before the membership took over, purchased the development from Campo when it was just under 50% developed.

