THE FIRST 10 YEARS OF BALLANTYNE CORPORATE PARK

1996–2006

A Biography of Place

by Susanne B. Deitzel
This book is dedicated in memory of two good friends, Dot and Ruf, my constant weekend companions during the development of Ballantyne Corporate Park.

Never was an important decision made that they were not there.

H.C. Bissell

September 2006
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book was intended to be a simple recording of the progress that has been made in the first 10 years in the development of Ballantyne Corporate Park. Similar to the development of the park, however, it has exceeded my expectations due to the team effort of many dedicated individuals and employees.

This could not have happened without the passion and commitment of Susanne Deitzel. When I first discussed my intentions with Susanne, she readily agreed to take on this task and immediately began to take it to the "Next Level." With no firsthand knowledge of Ballantyne she proceeded to interview many who were involved, and has produced a history that is far more comprehensive than I could have imagined. For this I am most grateful. Dan and J.J. Bissell, assisted by Elizabeth Morissette, were responsible for assembling the images and photographs and for providing design input to John Paul Galles, Maryl Lane and Mandy Barrett who provided their professional skills to the design and production of this book, of which I am very proud. David Conlan was responsible for coordinating the execution of this project and, as usual, it was done in a timely and efficient manner.

As the book so accurately details, Ballantyne Corporate Park has been a labor of love for my wife Sara and me. None of it could have been accomplished without the effort of so many professionals, contractors, and Bissell Companies personnel. Many of them are documented in the book and were the source of knowledge Susanne needed to write this history. Many others not interviewed for this book were also critical to the success of the first 10 years. Steve Brooks and Owen Parker were involved with Wayne Shusko in nearly every aspect of the development and operation of the hotels while Judy Stell provided the expertise needed for development and operation of the spa. Howard Bissell and Barry Fabyan provided the leadership necessary to fill the office space with tenants while the Bissell Companies back office team kept the schedules, agendas and accounting records in order.

Our professional advisors, contractors and outside vendors had teams which were equally committed to making our efforts successful. Jeff Floyd’s architectural team included considerable contributions from Shawn Mottern. In construction, Bill Caldwell was supported throughout by Tom Barnett, Roger Brafford, Tom Haggard, Mark Berkley and Bo Fitcher. Wayne Osella and Randy Hughes comprised our talented team of finance professionals, working first with Genie Cotner and later with Lars Wilson. Bailey Patrick, Bernie Farmer and Patrick Ridinger protected our interest in all agreements while making sure we complied with the law.

Our commitment to young leadership has continued and our focus toward the continued success of Ballantyne Corporate Park is grounded in this team’s assurance that the assets we have developed are operated and maintained efficiently, while continuing to render outstanding customer service. Today that includes Joe Hallow and his team of Steve Kalczynski, Julie Paden, Travis Carroll, Paul Stroman, Woody Allen, Jim Combs and Kirsten Combs in our hotels, golf and spa operations. Jay Reid continues to be a leader within the Dana Rader Golf School and will head its new Statesville location. Clifton Coble in development and Tom Pizzo in operations are building strong management teams to lead us in the next 10 years, which I am confident will be as exciting, enjoyable and successful as the past 10 years.

H.C. Bissell

Charlotte, September 2006
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From what was little more than a 2,000-plus acre plot of hardwoods littered with pine scrub and North Carolina underbrush has emerged Ballantyne, a revolutionary plan which will eventually include five million square feet of Class-A office space as well as a Four-Diamond resort hotel and golf course in southeast Charlotte.

Officially started in 1992, Ballantyne Corporate Park has become one of the largest and most prestigious corporate parks in the southeastern United States. It began when John W. Harris, son of the venerable James J. Harris, decided to transform the family’s occasional hunting grounds into a commercial masterpiece. By laying plow and pipe to the tune of $40 million, he would also lay the framework for the functional engine that would power the area into existence.

Prior to Johnny Harris’ involvement, most developers felt the area held little promise. At the time, it was little more than a very large, very remote mass of land with no connectivity, although murmurings about proposed Interstate 485 suggested that the highway would cut right through the center of the Ballantyne land. The new highway was drawn to intersect with Interstate 77 and Interstate 85, dramatically increasing access to uptown Charlotte and the city’s other populous areas and promising to relieve the traffic burden on smaller connectors. In the early 1990s, Highway 521 was still a small, though highly-traveled, road that was also forecast for reconstruction to align with Johnston Road. The result was a high volume transit corridor that would bisect the Ballantyne property into its eastern and western segments.

Johnny Harris spent countless hours and considerable resources trying to map his ideas for Ballantyne, and taking vital zoning steps with state and local government to make Ballantyne more than just an idea on paper. After months of deliberation and considerable convincing, the road construction was signaled to move forward, and the zoning for Ballantyne, the largest in
Left: Johnny Harris, developer of Ballantyne area.
Right: Terry Knotts and his associate, Julie Hobbs.
Below: Pre-Ballantyne highway plans.
Mecklenburg county history, was finalized.

Terry Knotts, now owner of Knotts Development Resources, joined the Ballantyne project in 1993 after meeting Peter Pappas and Johnny Harris through several mutual business transactions. After Harris had successfully achieved the monumental feat of rezoning the Ballantyne land, the well-known developer gave Knotts a call that would lead to his installation as project manager for the entire site.

Recalls Knotts, “In 1992, this area was all woods. Soon, 2,000-plus acres would be open land left in the hands of a cadre of engineers, consultants and planners to implement one of the most ambitious developments in Charlotte. Was it daunting? Sure. But there wasn’t one person in the business that didn’t want to be involved in this project. Their massive contributions to SouthPark are a testament to how the Harris family does things, and we all wanted to be a part of this next venture.”

Knotts would be entirely responsible for directing the epic undertaking of clearing the land, building roads, laying water mains and sewer systems and irrigation, the sum total of which would comprise the master plan infrastructure. Knotts became a fundamental cog in the machinery charged with laying the underpinnings for the area’s future, which he would do under the umbrella of Ballantyne Development Corporation.

The original land area owned by the Harris family was split into several parcels. The largest parcel, 610 acres, would be sold to Crescent Resources for Ballantyne Country Club and its accompanying residential development. Another 414 acres were designated for the corporate park, and after many on-again, off-again deals with large corporations, a 108-acre tract would be sold to State Farm Insurance Company for a corporate office. This parcel was later repurchased for inclusion in the Ballantyne Corporate Park acreage.

Once all was said and done, the master plan facilitated a synergy in which the corporate park, residential and retail parcels would feed off of one another, creating an ambitious model that would come to be known as ‘Live, Work, Play and Stay.’

The infrastructure included over 66 miles of telephone and electric conduits, five miles of sewer pipe, 10 miles of water mains, 50 miles of irrigation pipe and 10 miles of roadway. Comments Knotts, “This was a huge and very complicated undertaking, especially in terms of what was standard 15 years ago. It was an incredible task translating what was rural and residential land parcels, into an urban/suburban landscape.”

Johnny Harris, known for his outgoing personality, vision and cut-no-corners approach
to business, spared no detail in the initial groundwork of the development, or in promoting it. “Johnny Harris had grand ideas for Ballantyne and he really went for it,” comments Knotts. “In addition to equipping the land with the infrastructure it needed to be top-notch, he also attended to drawing Charlotte’s attention to this piece of land that he knew everyone considered to be out in the middle of nowhere.”

Part of this strategy was to mark the four corners of Ballantyne’s intersecting highways with large clay monuments over 30 feet in height, illustrating major hallmarks of Charlotte history and the spirit of its founding: a vital transportation hub, a powerful finance district, strong leaders demonstrating strength of character, and an homage to the city’s historical roots in agriculture and textile manufacturing. The giant monuments depict charismatic leaders, historical landmarks and events, and significant totems to Charlotte’s emergence as an increasingly desirable destination.

The scenes on the Ballantyne monuments were commissioned to Yugoslav artist, Boris Tomic, and were produced and fired locally at Taylor Clay Products in Salisbury, North Carolina. The monuments reveal a commitment to acknowledging the Charlotte roots from which Ballantyne, the city’s
Ballantyne Master Plan.
14: chapter I
Top right: Artist, Boris Tomic.
Bottom right: Monuments under construction.
Left: Finished monument.
newest major development branch, would be pulling.

