

Dixie Red Hills Golf Course & Sandstone Quarry Pathway: Where Persistence Pays Off

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Two St. George public projects separated by fifty years share developmental histories driven by unrelenting dedication. The Red Hills Golf Course and the Sandstone Quarry Pathway attest to the organizational, political, and visionary skills of Sid Atkin and Wayne Pace.

Dixie Red Hills Golf Course

Sid Atkin, the driving force behind Dixie Red Hills—St. George’s first golf course—acknowledges that in the 1930s, LDS Church President Heber J. Grant declared, “What this town needs is a new hotel and a golf course.” It wasn’t until the early 1960s when Atkin stepped in that plans moved forward in a town where work routines left little time for diversion and few residents played golf.

Prior to his declining health, Atkin documented, “When I joined the St. George Chamber of Commerce in 1958 I was Owner/Manager of the Sugar Loaf Cafe, one of the three main restaurants in town – the population of St. George was 4450 – Highway 91 was what is now St. George Blvd – there were no traffic lights and no golf courses. The tourist business began Memorial Day and ended Labor Day, in spite of Highway billboards that advertised, “Stay in St. George where the summer sun spends the winter.”

Atkin described how Ogden golf pro Ernie Snyder Sr. frequently stopped in his cafe to promote the golf course idea. Atkin chaired a golf course committee and kept the project moving forward when it “was beginning to run out of steam.” Eventually, he persuaded the city council to provide public land for a nine-hole course and finance construction through revenue bonds. He obtained private water for the course along with donated labor commitments from Elks and Lions clubs.

The selected site, nestled against red cliffs adjacent to a sandstone quarry on the north side of St. George, was a Tonaquint Indian encampment prior to Mormon settlement and was the West Spring water source for early settlers. Previously, the area contained a copper smelter in 1890s, Dodge’s Pond, an ice plant in 1907, Civilian Conservation Corps Camp in 1930s, and a city dump. Years of planning paid off. On July 4, 1965, Dixie Red Hills Golf Course opened with seven holes—two holes were completed a few months later.

Atkin claims, “The successful outcome of the Dixie Red Hills Golf Course spawned the development of the Bloomington Country Club when Ellis Ivory and Frank Johnson discovered

they couldn't raise carrots successfully on the big farm they had purchased in Bloomington." Ultimately, Atkin believed the golf course, "changed St. George from a pass through to a destination city."

By 2010, Dixie Red Hills ranked 24th in Golf Digest's Best Nine Hole Courses in the nation. By 2016, St. George's Tourism Office reported that golfing contributed \$55 million in economic impact to the area. Douglas Alder wrote in *A History of Washington County from Isolation to Destination*, "Though the Red Hills Golf Course was soon surpassed by many other ventures and other courses, its creation served as a turning point for St. George."

Sandstone Quarry Pathway

Like the Dixie Red Hills Golf Course, the Sandstone Quarry Pathway, dedicated in 2016, exists mainly due to one man's unrelenting efforts. Dr. Wayne Pace, a retired professor of organizational leadership and communication from BYU and other universities, author of leadership and organizational books, personal history volumes, research reports, over 100 articles, and founding President of Dixie Encampment Chapter of the Sons of Utah Pioneers, mobilized individuals and resources that created the pathway to the dormant quarry.

The project began with a "trek" to the quarry in 2010 and was followed by numerous strategizing and planning meetings with the City of St. George, the Habitat Conservation Program (a portion of the trail crosses tortoise habitat), and golf course administrators.

Today, visitors access the pathway at 700 West and Diagonal Street, pass between two sandstone pillars and walk along the edge of the Red Hills Golf Course to the old quarry where stone was extracted to build the Tabernacle, the Temple, the Opera House, the old County Courthouse, Woodward School and other prominent buildings. Plaques with historical references describe the stone removal process and benches along the way allow visitors to linger and enjoy the panoramic views.

Pace's booklet, *Bringing History to Life*, depicts the 6-year struggle that "was worth the perilousness, uncertainty, and difficulty involved." In the booklet, he documents the quarry's history, stalled planning meetings, debates over location, jurisdictional approvals, design, funding, and construction. In the end, Pace succeeded: he "brought life and visitors back to the quarry."

Dixie Red Hills Golf Course and the Sandstone Quarry Pathway are forever enshrined in St. George's history owing to the dedication and persistence of two men: Sid Atkin and Wayne Pace who are pioneers in transforming St. George into an outdoor recreation destination.

*"Here was evidence that sunshine, scenery, and tourism could
make things happen in southern Utah."*

~ A History of Washington County from Isolation to Destination