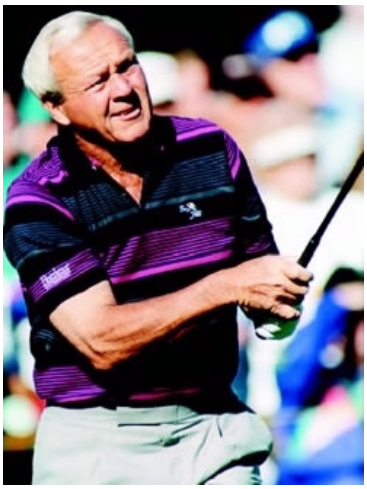
Being Healthy Is The Good Life!

ARNOLD PALMER TALKS OPENLY ABOUT PROSTATE CANCER, PRESIDENT EISENHOWER, THE DESERT



Golf legend Arnold Palmer met with Eisenhower Medical Center Foundation President Michael Landes to discuss Arnie's own experiences with prostate cancer, his personal relationship with President Dwight D. Eisenhower, and his longstanding ties to the desert – all of which motivated him to lend his name to the new Arnold Palmer Prostate Center at Eisenhower Lucy Curci Cancer Center.

MICHAEL: You and I have talked about the fact that we are both survivors of prostate cancer…, yet I'm 47 and you were diagnosed in your late 60's. What kind of cancer are we dealing with here?

ARNIE: Let me tell you that when I had my surgery at Mayo Clinic, the guy in the room next door was a minister, 29 years old, and he was having radical surgery for prostate cancer. So, don't let anybody ever tell you, "Oh, when you get to be 50 or 60, you need to start having a PSA (prostate specific antigen) test." A 29-year-old had prostate cancer, and he's living and healthy now because they discovered it early, and they could do something about it.

MICHAEL: PSA is a simple, low cost blood test, but it wasn't really until people like Arnold Palmer, Michael Milken, and others began raising awareness, and funds, that a greater population of men felt compelled to get tested.

ARNIE: I was operated on in January 1997…they didn't take my life, they took my prostate. For six weeks, I suffered with the recovery of radical surgery. But, my life hasn't changed, except for my wife dying, which was a tragic thing for me, because she was my life. To lose her, was a tragedy for me, much more than my prostate cancer. But the fact is, I was able to enjoy my life then, and I am still enjoying it. As my wife said before she passed away, "Arnold, get on with your life." So, when men are scared, "I don't want to go have a PSA because I'm scared what they're going to find," that is the most stupid, ridiculous statement I have ever heard in my life! And I tell men that. And I will tell them….

MICHAEL: Well, at Eisenhower, we are going to be real advocates for this, I promise you that. We serve one of the fastest growing areas in California, so we can truly make a difference, and we're looking forward to it.

ARNIE: The future for treating prostate cancer is so great. It's very optimistic. When it was discovered that I had it, they said, "We've got to give you a biopsy." In those days, and this is just eight years ago, they did six samples of your prostate. Today, it's very rare for them to do less than 12.

MICHAEL: I had 12.

ARNIE: Some hospitals and some urologists recommend 14. When I had them, it was painful as hell. But now, they have a way to do them, that you don't feel a thing. You are reasonably comfortable.

MICHAEL: Well, it is a shock for men. But you've got to face it, and you've got to take action, unless you're older and your doctor is recommending "watchful waiting." One of the wonderful things is the range of latest therapies. At the Arnold Palmer Prostate Center, one of our centers of excellence is brachytherapy – better known as radiation seed implants.

ARNIE: Which is good.

MICHAEL: You have options.

ARNIE: Your choice. assets/news/story/cfhlimages/200501/arnie-michael.jpg Arnold Palmer and Eisenhower Medical Center Foundation President Michael Landes at the Tradition Golf Club.

MICHAEL: As far as prostate cancer, your news for the men out there is…

ARNIE: Very good. Get PSAs. It's simple, and should be done by every man when he's in his 20's. But you're talking about health and living…give the doctors a shot. A lot of people worry about something, they'll fret and know that something is bothering them, but they personally do not want to admit it to themselves.

MICHAEL: Denial. I'm fortunate that my allergist, Dr. Sam Weiss, suggested that I have a PSA test..., and just as fortunate to have a great urologist, Dr. Marvin Brooks, calmly take me through all the testing up through educating me about treatment options. But, I think most men deny they could ever have the disease.

ARNIE: They're in denial. Their life would be far better if they just talked to their doctor about it – like taking a PSA, or having a colonoscopy, or having your heart checked. It's not a big deal, if you do it regularly. That's health and living.