Recalls Knotts, “In addition to the massive undertaking of the monuments themselves, Harris also commissioned David Goldfield, a professor of history at UNC Charlotte, to write a detailed explanation of the monuments that would connect the artwork with the spirit of Charlotte. Johnny also took special care in choosing the lighting artist for the monuments. He hired the same gentleman responsible for designing the lighting at the Rotunda Building in SouthPark, even better known for his work on the Statue of Liberty.”

“Then, along Highway 521, he had landscape designers plan a gradual buildup of trees, flowers and plants that served as a drum roll of sorts, as you got closer to Ballantyne. There would be no disputing that once you reached the monuments, you had reached your destination,” Knotts adds.

For an intense three years, the grind of metal to rock and the racket of hammer to pipe would ring throughout what was once little more than a forgotten bunker of forest. Yet, despite accomplishing the huge task of installing the infrastructure, the project was still in its nascent stages.

**Detail at top of the four corner monuments by themes (top to bottom): Finance, Human Spirit, Transportation and Technology.**
chapter II

LEGACY OF THE LAND

During the creation of Ballantyne’s infrastructure, siblings Johnny and Cameron Harris and Sara Harris Bissell held equal shares in its property rights. As children of Angelia Morrison Harris (daughter of famed North Carolina Governor Cameron Morrison) and James J. Harris (owner of the largest privately held insurance company in North Carolina), the threesome were no strangers to watching open land give way to the emerging Charlotte cityscape.

James J. Harris was widely regarded as an astute businessman with keen vision concerning the development potential of Charlotte. Harris’ father-in-law was quoted frequently as saying, “The wealth of the nation is in the land,” and he fastidiously purchased land parcels contiguous to his own. When Jimmie and Angelia Harris inherited this vast amount of property, Harris persisted in expanding those boundaries.

While their father was amassing a substantial land portfolio, Cameron was studying in Chapel Hill planning to follow in his father’s footsteps in the insurance industry, Johnny was attending Woodbury Forest Prep School in Orange, Virginia, and Sara was attending Bennett College in New York.

Each of Harris’ children forged his or her own career path and garnered significant talents that would contribute to the family legacy, but it was Sara Harris that eventually pioneered a partnership that would prove central to the future of south Charlotte’s development. While attending Bennett College, Sara met Howard C. ’Smoky’ Bissell who was slated to graduate from Yale University in 1959. Their courtship was fated and the two married in 1960. Bissell’s U.S. Navy commitment separated the two quickly thereafter as the young officer was at sea 237 days of his first year of marriage. After his tour, the two moved to San Diego, California, to pursue Bissell’s aspirations to see the West Coast, find a place to teach, and raise a family.

It was in San Diego that the couple met Smoky’s colorful great aunt, Barbara Ballantyne,
SouthPark, 1966 and 2006.
after whom the couple would name one of their daughters, and later, the Ballantyne area itself.

In California, Bissell got a crash course in the life of an educator. He applied for a position as head of the math department at an independent day school, only to find himself a fourth grade homeroom teacher. While his passion for teaching eventually led him to heading a middle school, he began to question his career path in terms of financial practicality, opportunity for growth, and the intensity of the emotional commitment.

It was then Bissell began to study real estate. Attending night classes at San Diego State University to secure his master’s degree in economics, Bissell found himself having to wait out a semester due to heavy enrollment figures brought about by a 1962 graduation address appearance by President John F. Kennedy. It was then that a friend suggested he take real estate classes at the University of California Extension in the interim.

Remembers Bissell, “I took two night classes taught by a real estate practitioner and immediately was on fire with what I learned there.” As a result, Bissell continued taking real estate courses and never returned to economics. It was at this time that his young wife’s father, James J. Harris, mentioned the possibility of the couple’s return to Charlotte. While Harris had amassed a sizable portfolio, he claimed his business was insurance, not real estate. According to Bissell, Harris said, “Somebody in this family should know something about real estate.” So Sara and Smoky returned to Charlotte in July of 1964, and he had his broker’s license in-hand on August 4th, 1964. Harris’ first concerns were properties in the Cotswold area that needed looking after.

But first, says Bissell, he had to hang out his own shingle. “I wanted to start my own business just in case the business relationship wasn’t compatible with the family relationship. Mr. Harris agreed that this wasn’t a bad idea.”

H.C. Bissell & Associates, Inc. was created, and people joked that Smoky was the only guy in the office. “I kept hearing, ‘Where are the associates?’” says Bissell. He began coordinating lot sales in the rapidly growing Foxcroft and Barclay Downs areas and then moved into Mr. Harris’ holdings in Greensboro where he needed more representation. Project after project took root and exploded into major developments in SouthPark and
Greensboro, creating a maelstrom of activity. Then, in 1967, James J. Harris had a heart attack.

Says Smoky, “I had been working with Wachovia for the purchase of their building in the first block of West Trade Street and also took over responsibilities for the Wachovia Building in Greensboro after Mr. Harris’ heart attack. It was shortly thereafter that I called Johnny, who was in graduate school in Washington, and asked him to come home to help out in Greensboro. After Johnny and I had been working together for six or seven years, Mr. Harris decided that he wasn’t interested in a large lease we had negotiated concerning the Equitable service center on Morrison Boulevard. So, Johnny and I bought the property that would become Equitable’s Regional Service Center from him. Shortly thereafter we bought the land for the Gold Bond building. We were off to the races after that.”

The pair pulled off coup after coup in the SouthPark area, brokering deals for major corporations and developers, facilitating development of all four sides of SouthPark Mall and a retail district that became a case study to leaders in the industry.

Anchored by SouthPark Mall, a vibrant retail and business hub blossomed, while neighboring Quail Hollow expressed its character with luxury homes and the resort amenities of the Quail Hollow Club. Each area they worked on was developed with considerable care and attention, and perhaps hinting at what was to come, these markets became self-sufficient with a style uniquely their own.

As the region continued to evolve, so did the buzz about Johnny Harris and Smoky Bissell. Their business ventures continued jointly, building one-off projects for Hewlett Packard in Greensboro, Richmond and Raleigh and creating an office warehouse portfolio in Greensboro with 247 different leases. In the late ’80s, Johnny moved into solo projects, building a hotel, golf course, country club and residential subdivision in Greenville, South Carolina, while Bissell continued to work mainly in Charlotte and Greensboro on commercial properties.

As the partners engineered their plans for the future, one thing was yet to become clear. Johnny Harris had been entertaining ideas for the family’s Ballantyne land, eight miles south of the duo’s SouthPark headquarters.
Johnny Harris (left) and Smoky Bissell (right).
photo by Sean Busher
Prior to the development of Ballantyne, Johnny Harris and Smoky Bissell enjoyed 21 years of fruitful partnership that would come to define the SouthPark area, as well as several significant holdings in Greensboro. Says Bissell, "Johnny started in Greensboro, I did a lot of work in Charlotte. Johnny would be out front, and I would be the nuts and bolts. Johnny’s job was to promise the world, and I would do my best to make it happen."

"That worked very well, and up until 1991, we owned all projects 50/50 unless there was a project that one of us was not interested in pursuing. It just turned out that our common interests became less and less, and we had more side projects individually than we had in common. He participated in several hotel deals out of state and was very involved in Gateway Village, whereas I stayed close to home and worked on other projects."

It eventually became clear that the partners’ interests had diverged significantly, so in 1992, Johnny and Smoky affably determined they would start endeavors under separate shingles. Smoky focused on building what is now the highly regarded Bissell Companies; Johnny began the equally successful Lincoln Harris. But before an equitable split could occur, each of the properties had to be considered.

According to Ned Curran, The Bissell Companies’ current COO, the partners’ interests were clearly divergent, and the divestiture of holdings were along those lines. "Johnny was reaching out globally, nationally and toward corporate services. Smoky was interested in regional commercial projects. So they each had interests that naturally laid in their own ballparks. Our task was to determine who had what ambitions with respect to a particular property, and we pared down the issues very comfortably."

In terms of Ballantyne, the consensus appeared to be that master planning and development responsibilities should go to Harris. Recalls Bissell, "It came to the point where we looked at each other and said, 'What are we going to do about Ballantyne?' and it seemed logical to me that he had been the front guy, he

**"WHEN YOU TALK ABOUT THE FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF DEVELOPMENT, THINGS CAN GET COMPLICATED. WHEN YOU TALK ABOUT A MASTER PLAN THIS LARGE, IT IS NOT UNLIKE PLAYING A GAME OF THREE-DIMENSIONAL CHESS."**

— NED CURRAN
had done all the work to make it happen. It seemed clear that it should be in his domain.”

