

# Growing Their Garden

Thanks to health-conscious owners Brenda Smith and Judy Mackey, the Garden of the Gods Club—and all who enter it—is flourishing. By Jon Rizzi

**IT STARTED WITH** a little joke. In May of 2013, Judy Mackey, a Colorado Springs-based health-care-insurance executive, and Brenda Smith, a managing partner at the public accounting firm of BKD, decided to start a wellness center. Having worked together on numerous professional initiatives over the years, the two found they shared an appreciation for alternative, integrative medical treatments. That May, the friends inquired about renting space at the Garden of Gods Resort & Club—the venerable, scenic 334-acre institution where Mackey was a member—and discovered that the owner, California-based Sunrise Company, was about to sell the 62-year-old property.

“Why don’t we just buy it?” Mackey kidded.

“For real?” replied Smith, who that evening casually floated the prospect by her husband, Chuck. He surprised her: “Sure.”

By October, the women owned the club. They spent the next six years magnificently updating the 90,000-square-foot, 56-room clubhouse/lodge, building 31 new residential and lodging structures and cultivating members of the property’s 27-hole Kissing Camels Golf Club.

Chief among their accomplishments: the construction of the 31,000-square-foot Strata Spa and Wellness Center, which has rapidly become a destination for personalized, holistic wellbeing programs tailored by physicians and therapists to produce optimal physical, emotional, spiritual and mental health.

## WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO BUY THE GARDEN OF THE GODS CLUB & RESORT?

**MACKEY:** It was kind of a surprise to us. We weren’t the highest bidder, but the owners knew we intended to uphold the legacy of the (founding) Hill Family (which owned it from 1951-2007); rebuild and renovate the property; and build a wellness center. And with me being a member and us both living in the community, the members really embraced us; the previous owners didn’t focus on them.

**SMITH:** We got a grace period during which we could prove ourselves to the members. The momentum has just carried on. We always look at how something will impact the members and also give our guests the best possible experience.



PHOTOGRAPH BY ELI CABER

**HIGHER STRATA:** Brenda Smith (left) and Judy Mackey have elevated the glorious Garden of the Gods Club by focusing on the well-being of club members, resort guests, employees and those looking to optimize their health.

## HOW DOES GOLF FIT INTO YOUR VISION?

**MACKEY:** Golf has been an important part of the Hill family vision since the first 18 Kissing Camels holes opened in 1961. It’s really baked into the social life, especially the Kissing Camels Ladies’ Golf Association, which has more members—and a slightly bigger locker room—than the men do. There used to be two different memberships—a dining membership on the “lodge” side of Mesa Road and the golf membership across the street. We’re eliminating that division and taking more of a campus approach. If there’s a social event at any golf tournament, we try to have it at the main lodge. Because of our emphasis on health, wellness and fitness, three members of our staff are TPI (Titleist Performance Institute) certified.

## WHAT ROLE HAS GOLF PLAYED IN YOUR LIVES?

**MACKEY:** Golf was a big part of my healthcare

consulting job. A lot of the insurance carriers had golf tournaments and golf outings. It was a place to network, a place to build the kind of relationships you can’t build in a boardroom. When you get out there on the course you get to know somebody personally, you get to know about their family. I think your relationship changes. I was also a committee chair with the 2008 US Senior Open and the 2011 US Women’s Open. Both were at The Broadmoor and huge events for the Colorado Springs community.

## AS SUCCESSFUL WOMEN, DO YOU FEEL A RESPONSIBILITY TO INSPIRE OTHER WOMEN?

**SMITH:** We not only have a responsibility to women; we have a responsibility to men. The more you show someone you believe in them, the more it helps them believe that they can do something, and they will work harder and try more. Gender shouldn’t really matter.

## Year of the Woman

**ON JULY 13-18**, at the United States Air Force Academy’s Eisenhower Golf Club in Colorado Springs, the Junior Golf Alliance of Colorado will host the **72nd U.S. Girls’ Junior Championship**. The Colorado golf community has thereby designated 2020 as the **Year of the Woman**. Throughout 2020, the Colorado PGA and Colorado Golf Association will host numerous events and programs aimed at increasing women’s participation in the game. This regular feature will highlight women for whom golf has had an enormous impact in building relationships, families and careers. To learn more, visit [coloradopga.com](http://coloradopga.com).

## The CPGA

**MACKEY:** Sometimes you don't realize that some of the things you are doing, some of the younger women are watching. Brenda and I are self-made, and we've gone through a lot to be successful. When some of these younger women who have obstacles hear about our struggles and how we overcame them, that gives them hope. I think it helps them see they can achieve their dreams, that it doesn't come easy and that it's a lot of work—but it can be done.

### WHAT'S THE BEST CAREER ADVICE YOU'VE EVER GOTTEN?

**SMITH:** Don't make it about you. That applies in two ways: The first is to listen genuinely with a true heart, so that you're not already programmed to respond in a certain way or anticipate what the person's going to say. It doesn't matter if it's an employee or a guest, or if it's something you're trying to accomplish in a negotiation. Really focus on what the person is trying to say and where are they trying to go. If you can genuinely care, it makes a big difference. The second: Surround yourself with people who are brighter than you are, and make sure you trust them. Then you can develop a culture that allows everyone to be successful.

**MACKEY:** I subscribe to that. You also build loyalty with your clients by really listening to them and understanding them. That's how you build your business and build relationships. A lot of our business partners wind up being wonderful friends just because you're committed to their success and they're invested in yours.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY GARDEN OF THE GODS RESORT AND CLUB




**HALO EFFECT:** At Strata, the center Smith and Mackey built, treatments include halotherapy in a Himalayan salt inhalation room with infrared deep heat therapy to help manage stress, detoxify and improve respiratory health.

### WHAT IS MOST GRATIFYING ABOUT OWNING GARDEN OF THE GODS?

**MACKEY:** Of course, we've been blessed to take this property to another level, but the gratification is really all about people. With Strata, our benefits are a self-funded plan. Our employees all use the wellness center, and we've set it up where the treatment is very affordable. We've changed so many lives. Our housekeepers—we make them feel as though they're loved, and they're welcomed

here. I love seeing their health change, and they're vibrant and energetic again, and they really feel like they're part of a family. We're really taking care of them. That, to me, is why we're here.

**SMITH:** It's the people. The employees, the guests and the members. When you can impact and change peoples' lives, it's amazing. 

For more on how Mackey's and Smith's vision has come to life, visit [gardenofthegodsresort.com](http://gardenofthegodsresort.com)

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