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International Relations

by

Tom Holbrook

It's amazing how mentioning The Villages in general conversation out of town brings "ooooohhs" and "aaaahhs" from the mouths of those listening. Judy and I took a two day get away to Bonita Springs and Naples, FL this past week and employees of the resort where we stayed could not stop raving about what they had heard about our hometown. One employee said that he had taken the tour and had decided he would be purchasing a Villa here within the next three months. Another had an uncle who already lives here and another had a friend who was considering a move to The Villages. Everyone had nothing but good things to say about our special community and could not believe that so much was offered for so little.

While there I played a round of golf on the Raptor Bay course at the Hyatt Coconut Plantation while Judy went shopping, and I couldn't have enjoyed it more. Well, that's not altogether true... seeing as I lost close to a dozen golf balls during my 4½ hour round I would have enjoyed it slightly more if I had been able to stay in the middle of the fairway. However, the pain of those losses was lessened by the great conversation I was having with the couple with whom I was playing.

Alphons and Ineke were two very interesting people from Holland who come to Naples every October and stay until December to play golf and get warm in the Florida sun. Although they are Dutch they now live in Belgium and look forward to their annual trip to America. Alphons is retired from the company he founded, but still acts as a consultant and travels around the world with many trips to China. He has an office in Switzerland and Canada as well as Belgium and has been to the United States over 100 times on business as well as pleasure. His company was responsible for introducing those plastic, stackable patio chairs to America via Walmart and K-Mart. He said the chairs were very well received in the other parts of the world as well.

Judy and I went to dinner with them later that evening and we sat and talked for over 3 hours. When we suggested we should visit them in Belgium in coming years Ineke said "Why don't you fly into Paris and we will meet you there and show you around? It's right in our back yard, only 1½ hours away." Who knows maybe it will happen? By the way, the restaurant was "Catch 22" in Old Naples, and everything we tried was absolutely delicious. It is a seafood specialty place, located adjacent to the Marina and many boats tie up there to eat as well. You should give it a try if you're down that way.

While golfing with Alphons and Ineke I discovered that golf is a universal language in and of itself, very quickly giving an insight into the character of those with whom you're playing. Ineke was the better golfer of the two, because she has been playing for over 20 years. She began playing in her mid-forties, which in her mind was much too late to begin but she enjoys the game enormously.

Early in my return to this game called golf I was very intimidated playing with anyone I don't know, but I've grown much bolder as time has passed and get right to the point from the get go. I mean they're going to find out pretty quickly my abilities, or lack thereof, so I get it out of the way as soon as possible. I advised them, upon meeting them, that the number one responsibility for those playing with me was to watch where my ball went so I wouldn't lose track of it. Those of us who don't consistently find the middle of the fairway need that kind of assistance you see, and my trifocals make it even more difficult to follow the ball's progress. They received their instructions very nicely and Ineke faithfully stood behind me in the tee box and helped me determine the exact spot my balls landed in the marshes and lakes. They had played the course before so she was able to point out where the drop zones were for those who had hit any errant missiles. The game moves so much more quickly that way, you know.

By the end of the round we were so comfortable with one another that both Alphons and Ineke felt free to put their foot in front of my ball to stop it as it skidded across the green for the third time from a mis-hit pitch shot, and they were even willing to stoop and pick my ball up for me when I started pulling out my calculator to add up my strokes on the par five holes. Folks, that's true hands across the sea friendship.

All in all we had a good time together and I discovered that people are people regardless of origin and that laughter is the perfect bonding agent when language sometimes fails us. By the way, if Judy and I do make it to Paris to visit our newly found friends in the future I will keep you informed. Have a great week.

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