Agrees Curran, "It was apparent that Johnny had been the most active player in Ballantyne. He was out front in what became the largest rezoning in the county’s history. He had made plans for an infrastructure that were far reaching for its time, and it was a clever plan for Mecklenburg County.”

So in addition to Johnny Harris’ one-third ownership in the Ballantyne land, he was afforded the development rights to Ballantyne, which included its promotional planning and marketing as well as overseeing the horizontal development of the property.

The remaining two-thirds of the property rights remained equally split between Johnny’s brother, Cameron Harris, and his sister, Smoky’s wife, Sara.

Bissell did his part to represent Sara’s one-third stake of the property, however his contribution largely involved sitting quietly in meetings on her behalf. During this time, Bissell did not visit the Ballantyne property once.

Then, in October 1995, Johnny and Cameron Harris had a change of heart after being approached by a well-regarded developer. Once a strong interest had been professed with regard to the property, the Harris brothers began to warm to the idea of selling the Ballantyne land.

When it became clear that the Harris brothers were considering selling, it was a call to action for Bissell.

Remembers Curran, "Smoky is good to know when to stay in port and when to sail. It suddenly became clear that there was a willing seller in the Harris brothers. And only once he realized the brothers were interested in selling the property, did he announce his interest.”

Smoky Bissell recalls the pivotal meeting. "I said, ‘Look, commercial real estate is all I have ever been interested in. If you are interested in selling the commercially zoned land, just give me 48 hours and I will make you an offer you can’t refuse.’”

Bissell did some fancy financial footwork and proposed an offer for the 414 acres of commercially zoned land 48 hours later, which was accepted on a handshake for a price tag of over $20 million. Crescent had purchased the bulk of land zoned for residential use, which was to become the highly successful Ballantyne Country Club development.

Curran says, "The handkerchief had been dropped,” and there was a lot of work to be done. The terms of the contract included that the sale of the
property had to close in 60 days."

Then, there was the task of solidifying the support of Bissell’s most important partner, his wife, Sara.

When Smoky proposed the idea of buying the 414 acres of Ballantine, Sara was not completely convinced it was a good idea. She sought the counsel of the son of a family friend and attorney, Bailey Patrick, who was a land broker with Bissell. History depicts Patrick as less than enthusiastic in his response to Sara, saying, "I have been telling Smoky that I thought a purchase of 20 acres in Ballantine was risky. What in the world do you think I am going to say about 414 acres!"

But Smoky’s track record was beyond reproach, so Sara stepped right out on the limb with him. They would own Ballantine together.

Laughs Ned Curran, "That story just goes to show you how much faith and strength their marriage has."

When asked about how Patrick views his forecast today, Curran laughs again, "Bailey Patrick wishes that story would just go away!"

Bissell became the owner of 414 acres of land, primed and ready for his vision for Ballantine Corporate Park as well as the future of south Charlotte.
Once the acquisition transactions closed, Bissell says he had only one reality, "I knew that I was betting a career on Ballantyne."

He immediately commissioned aerial photographs of the land from every angle, the prints of which would wallpaper his office. The photographs proved to be a daily reminder of the task at hand, and a tangible representation of his obsession for the project. Comments Clifton Coble, president of Bissell Development, "He would sit in his office for hours staring at those pictures; thinking and planning."

State Farm Insurance Company had already purchased a sizeable tract of land, 108 acres, with prime frontage on I-485, and Crescent Resources had begun building Ballantyne Country Club and the exclusive homes surrounding it on the 610 acres it had acquired. Bissell knew that the pricey residential component would become a huge draw for corporate executives looking to find suitable homes for their families, as well as their companies. He also knew the success of the combination would hinge on the proper layout.

To this end, Bissell would take to foot every weekend in the early morning hours, combing through brushwood and barbed wire. He patiently waited for the brisk winter air to freeze the creek beds; this way he could navigate the topography from its lowest points. "I called it my 'getting to know you' period with the land," says Bissell.

As the relationship evolved between Bissell and the icy ground underfoot, he scouted the
Bissell reviewing one of the massive aerials in the Bissell offices.
natural assets of the land with his Dalmatians, Dot and Ruf.
“Mostly, it was just the dogs and me in the brisk, early morning air. We navigated through the woods using the sun’s position and the sounds from the interstate. Time after time, I had to pull the dogs’ white hair from the tangles of forgotten barbed wire around the property.” Smiling widely in remembrance he adds, “The dogs never got cut, but they never really grasped the concept of staying away from the wire, either.”

Both these chilly day trips and the strategic office meditations combined in what many describe as a svengali-like vision. Bissell’s plan slowly began to reveal itself: verdant, rolling grades would take their place next to stately outcroppings of glass and concrete. And it would take place on a grand scale — Bissell now owned the rights to build five million square feet of Class-A office space, more than was built in all of SouthPark at the time.

While still headquartered in his SouthPark office, Bissell began to spend more and more time on the as-yet empty Ballantyne land. Slowly transitioning his focus, portfolio and crew, the first edifice he would erect would be humble — a construction trailer on the property. It would be from here Ballantyne would assemble a loyal and teachable team, and hold regular meetings that would ultimately shape the fate of the property.
Smoky Bissell is quick to attribute his many successes to his team. Yet Bissell’s personal experience with mentors of his own has apparently furnished him with the ability to attract and inspire like-minded individuals with a drive for excellence.

Early in his career as an educator, Bissell came to steadfastly believe in the old adage, ‘Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach him to fish and feed him for a lifetime.’ His staff says his leadership style is open and generous, with high expectations sewn into the lining. By providing resources, insight and direction, he outfits his charges to make decisions themselves. This way, every success can be an individual, as well as a team success, but perhaps more importantly, every mistake becomes a lesson.

The utmost attention is given to accountability, trust and full-disclosure, as well as the pursuit of “Next-Level Ideas” that have come to personify The Bissell Companies modus operandi. Quality supercedes speed as a close second. Anticipation and efficiency are tools, rather than goals for his team members.

The process of instilling these qualities appears to be as much a part of Bissell’s routine as waking in the morning. In fact, his charges start young, and early in the morning, to learn what many of them call “the Bissell way of doing things.”

Right Out of the Nest

Bissell’s first Ballantyne recruit seemed like an unlikely one to some. Yates Pharr, the son of a family friend and neighbor, was attending college at Appalachian State University when he called Bissell in his senior year for suggestions concerning

— YATES PHARR
his interest in real estate. Following Bissell’s advice, Pharr interned with a real estate company in Boone and completed his pre-licensing course by graduation. Shortly after Pharr swung his tassel, he was working with Bissell.

Recalls Pharr, "I used to work on odd jobs for Mr. Bissell as a kid. I was a friend of his son, Howard, who was always talking about the chores his dad had him working on around the house. So, I started working on little projects to help pay for my camping equipment. Mr. Bissell would leave little yellow Post-it notes taped to the back door, which, by the way, was never locked. Whenever we had free time, we’d pull off one of the yellow notes (we called them ‘snowflakes’), keep track of our hours, and get the job done.”

Pharr continues, "Even then, Mr. Bissell was a ‘just-get-it-done’ type of guy. He wasn’t hesitant to empower you with the opportunity to try something on your own, even if you failed from time to time. That also goes for his management style. Even today, he gives you the opportunity to learn, even if it costs him money.”

Which is not to say that poor performance was accepted. "You approach everything for Mr. Bissell with an air of respect. He is very professional. He would let you know in a very dignified way if you weren’t being efficient. There was never any doubt as to the level of performance he expected. One of Mr. Bissell’s mantras was ‘ZDNS’—zero defects, no surprises. Therefore, you knew you were supposed to do everything a certain way.”

Pharr started with Bissell as a management trainee just two days after his graduation. "We kept in touch as I grew up, and he gave me a lot of good advice concerning the choices I had in college,” recalls Pharr.

He continues, "To be honest, I was hoping to spend a little time in the outdoors before working, but he had other plans. He had a place for me immediately, and I began working just a few days after I graduated. While I didn’t realize it at the time, his insistence on my starting right away was in my best interest in more ways than one. If I had started even one week later, the 401(k) I was being offered wouldn’t be vested until the following year." He concludes, “In addition to the guidance and love my own father gave me, Mr. Bissell provided an additional father-figure to fall back on.”
Left: First recruit, Yates Pharr, at Ballantyne groundbreaking. 
Right: Clifton Coble.
Pharr worked in Greensboro for one year learning about office and warehouse leasing and management, and then, in his words, ‘slid in’ to the position of property manager in the SouthPark office. Bissell encouraged him to undergo extra training, to take classes and achieve special certifications that Pharr says has become the core of his skill set. “The importance of relationships, basic management skills, selecting a good staff, and a strong knowledge of finance, strategy and teamwork are what Bissell is about, and what he taught me,” says Pharr.

