

City Beat

There are eight million stories in my albums. This is one of them...

Located at 10000 Pico Boulevard across the street from Fox Studios, Hillcrest was the first Los Angeles country club for the city's Jewish community. In 1972, the *Los Angeles Times* referred to Hillcrest as "the leading Jewish country club in Southern California." The property includes an 18-hole golf course and tennis courts, and serves as a meeting place for its members. The course was designed by Willie Watson and opened in 1920.

In the 1950s, oil was discovered on Hillcrest's land, and the club allowed drilling. Members who have shares in the club collect tax-sheltered dividends on their original initiation fees, and "B.O." (for "before oil") memberships became so valuable that they were willed from father to son.

Hillcrest was the site of the PGA Championship in 1929, one of golf's major championships. Then a match play competition, it was held in early December and won by defending champion Leo Diegel. It was the first major held in the western United States. Hillcrest later hosted the Los Angeles Open on the PGA Tour in 1932 and 1942, won by Macdonald Smith and Ben Hogan, respectively.

Groucho Marx was a member of Hillcrest, even though he once famously proclaimed that he would not want to be a member of any club willing to have him as a member. (When one club offered to waive its no-Jews rule for Groucho, provided he abstained from using the swimming pool, he remarked, "My daughter's only half Jewish, can she wade in up to her knees?") Groucho once noted: "As you may recall, the Hillcrest is the only country club in all of Greater Los Angeles that will accept Talmudic scholars such as myself as members."

For years, many of the city's top comedians, including Jack Benny, George Burns, George Jessel, Groucho Marx, Danny Kaye, and later Milton Berle and Don Rickles, got together for a regular Friday lunch at Hillcrest, where they would socialize, try new material out on their friends, and talk "shop." Alan King said the Friday lunches at Hillcrest were like a college for comedy. In 1972, the *Los Angeles Times* referred to the comedians' table at Hillcrest as the "Round Table" in a corner of the main dining room. The members of the Round Table included Al Jolson, Harpo Marx, Eddie Cantor, Lou Holtz and Irving Brecher.

When Hillcrest membership opened to non-Jews, their first choice for a new member was Danny Thomas, a Lebanese Catholic. At the time, Jack Benny quipped to Thomas that the least the club could have done was to admit a member who looked like a gentile. Other notable non-Jewish members over the years have included Los Angeles Dodgers owner Walter O'Malley, actor Jack Lemmon, Sidney Poitier, and Oscar-winning film producers Darryl F. Zanuck and Richard D. Zanuck. [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hillcrest_Country_Club_\(Los_Angeles\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hillcrest_Country_Club_(Los_Angeles))]

Hillcrest Country Club is still going strong today.