MICHAEL: Let's switch gears and talk about your memories of President Eisenhower.

ARNIE: I won the Master's in '58, and he was President of the United States. After I won, I was told that he was going to be there to play golf Monday, and they wanted to know if I wanted to stay and play golf with him. I said, "Certainly!" So I did, and that kind of started our relationship. And it was really a great one through the years. We became very close friends, and we spent a lot of time just talking. In the early days, we spent a lot of time playing golf. As the years went by, we did various things – from entertainment, to a lot of charity for the heart fund, and things like that. Then, he got sick. He couldn't play anymore, and so we used to just visit. We'd spend hours talking. Talking personally, about things that were happening, about things that I wouldn't reveal even today, likes and dislikes, and little things that were not a big deal, but important to both of us. That cemented our relationship. Then, he passed away. I was there when he did. He was at Walter Reed in Washington, and Winnie and I went to see him. He was the same – the same spirit and laugh and smile – as he was all the time. I considered him a really good friend.

MICHAEL: Eisenhower Medical Center is really a place of excellence, and one of the reasons is because of the name "Eisenhower." Our leadership and our community are proud to keep it a place of excellence. That was one of the promises that the people that founded Eisenhower Medical Center made to him. To add the "Arnold Palmer" name is really something special.

ARNIE: I appreciate that, and I'm sure that he would. There are a lot of things that have happened since his death, very marked things, as far as he was concerned. I'm sorry he wasn't around to hear or see what has been happening.

MICHAEL: Both of you enjoyed the early years here in the desert. Tell us about those "early days."

ARNIE:

President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Arnold Palmer at the future site of Eisenhower Medical Center on January 31, 1967.

Well, there aren't many people around that can tell you what it was really like…except me! I came here in January of 1955. And, anybody that comes to the desert today and sees what is here now, would not even believe what I'm going to tell you…because it was so different. I drove up from Brawley, California, and there was nothing. Farms…just everywhere! It was solid farms, and water, and irrigation. There were three golf courses here: one was Thunderbird, one was Tamarisk, and the other one was O'Donnell downtown, and that was it. Of course, my wife was with me. We had just been married. The weather was nice. It was a day like today…it was warm. We were so green…, we didn't even attempt to get into Thunderbird. We drove around the outskirts and looked at all the stuff that was happening. In those days, you could surround the whole place and drive through everything in about an hour. But, then…the desert was desert. I mean, places like Bermuda Dunes, Eldorado, Indian Wells, Palm Desert, weren't here. There was nothing. Highway 111 was a two lane road, and there was no traffic! We both decided that we liked what we saw…and I never missed a year since then. I've been here, coming back and forth, all those years. It's 50 years!

MICHAEL: That's quite awhile, because some of us feel like we're old-timers, if we've lived here since the 80s. Because it's a dramatic change, even from the 80s to now.

ARNIE: I won the Thunderbird Invitational in 1959. That was my first tournament win in the desert. The next year, I won the Desert Classic. Then in '61, they named it the Bob Hope Desert Classic, and of course, now that's history…. I was here when they built Indian Wells, when they built Eldorado and Bermuda Dunes. I watched them all being built. I remember when Ernie Dunlevie built Bermuda Dunes. The word was out on the street that it would be a total and absolute failure, because of the wind that blew down the valley. It's not a significant fact in the desert at all! I'm doing a golf course, right now, on the other side of I-10 for the Berger Foundation. It's called North Star, and it will be a resort. It's right in the funnel of the wind, and we aren't concerned about it at all. It isn't going to affect the development.

MICHAEL: We are here at the Tradition Golf Club. What are your thoughts about this course?

ARNIE: David Chapman became the general manager in charge of this development. When we built the golf course, David followed all my thoughts on this project. He did them far beyond where even I thought they would go. I didn't like the desert being viewed as just desert and brown sand. And, Winnie, my wife, encouraged me to encourage David to plan it in its entirety, which we have done. David did very well. Everything is annuals and very lush. I've built over 300 golf courses in the world, and without question, there aren't many of them that can come up to the meticulousness of this development. There are some great ones, and there are some, in their own right, that are probably just as good or better than this…, but not any more meticulously done or well kept as Tradition.

MICHAEL: It is. If you drive around, it is absolutely outstanding. The last question, Arnie, what is the good life to you?

ARNIE: Being healthy. Period. You can have all the things in the world you want, but being healthy is the good life.

MICHAEL: Words of wisdom to live by.

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