From property management in SouthPark, Pharr moved into development for the Ballantyne project, which he says he knew would be the first, and ultimately biggest, of its kind. Pharr would become an extension of Bissell, exporting his business ethos and recruiting like-minded players for the Bissell team.

Clifton Coble, current president of Bissell Development, was one such recruit. Like Pharr, Coble was a recent graduate from Western Carolina University and was looking for a temporary job to help pay the bills.

Says Coble, “When I look back, I see that it was definitely a matter of being in the right place at the right time. I met Yates after knocking on some doors and he asked if I would like to come out to Ballantyne, which at this point had only one building up. I began cleaning out closets for Mr. Bissell, pressure washing parking decks and painting, and filing papers for Yates.”

“I had planned on taking my marketing degree out to Colorado with me, and just canoe and kayak for a time; Yates and I had those passions in common. As I learned more and more about the business and spent more time with him, I found out that we also shared a passion for real estate and construction. After just a short period of time with him and Mr. Bissell, I knew what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.”

For a while, Bissell, Yates and Coble would meet for Thursday construction meetings, walking and driving around the site. Coble says that the vision these men had when looking at raw land baffled him. “All these parcels that surround us now were just trees; only the roads were here. But Mr. Bissell and Yates could literally see buildings and parking lots. At 24 years old, I had to ask, ‘How do you all even think that way?’ That was what really got me — how they were able to anticipate what they needed.”
Yates Pharr would also suggest that Tom Pizzo, now president of Bissell Property Management Services, take his place in SouthPark while Pharr focused on Ballantyne. Starting as an assistant property manager, Pizzo, a recent graduate of the University of Georgia, learned the ropes and appreciated the unique climate of growth. "I've been here since I got out of school, so I don't know what it is like to work for other companies. But I certainly hear about the differences when I interview candidates. There is no doubt that working here gives you a completely unfe
terred chance to follow your interests, demon-
strate your capabilities, and grow with the company."

But working at Bissell Companies isn't just a walk in the park. "You are challenged daily," Pizzo says, "and that's gratifying. But above and beyond that, you also know that you always have a seat at the table; that your opinion and vision matters. Time and again I have seen people who would give absolutely anything to work in this kind of environment."

While there is an unspoken acknowledge-
ment that younger talent was financially benefi-
cial as opposed to hiring top-dollar veterans,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Franchise Player Traits</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong> Is a Team Player:</td>
<td>Performs Best Practices:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has the desire to work and put forth extra effort to accomplish vision and mission with others.</td>
<td>Constantly strives through observation and research to determine “best practices” for each business process and to apply the knowledge to operations.</td>
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<td><strong>2</strong> Is a Continuous Learner:</td>
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<td>Adds to acquired job skills, education, work experience, and knowledge of technology regularly.</td>
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<td><strong>3</strong> Has Shared Values/Integrity:</td>
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<td>Ability to perform job in an honest, forthright manner, treating others fairly, consistently, and with respect.</td>
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<td><strong>4</strong> Is Self-Motivated:</td>
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<td>Possesses the personal desire to be the best he/she can be.</td>
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<td><strong>5</strong> Is Willing to Change/Be Flexible:</td>
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<td>Able to assimilate new job situations, information, and new technology quickly. Handles multiple assignments and changes.</td>
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<td><strong>6</strong> Is Service-Oriented:</td>
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<td>Has the desire to provide four-star service to all people at all times.</td>
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<td><strong>7</strong> Is Creative:</td>
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<td>Applying imaginative and innovative methods on the job to increase efficiency and/or lower costs.</td>
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<td><strong>9</strong> Is Loyal:</td>
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<td>Ability to support organization programs and activities with a desire to stay with the organization long-term.</td>
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<td><strong>10</strong> Is Experienced/Knowledgeable:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applies education in specific areas of expertise, job-related skills and has a working knowledge of technology.</td>
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<td><strong>11</strong> Has Pride:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Takes a personal investment in the success of BFOC vision and mission.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>12</strong> Has Self Esteem:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has a positive view of themselves and their work.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>13</strong> Buys Into BFOC Story:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complete knowledge of and support of the Bissell Family of Companies’ vision and mission.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>14</strong> Understands the Principle of the Slight Edge:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Championship performance begets Superior Rewards.</td>
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there were other benefits as well. Bissell cultivated a wellspring of talent that personified willingness, teachability, industry and integrity, for which he says he has received many rewards for choosing this path.

“We had our permit to build the Staybridge Suites and the site grading had begun, when Clifton — just 26 at the time — runs breathlessly into my office and says, ‘You’ve got to stop and rework the building site plans right now!’ He went on to explain that the building was in the wrong location, that it would dwarf surrounding buildings and that the finish on the building would look like the devil.” Bissell continues, “He was right, and we moved it to a new location.”

When asked about this compliment from Bissell, Coble replies, “Mr. Bissell has taught every one of us one important rule of thumb in team development, and that is everyone’s ideas and voice should be heard. Nobody had seen a Staybridge building completed, and when I saw one, I knew we had to move the one we were planning to build.”

Bissell and his leadership team would canonize the qualities epitomized by this young group of A-Players, developing a list of “Franchise Player Traits” which would be used in the process of hiring, evaluating and forming business relationships. These qualities would be sought and expressed in every individual and implemented in every project thereafter.

With these common threads, the Ballantyne team worked tirelessly to sow the seeds of what was quickly becoming a much larger endeavor. Pizzo managed the SouthPark properties, while Bissell, Pharr and Coble worked on the Ballantyne property and held meetings at the construction trailer every Thursday morning. As the project blossomed, engineers, architects, superintendents, foremen and laborers from every arm of the project would be invited. The ranks of what was once a three-man meeting would eventually grow, and every detail from a scratch on a blueprint to the raising of a beam would be discussed in an open, frank forum.
chapter VI
THE BIG BANG DEVELOPMENT AND CONSTRUCTION OF BCP

In addition to the young and enthusiastic talent that would form the centerpiece of the Bissell Companies’ Ballantyne Corporate Park (BCP), Bissell also selected long-time associates and industry experts for the project that exemplified his approach to quality, service and delivery.

The Veterans
Mike Tribble, Jim Williams and Jeff Floyd, now principals of LS3P Associates in Charlotte, were recruited while the dirt was still being moved to make way for the corporate park. Their first design for Bissell was the distinctive Carnegie building in SouthPark while they were with architecture firm Clark Tribble Harris and Li.

Floyd met weekly with Bissell at 8:45 a.m. sharp, during the 1985-1986 design phase of the SouthPark project, and like most of Bissell’s business relationships, the pairing has since been one of longevity and mutual admiration for 20 years.

For his part, Floyd embraces what he calls Bissell’s ’tireless commitment to the customer.’

"Because of his benevolence and concern for his tenants and the community, he is willing to spend money on amenities that other developers wouldn’t consider. He is always displaying a willingness to go just a little bit further for the customer.”

The massive scale of the Ballantyne Corporate Park taken as a whole was a design challenge, which suggested to Floyd that it be broken down into smaller units — typically of three or four buildings with identical design — surrounded by components Floyd calls "placemaking.”

"Placemaking involves taking a group of similar buildings, outfitting them with a similar, unifying appearance, and seating them in a location that hallmarks that site. In some instances it is a lake, in others a pocket park that people can enjoy during lunch or an afternoon break. There are gardens

— BILL CALDWELL

The first office building, Ballantyne One, 1996.
and fountains, and even a putting green, that give each set of buildings a specific feel and character.”

Floyd says Bissell often takes key elements of landscaping and placemaking and embellishes them with subtle touches of character. “You can see his handiwork making quiet suggestions of the uniqueness and quality of the park.” The Cullman Building overlooks a pair of bronze herons nestled into a waterfall that are so realistic Floyd’s young daughter once snuck up to rouse them while the men talked business. Three 2,000-pound bronze bull sculptures were ‘put out to pasture’ in the development’s main parking buffer to much fanfare, and a putting green centered outside the Chandler Building is outfitted with a cart full of putters and balls for tenants and visitors to use at their discretion. Lakes are stocked with fish, gardens are painstakingly maintained, and every conceivable detail is addressed with care and deliberation.

