

Bella Vista Country Club

The holidays were extra special for the residents of the young Bella Vista Village in 1968, because they had a brand new Country Club building, which opened just in time for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year celebrations.

Architect E. Fay Jones was a student of Frank Lloyd Wright and had designed the first town homes built by John Cooper Sr. in Cherokee Village, Cooper's first retirement village near Hardy, Arkansas. Those were so well thought of that Cooper decided to ask Jones to design the Bella Vista Country Club building.

Construction on the new clubhouse began in June 1967. The Village Vista of January 1968 reported that the building would cost about \$418,000 to build.

The cost of construction rose during the year, however. The Vista of December 1968 reported, "...the imposing new Bella Vista Country Club clubhouse... was completed at a cost in excess of \$1 million....Workmen laid approximately...600 tons of stone in construction of the building. Two carloads of hand-split cedar shakes were required to cover the approximately 36,000 square feet of massive roof." In that issue of the Vista, a photo was published of the Clubhouse staff, reporting that there were 32 employees in positions ranging from 'locker room attendant' to 'security guard' to 'salad lady.'

The Vista went on to say, "The first major activity to be held in the new building was a Thanksgiving buffet November 25....A New Year's Eve party will be held (at a cost of) \$20 per couple...."

Linda Cash Rush began greeting visitors on the day the clubhouse opened in November 1968, and continued working in the building until her retirement in 2014, with the exception of the five years the building was closed, starting in 2002, when the staff worked out of Town Center. (Linda was a Bella Vista native, having been raised on a farm which her dad, Oscar Cash, sold to Cooper in 1971. Part of it later became Lake Brittany.) In the POA Employee Newsletter in 1995, Linda wrote that when the Country Club opened, "As it was the only place to eat in town, there were many Saturday nights that we would have to turn people away because we simply did not have the space...."

The dress code was very different back then. The Weekly Vista of December 6, 1977, printed a list of "Clubhouse Rules." Included were the statements that "Casual dress, including conventional golf and tennis attire, is permitted in the

Terrace Room and 19th hole only. Gentlemen...are required to wear conventional clothing (suit coat, sport coat, leisure suits) on the main floor of the clubhouse after 6 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, and after noon on Sunday. Women must be attired in conventional clothing (pants suit, long or street length dresses)....”

After the POA decided to stop subsidizing their restaurants in Bella Vista and lease them out, the Country Club began to be operated by a series of lessees. Its current restaurant, Café Amici, has been in operation since January 2014.



Linda Rush was a Bella Vista Country Club employee from the day the building opened in 1968 until her retirement in 2014.



This postcard shows the Bella Vista Country Club when the trees were on the golf course were still quite small.



The view of the Bella Vista Country Club, shortly after construction was finished, as printed in the Village Vista of December 1968.