The topography of the Ballantyne Corporate Park, its circuitous road plan, and the identifying architectural features of each building cluster make them unique and clearly identifiable while also preserving the unity of the overall design. Says Floyd, "While the park is large, placemaking gives it a human scale and makes it understandable. Every time we prepare a new group of buildings we talk about its image, its uniqueness and its special identity. At the same time, by observing strict adherence to quality guidelines, consistent materials and design, and respect for the natural topography of the land, there can be no mistake that when you are in Ballantyne — you KNOW you are in Ballantyne.”

Floyd cites traditional architectural tenets in Ballantyne’s building design. Each building cluster shares the same classical derivatives of base, shaft and top, characterized by a contemporary nature and what some have called ‘undeniable elegance.’ The salmon-colored edifices are lined with walls of green and green-blue tinted windows that overlook courtyards of grass and foliage.

The cluster philosophy also provides an economy of scale when it comes to design and building costs. “By building in groups, we can take advantage of material costs when the market is good to buy, or to perhaps avoid price hikes in the imminent future,” says Floyd.

Bill Caldwell, currently of the construction firm Cox & Schepp, Inc., echoes Floyd’s observation, “One of my jobs is to be a partner in providing
Ballantyne Corporate Park's unique elements “for the people.”
accurate information for the market. It’s been my job to watch trends, material cost projections, and similar considerations. Anything that I can do to facilitate the crucial components of Smoky’s product, especially its delivery for the right price and perhaps, most importantly, at the right time, I stay on top of."

Bill Caldwell and Smoky Bissell began working together on a few projects in Greensboro in the early 1980s while Bissell was still partnered with Harris and Caldwell was working for F.N. Thompson. Their paths continued to merge, and in Caldwell, Bissell found another exemplary character to implement his vision.

When Caldwell moved from F.N. Thompson to Turner Construction, Bissell’s business followed, and their fate was jointly sealed. Caldwell recalls the first time he knew that they had not just a business, but also a personal relationship. "I was working on the Arnold Palmer Building, which was my first multi-story building. I really wanted to do a good job on it. I tried to know more about the project than Smoky did, which is not an easy job. I would go out in the middle of the night with a flashlight to check on things."

"Then one Friday night," he remembers, "my wife and I were on the way to dinner, and I stopped by to see if some pavers had been delivered because they were crucial to completing the building on time. Wouldn’t you know that as we pulled up, so did Smoky and Sara who were stopping in before they went out for the evening. After that, I would never forget the significance of 100 percent commitment."

Indeed, it was a watershed moment for Caldwell, and a good characterization of the level of commitment Bissell enjoys from his team.

Explains Caldwell, "Working for Smoky Bissell is a process that is hard to describe. It is forged with unique relationships, comprehensive and dynamic plans, and an evolutionary approach. While the hard and dry roots of any development project are present in full force, his attention to detail is unsurpassed, and there is an incredible focus on exceeding expectations to higher and higher levels. The environment is uniquely collaborative, and this makes his projects highly coveted in the industry — from the business owner to its workers, everyone wants to work for Bissell."

Bissell’s powerful triumvirate was architect Jeff Floyd and his LS3P associates, Bill Caldwell and his subcontractors, and Bissell’s young development
team. By pairing seasoned veterans with youthful enthusiasm and new ideas, a winning formula had been discovered.

**From Paper to Plans**

Bissell used a camera, sticky notes and voice recorders velcroed onto the dash of his car to carefully detail and document every thought and concern. On any given morning, members of the development team would arrive at their desks to find new items on their growing to-do lists.

Echoing the thoughts of Bissell’s apprentice Yates Pharr, most team members recognize the virtues of the Ballantyne planning process and describe its execution as largely organic. Bill Caldwell, like many others on the development team, commented on the use of Bissell’s sticky ‘snowflakes’ posted on building documents, desk planners and the thousands of photographs which became ubiquitous. "Smoky would send you a photograph, sometimes with comments, sometimes not, but you knew if you received a photograph that there was an issue that needed to be addressed immediately."

Comments Terry Knotts, "You certainly didn’t want to receive more than one of the same
photograph. That meant you weren’t keeping your end of the deal.”

But despite the evolutionary mindset with regard to growing and improving the corporate park, some facets were impervious to alteration. Says Clifton Coble, “Every task is approached from a place of creativity, encouraging feedback on how to make things better. Every component of a project must be closely monitored to anticipate situations and opportunities before they occur. And, above all, the final product must in every way adhere to the standard of quality that Bissell has established in everything he does.”

Bissell’s team agrees that to create the standard of quality that has become synonymous with all of the Bissell Companies’ undertakings requires an extraordinary amount of personal investment on Mr. Bissell’s behalf. Architect Jeff Floyd, The Bissell Companies’ Clifton Coble, and construction leader Bill Caldwell jointly recall hours and hours of formal and informal meetings, impromptu walks through the property, extemporaneous on-site discussions with workers, and off-the-cuff conversations in passing by Smoky’s open cubicle.

Says Coble, “I would say his door is always open for people wanting to bend his ear, but he doesn’t even have a door. He sits in the middle of all of us, and there are open stools right in front of his desk if you need to talk to him.”

“In what other company can you find a principal so invested, so passionate about his work, that he wants to be immersed in every detail 24/7?” comments Vice President of Land Management Nelson Cato. “There is a distinctive difference in his level of commitment and concern.”

But, that does not preclude Bissell from taking major risks and delegating to his team to make things happen. Comments Coble, “His belief in you gives you the support you need to undertake a project, as well as the dedication to making sure you do it right. He doesn’t want to know about every little incident; he wants to know you are getting it done and getting it done to the proper standards.”

Says Bill Caldwell, “Mr. Bissell knows the sites intimately, and the things that hit his eye must meet his quality standards. This is visible in the tiniest details, from a water fountain, to a sculpture, to the landscaping, to the sidewalks in front of the job site. Smoky has taught me that to get a project done to certain standards, you have to be involved on a very personal level.”

The development team’s attention to detail was
not limited to overall planning of the grounds, but was also specific to buildings in the corporate park. According to Jeff Floyd, the plan for the park itself went through many iterations, as did the design of each building cluster. Bissell’s notorious sticky notes found their way onto every blueprint and every schematic. Jokes Floyd, “They call them snowflakes because they come from out of nowhere; you never know how many of them are coming or how long they’re going to last.”

Bill Caldwell says he gave Bissell an entire case of Post-it notes as a joke for Bissell’s 50th birthday, and he is sure that he has certainly burned through them. “We all joke about Bissell’s sticky notes, but in truth, it is a very functional system to get feedback.”

Personal friend and advisor David Conlan characterizes the Bissell process as creative and responsive, but also disciplined and fiscally astute. “There is a definite timeline, problems and issues are identified and immediately addressed. There are no fits and starts, no lapses — he runs a tight ship.”

Agrees Bill Caldwell, “Every Thursday, without exception, we have a construction meeting and all the key players, including contractors and subcontractors, for the development phase we are in attend. It is a great compliment to be included, but it is also a great responsibility. Each attendee must have the power to speak for and bind his company to any commitments. This makes for a fast moving meeting where instant decisions and changes can be made.”

But there was also plenty of room for fun in these meetings. At one point, construction foreman Mark Berkley and then Ballantyne Resort General Manager Wayne Shusko played an extravagant prank on Bissell that involved a Charlotte Mecklenburg police officer pulling into the construction site, sirens blaring, just to throw Mr. Bissell off his game a little.

Recalls Shusko, “While it was very funny, Bissell just smiled and committed to finding the guilty parties for payback. We were always up to some little prank or joke with each other.”

All parties agree that it is a rare to see a combination of visionary with fiscal expertise, especially in such an unassuming package, but with Smoky Bissell, that is exactly what you get. At one time or another, everyone interviewed about Bissell says, “Bottom line — he knows his business, and that’s why and how he can do what he does.”

"Next Level” Best Practices

Ballantyne ‘standards of quality’ aren’t
copywriter fluff or fodder for a fifteen-minute motivational speech. What The Bissell Companies have been able to accomplish is identifying every last “Oh, wouldn’t that be nice,” and transforming ‘that’ into bricks-and-mortar reality.

Class-A office space, like that provided in Ballantine Corporate Park, is generally characterized as a building or buildings with excellent location and access, which attract high quality tenants, and are managed professionally. Building materials are high quality and rents are competitive with other new buildings.

What The Bissell Companies has done with Ballantine Corporate Park is elevate its product and service mentality to “Next Level” principles, where team members navigate through a juggernaut of ideas in a constant quest to raise the bar on quality standards.

While the examples of this are exhaustive, several important examples on the construction and development end include: choosing fully-adhered roof membranes over the more commonly used ‘mechanically-fastened,’ which the company has found to be unsuitable due to roof leaks; implementation of internal irrigation in which each property’s storm water pond has been expanded
and added to irrigation wells, which dramatically reduced irrigation costs for the properties; con-
tinuous photography of underground infrastruc-
ture construction as it goes in for the purposes of locating plumbing and electrical lines and cable/gas conduits for future needs; and asking tradesmen about the availability of new products or ideas that could be implemented, prior to pricing or beginning a new project.

Says Clifton Coble, “It is important ideas like these that keep us ahead of our competition.”

“Next Level” performance measures also extend well beyond the buildings themselves, into the maintenance of the grounds and common areas, and contact with tenants.

Tom Pizzo, president of Property Services, has been with the company since 1996. Pizzo jokes that he is responsible for ‘all things that come into the corporate park,’ but there is more than a grain of truth in his jocularity. He demonstrates Bissell’s attention to detail by providing as an example a giant list of ideas his division has compiled since 2003 concerning improvements to the corporate park.

Among them are several safety and security precautions. In addition to regulation building and safety inspections, property managers and their assistants make regular formal inspections of the property for standards adherence and to familiarize themselves with the properties. Every Bissell team member also makes ‘Best Practices’ notes during visits to competitors’ properties. On site security levels have been increased repeatedly with the addition of conspicuously uniformed guards, video cameras and card access security systems. In 2005, Bissell Companies provided ten-
ants with a white paper outlining procedures in the event of building emergencies, and key per-
sonnel are always available by cellular phone. Right down to the custom Bissell Companies’ ‘Wet Floor’ signs for lobbies and restrooms, and plastic bag holders for wet umbrellas, the Bissell signature means safety.

However, according to many tenants, aesthet-
ics and amenities provide the Ballantyne ‘coup de grace.’ Walking trails through the many people parks are dotted with water fountains, while a horseshoe pit and tent-covered plaza allow tenants to play or rest during their lunch break. A few memos document the admonishment that more attention be given to ‘crooked entry mats,’ remedy-
ing newspapers ‘haphazardly left in the lobbies,’
and fixing the ‘goose poop problem’ (a work cart rigged to maintenance equipment was purchased to spray off problem areas.) Seasonal decoration and celebration is attended to with enthusiasm; the three large bronze bull sculptures are ornamented with red bows, and team members are selected to dress up as Santa and greet tenants at the park monuments and other key locations during the Christmas holidays.

While the goal at Ballantyne is to think of the next best thing, the motivation behind it is focused clearly around their tenants, rather than potential competitors. One way the company does so is by strongly encouraging feedback from its tenants. At one point it was suggested that tenants be given disposable cameras in case they encountered any problems in the park, so the cameras could be placed in a drop box to be developed and attended to by property management. Tenant surveys are sent, and meetings hosted regularly; Web site comments are rigorously monitored.

Communications are turnkey. A list of pertinent information for each building, including property management, maintenance and emergency contacts is conspicuously displayed in the building lobby. The entire company is governed, says Pizzo, by a “concierge mentality,” that assures a tenant can reach a representative and be quickly and efficiently navigated to the appropriate person to handle any issue. When a new tenant joins Ballantyne, welcome cards and a gift basket greet them, and notices are sent to all local building tenants informing them of the new business, its mission, and providing a personal contact in the business.

While these trademark practices are considerable investments, Ballantyne tenants can also be assured that The Bissell Companies is a fair-minded landlord and good corporate citizen. Bissell attends to fiscal responsibility rather than extravagance for its own sake. For example, the company investigated insurance rates for the buildings to see if there were any provisions that could lower them, and manages quotes from outside contractors to the letter for reasonable costs. The company finds and stays with one contractor for a service whenever possible, to reduce costs and achieve consistency. Bissell also regularly seeks energy conservation measures, including researching the latest in Energy Star compliance and installing energy efficient HVAC units and light bulbs in the buildings and pulse meters at all
Decking the Halls — Ballantyne Style.
properties to monitor and graph power consumption. Maintenance fleets are fueled after dusk and public transportation is readily accessible. The Bissell Companies is also an active participant in the Mecklenburg County’s Clean Air Works initiative. Summarily, in Ballantyne Corporate Park it is a point of considerable importance to keep the business park energy efficient in terms of cost, as well as being as a good steward to the environment.

Through weekly brainstorming sessions, feedback sessions and strenuous attention to day-to-day happenings in the park, the team culs a large amount of information to log in a Best Practices database. ‘Glitch reports’ are a regular practice, wherein troubleshooting is documented, and solutions are proposed for timely follow up. But just as often, the answer for the next great idea is not to be found in the park itself — but rather in its customers and the culture of its tenants.

**Cultures of the Corporate Park**

After the shell building has been erected and a relationship with a tenant has been established, the tenant meets with a space planner to determine the best use of the space in terms of traffic, technology,
workstations and finishing. Once the planning process is undertaken, the project is handed off to the interior construction coordinator for design implementation.

According to Tom Pizzo, much care is given to outfitting the space for the culture of each tenant that chooses Ballantyne. “While there are certainly a variety of cultures within Ballantyne — which range from small, entrepreneurial-minded companies to well-established corporations — we can accommodate just about any need. And despite their diversity, we find at least one thing all of our tenants have in common: they respect the value of their people and they take seriously their obligation to provide the best working environment and the best experience they can.”

One of the crucial events that set the corporate park on solid footing was the relocation of Equitable Insurance’s, now AXA Equitable’s, regional service center from SouthPark into the park. Thereafter, the company also determined to combine its other regional centers — from Des Moines to Columbus to Fresno to Hamden — into one national service center in Ballantyne. AXA Equitable’s decision was important on a variety of different counts. First, it was a large, well-established and respected company known for its financial savvy and somewhat conservative culture, which chose to move from the steady heartbeat of SouthPark to a remote, nearly open field off of Highway 521. The decision demonstrated a
AXA Equitables’s Ballantyne office.
significant vote of confidence for the region, on behalf of AXA.

But perhaps the most significant factor in AXA Equitable’s decision was not so much the land, as its developer. Smoky Bissell and Johnny Harris built the Equitable’s first building in SouthPark, and from that point on the two companies shared a 20-year history together. It was clearly by virtue of the fruits of that relationship that AXA Equitable made a leap of faith right into Ballantyne.

Remembers Ned Curran, ”AXA Equitable came to the table when most companies thought Ballantyne was too far out. But they knew our track record and performance. In addition, they were more forward-looking than many other companies; they looked at the housing demographics and knew that the area could meet 100 percent of their employees’ home-buying needs. They saw, too, that as Charlotte continued to grow into a major business hub in the southeast, that Ballantyne would be able to accommodate what other parts of the city could not. These factors were our biggest selling points, and AXA Equitable’s decision was a huge vote of confidence in the future of the park.”

Another company contributing to Ballantyne’s corporate diversity was LendingTree. The corporate embodiment of the mortgage company’s familiar refrain ”When Banks Compete, You Win” was born in a speculative shell building within the Ballantyne Corporate Park. Doug Lebda, the company’s founder, took his frustration with researching lenders and leveraged it into a company that has become a household name. At first Lebda’s facility included one building and 125 employees, but eventually it grew into three buildings housing over 600 employees.

Says Curran, ”LendingTree was one of the few dot-com era businesses that really took hold, and took off. Yes, they were creating a new model, but they had great leadership and a rock-solid plan. It was a gratifying experience working with them to outfit a space that would fit this new type of working environment.”

He elaborates, ”When we were planning the LendingTree offices, they explained a desire for open space, access, and creativity. They wanted
fewer walls, and an environment conducive to communication and collaboration. For example, they have a large open lunchroom with foosball tables and arcade games. They have what they called a “town center” meeting space for Friday afternoon employee rallies. The space was created to be bright and progressive and casual.”

Curran concludes, “An office space is more than just a place to house workers, and Lebda knew that instinctively. He wanted a place that would attract the kind of talent he was looking for. He got creative to attract the creative class.”

The LendingTree relationship also permitted Ballantyne to assert another of its major advantages—being able to accommodate company growth within the same park. With the evolutionary nature of Ballantyne, its uninterrupted growth, and its principle of client accommodation, companies have saved considerable amounts of money by relocating to a different building within the corporate park, rather than a different section of the city.

Curran reports that since Ballantyne is able to fulfill client growth within the park, companies don’t have to relocate people, lose talent, or pro-
ductivity. “I would say we have had over 50 experiences in the past 10 years where we were able to move a business to another location within the park. Time after time, we hear a lot of gratitude for providing that option.”

Ballantyne also raised the process of retrofitting buildings to an art form. Since most of the buildings are built on spec, certain company needs must be addressed after the fact. A great example of this was the SPX Building. The company wanted to integrate a spiral staircase into its building, so the roof was removed and a crane used to lower the staircase into the building center.

ESPN moved to Ballantyne in 1999, which required considerable technological considerations to accommodate broadcasts from the facility. Now, 10 satellite dishes distinguish the building as the homing signal for sports lovers, and the camera team is often seen filming segments around the property.

In 2003, Ballantyne made another shift, dedicating a group of buildings as medical office space which involved special considerations for increased utilities and maintenance due to high-traffic in
Right: ESPN production taking place in BCP provides entertainment before shows even hit the air.

Above: BCP’s medical offices opened another avenue to accommodate clients.
the building cluster. The addition symbolized the desire to accommodate as many applications of office space as Bissell and his team could conceive of, in the best possible manner.

These relationships demonstrate the variety of cultures, as well as the construction and care dedicated to making them possible. In the course of pursuing these and other projects, retail began to usher in a new growth sector as shops began to pepper the corners of the park. Owners of a Petro Express convenience store seized a prime corner, several restaurants began popping up to serve the lunchtime rush, and banks branched into Ballantyne.

However, to completely fulfill the needs of business travelers and relocating businesses, it became clear to Bissell that a hotel was in order. AXA Equitable mentioned in its leasing process that they needed a place for its employees to stay, and Bissell applied for a Courtyard Marriott fran-
chise on the spot. That purpose was served for a short time, and then it became clear that an extended-stay hotel option was also needed, so The Bissell Companies set out to franchise a Staybridge Suites Hotel. These two endeavors, the Courtyard Marriott and the Staybridge Suites, were important not only because they jelled the ‘Stay’ component of the Ballantyne philosophy and answered a need for the business traveler, but also because it solidified a core of self-reliance to personally address as many client needs as possible. The Ballantyne service mentality was growing into: ‘The clients want it? Then figure out the best way we can do it and make it happen.’

The ‘Stay’ component of Ballantyne was simply fulfilling a need for the business travelers in the region — whether they were visiting on a business trip or relocating to Charlotte. It was an extension of Bissell’s service mentality, rather than a desire to profit from the hotels themselves. Comments
Ned Curran, “He is always saying that he’s not in the hotel business, but for the past several years he’s had holdings in four hotels representing a considerable amount of assets. It has become a bit of a standing joke.”

By this time the west side of Ballantyne had firmly taken root. Ballantyne Corporate Park was establishing its increasingly visible and competitive ‘Work’ component, Crescent Resources and those riding the wave of its forecasts were launching residences for everyone from the president of the company to the mail room clerk, rounding out the ‘Live’ component, and two hotels had been erected to answer the ‘Stay’ needs of Ballantyne’s corporate citizens. During this time, Bissell was also able to buy back the 108 acres of State Farm land, solidifying his hold on all the Ballantyne Corporate Park property, and giving him dominion over the brand of the land.
SMOKY WAS ABLE TO ENVISION THAT A GOLF COURSE WOULD BE THE CATALYST FOR THE WHOLE DEVELOPMENT.

— NELSON CATO

By late 1996, as bulldozers scraped and cement was being poured, the fever surrounding Ballantyne was infectious. The groundbreaking for the corporate park's first building, Ballantyne One, was a festive affair, attracting Mayor Pat McCrory and the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce's Carroll Gray to raise their shovels alongside Smoky Bissell, and Bill Caldwell.

The west side of Highway 521 was an anthill of activity, which now had a building to show for it. But the sudden rumbling on the highway's east side was now beginning to raise some eyebrows. People were asking, "What is Bissell up to now?"

The answer was revealed in confidence several months earlier as Wayne Shusko, a close friend and manager of the Park Hotel (then a Bissell Hotel) and Mr. Bissell met for lunch. According to Shusko, Bissell asked out of the blue, "What do you think Charlotte's hotel industry is missing?"

"It was an easy solution, with a seemingly impossible implementation," says Shusko. "North Carolina is known for its golf, and we don't have a course where a guest can walk to the tee from the hotel."

He continues, "Of course I knew he had something up his sleeve when he asked the question. But when I answered and saw that little smile of his start at the corner of his mouth, I knew he had already made plans. It wouldn't be long until Bissell would start a golf course and a hotel right across from the corporate park."

In hindsight the idea seems like an easy win, but at the time there were absolutely no comparables for an urban golf resort. It was difficult to prepare even a modest feasibility study because the idea was so radical. But to Smoky Bissell, it was a simple case of making lemonade from lemons.
While the corporate park was getting the lion’s share of attention from the press, the Ballantyne Golf Course was about to become big news.

Explains Bissell, "Here I am, with all this acreage on the east side of Highway 521 sitting in a hole," says Bissell, referring to the sunken topography of the east side. "I knew I couldn’t build in a hole; there is something very submissive about a building you have to look down on in a literal sense. I have never seen such a building be successful. So I had to keep asking myself, 'What am I going to do with all this land?'"

He adds, "At the same time I find myself owning three hotels and being asked daily by visiting corporate groups to arrange golf outings for them. We were arranging buses here and there, trying to make tee times, and get people back in time for meetings. Inevitably, of the 40 guys you have to get on the course by tee time or back to the hotel, there is always — and I mean always — at least one guy holding up the bus. It became a bit of a logistical nightmare. So I asked myself, 'What if we didn’t have to put them on a bus at all?'"

"I figured if we put a resort hotel and a golf course in Charlotte, close to the hub airport, we
could save these groups at least one full day of meeting time by eliminating drives or flights to Pinehurst, Asheville or Greensboro. I suggested that we could attract all the corporate business that exists by providing a way for these guests to walk from their room to the course and then back to the hotel for meetings.

The east side of Ballantyne proved perfect for the idea, where Bissell could “spend the land” on a golf course. It also didn’t hurt that corporate travelers were being exposed in the meantime to some very attractive commercial real estate across the highway, which just happened to be in a growing and increasingly desirable city.

So, Smoky and Sara Bissell with friends David and Jane Conlan set off on a tour, scouting out the best ideas from international resorts and golf resorts around the country. Says David Conlan, “Smoky and I attended a seminar in the mid ’90s, after he decided he would like to build a course. From that point, we firmly resolved to figure out how to do it.”

Conlan says that in addition to the location, the timing of the Ballantyne course was also perfect. “We were erecting buildings on the west side for the office park, and had the go-ahead to begin clearing for the golf course on the east side. What we ended up with was a great sense of momentum, which is hugely important in the real estate business. It attracted attention to the whole concept and the whole region, rather than just another group of buildings going up.”

“Timing and quality are two things Bissell doesn’t skimp on,” he continues. “So once we got the gears in motion, we began implementing ideas we gathered on our best practices trips.”

The foursome, the Bissells and the Conlans, traveled to 36 courses and stayed in three hotels in four days, while not one of them managed to pick up a golf club. Instead they circled the grounds asking questions like, “What is the sense of arrival? Who picks up the clubs? How do you set up a pro shop or a starters area? What can you tell us about your cart fleet and its maintenance?” When asked about the trip, Sara Bissell...
likes to joke that she was there to move the baggage from hotel to hotel while the men engaged in a study of best practices for building the course.

Yet Bissell and Conlan are nothing if not earnest about their approach. Says Conlan, "Whatever you are about to do, find out who does it better than anyone else in the world and go talk to them." He says the next logical step is to improve upon the best ideas. "It’s only a best practice until somebody else one-ups it," quips Conlan.

He adds, "Finding out what works and what doesn’t is about paying attention, using common sense and asking questions. Most people are very proud of their work, and very open to talking about their product when you are not in direct geographic competition with them, and this is very helpful. You are always trying to catch the fatal flaws, because once something is built, there isn’t a thing you can do about it."

**Building the Course**

After making the pivotal best practices trips for ideas about the course, resort and service mechanics, one rather important detail had to be determined: how to go about building a golf course.

And again, Bissell went against the grain. He resolved to bypass commissioning a professional course architect, instead pioneering a grassroots team to create an award-winning course.

Bissell thoroughly reviewed his options but decided against big-name course designers like Nicklaus, Palmer and Irwin. For the thousands of dollars it costs just to buy the celebrity brand, Bissell determined he would rather channel the money into the course itself, also providing the ability to maintain the degree of creative control he might need to accommodate the other factors in his development.

Bissell first commissioned LandDesign, a site engineering, design and landscape architecture firm, and then hired Shapemasters, a golf course construction company led by Jeffrey
Stein, both of which had worked on celebrity championship courses.

Bissell asked LandDesign’s Larry Best to have his team draw up plans for Ballantyne’s course. Bissell explained that he understood that the company did not generally design its own major courses from scratch, but it did, after all, have considerable experience fine-tuning, routing and master planning for the big name players. Inspired and convinced, LandDesign took the job.

Comments Wayne Shusko, "LandDesign had the inside scoop and the talent to make it happen. Look at Ballantyne’s greens — there’s not a straight putt on them. That is an example of LandDesign know-how."

LandDesign signed on to provide the brain-power. Shapemasters would do the heavy lifting, and then Bissell would create a home-grown focus group to corral ideas for the course requirements.

The 'focus group' would come to be known as the Golf Course Design Review Committee, which included Bailey Patrick, Joe Hallow, Johno Harris, Ede Graves, Stacy Gibson, Eddie Pell and David Straw. Its charge was to brainstorm ideas, and become devil’s advocates for a desired end-result of maximum playability and enjoyment for all levels of experience. Ballantyne Golf Course was to become a haven for pros, amateurs, 'hackers', juniors and women, and Bissell wanted a design to satisfy all of them.

Recalls Wayne Shusko, "It was a unique team of people from varying levels of play willing to walk around and hit golf balls in the dirt, and humbly share the strengths and weaknesses of their playing skills for the good of the course."

Laughing, Shusko remembers, "At one point, Smoky decided to turn the course a certain way, and when I asked him why, he said, 'Wayne, I have seen how you hit a golf ball, and I don’t want it flying into the windows of those buildings going..."
in over there.' He knew that nine out of ten golfers slice (hit to the right) so his plan was to put the buildings on the left. By listening to everyone, he was able to anticipate everything."

People close to the course design credit one woman in particular, Ede Graves, with a crucial observation. "Whatever you do," she said, "please don’t put the first tee right below the hotel where everyone can watch. That kind of stress will mess me up the whole day. If you put it there, women will not play the course."

So Bissell’s design and course construction team was selected and his advisors solidly staffed. Now he needed a leader to make the pieces fall into place. Again, Yates Pharr would make a significant contribution. Pharr heard that Nelson Cato, a highly respected course superintendent and golf operations director, was looking to make a change. Cato, known for his execution of the esteemed and challenging Grandover Resort in Greensboro, was firmly set in Bissell’s sights.

Upon hearing about Cato, Bissell and Pharr immediately drove to Grandover to speak with him. The formidable task of developing Grandover was 90 percent complete, so Cato drove a golf cart through the sleet and rain to tour the Ballantyne duo through the course and its secrets.

Two weeks and a few discussions later, Bissell and company got their man. Cato, for his part, admits to doing his homework. “After Grandover and several other large projects,” he explains, “I knew what was needed to build a successful course from the ground up. You absolutely need solid capital resources, and a very strong commitment to use them correctly for a good product. You need strong involvement from your investor, and a willingness to be flexible and plan for contingencies.”

Smoky scored an ‘A’ on all of the above. Says Cato, "At first I was concerned that,
since Bissell had built so many office buildings, he would be set in a very rigid development formula. With a golf course, you run into so many unexpected factors, you have to be willing to chuck a plan out the window to find a solution. But I found Mr. Bissell had a surprisingly flexible mindset in his development practices. I felt confident when I signed on that I would get what I needed to do the job well, and I was right. If I came to him with a request or a suggestion, he simply wanted a reasonable explanation, for me to track the cost, and do what needed to be done to make Ballantyne the best course we could build. There was never any doubt that Mr. Conlan or Mr. Bissell would be there to support any sensible need we had.”

Cato says that he came in on the ground floor to oversee the construction of the course from top to bottom. In addition to tweaking major decisions about the course routing and play, he was also responsible for keeping the budgets, estimates and scheduling in check.

“Coming to Ballantyne was a very significant decision for me. I had always tinkered with the idea of designing courses, and I found myself in a situation where I could utilize my experience to be heavily involved from the outset. My experience has shown that a vocabulary and communication style that transfers well between designers, architects, contractors, developers, and ownership, facilitates good execution, timeliness and fiscal responsibility. This is what I try to bring to the table.”

As anticipated, there were innumerable challenges in the course design. First, as an urban course, it had to be placed in the context of pre-established barriers, namely roads, buildings or buildings-to-be. It also had to work with the considerable infrastructure laid by Johnny Harris, and to comply with several environmental restrictions, the most significant of which was wetland preservation and
sedimentation and water quality ponds. And, in keeping with Bissell’s philosophy, it had to work with the natural geography and topography of the land.

Initial clearing had begun when Cato came on board, and he recommended clearing much more. He tweaked the hole-to-hole routing plan and centerline, providing for 100 feet of clearance on either side. Simplified, the process involved two clearing phases, an earthmoving phase, drainage, irrigation, bunkers, and greens development.

The creek system throughout the course brought interesting challenges. The low elevations were prone to gully washers, so bridges and creek walls had to be adequately positioned and fortified. Acquiring permits to build around the wetlands was time consuming. And then, there was irrigation to consider.

Cato explains, “The heart of any golf course is its water system. At Ballantyne, the irrigation pond we started with wasn’t adequate, so we made the lake bigger and dug more wells to recharge it. Then, the water supply was too basic; since the bicarbonate affects the soil and anything you are trying to grow in it, we had to treat it. But in the end we were very fortunate. Our wells ended up being very strong, and our drainage plan made it possible to utilize the runoff very efficiently, by capturing it and routing it back to the pond.”

If the irrigation was technical and scientific, then the course’s environmental nuances are aesthetic and conservatorial. One of Bissell’s goals was to achieve no net loss of trees; if one went down, another would take its place. “We did a lot of tree moving,” recalls Cato. “I remember him saying, ‘It’s wrong to unnecessarily remove what it takes Mother Nature 50 to 60 years to grow.’” Bissell invested in a tree spade to back up this commitment.

Ballantyne also went through a rigorous process for certification as an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary, meeting preservation
Detail of Ballantyne’s vegetation and watershed.
and ecology guidelines to foster wellness of the wilderness habitat. It was only the third course in Charlotte to receive the certification.

Of course, in the midst of all these factors, designers and planners were working to make the course attractive, sustainable, and most importantly, playable.

**Course Details**

Cato describes Ballantyne’s 18-hole, par 71 course as similar to an old Donald Ross-style design. There are five sets of tees for each hole, small undulating greens, 45 bunkers, and shot placement that values accuracy over strength. The team stretched pretty hard to achieve close to the requisite 7,000 yards characteristic of championship courses.

"Perhaps the most important rule in managing all the different interests in the design is that form follows function," says Cato. "The largest imperative in a course design is the flow. We didn’t want to slow down the play with too many bunkers, while also acknowledging that we needed mounds to break up noise and protect against errant shots."

Simply growing grass and keeping it alive was another challenge. Says Cato, "We have all varieties of grass: Bermuda, fescue, and the L-93 that was being used at Augusta National. We have a crack team for manicuring and maintaining the turf and state-of-the-art systems for irrigation, drainage and mechanical air movement."

Cato says the most enjoyable aspect of the course was the brainstorming sessions that led to finding ways to bring it to the 'next level' of play. "We would sit back and talk about the 'What-ifs' — that was the fun part. Where would the turn house go? What about the rest-stations? What if carts passed through a stone tunnel with a large Ballantyne B on its entrance to the back portion of the course?"

Another question that arose was how to hide the requisite golf course maintenance area. "We built and carefully bunkered it
behind holes 9, 11, and 17, then camouflaged it with pines and wax myrtles. Still, we would occasionally sit back and laugh when some wild shot — 150 yards off line — would fly right through the trees, into a window. These were all fun, but important conversations,” smiles Cato.

There would be another conversation that would drastically alter the landscape of the Ballantyne course, both figuratively and literally. According to Bissell, “David Conlan was discussing golf with a friend and learned about golf pro Dana Rader’s rather modest setup at a nearby course. The tipster suggested we talk with her and we did. That meeting precipitated the Dana Rader Golf School.”

Dana Rader is a recognized celebrity, having been the 1990 LPGA Teacher of the Year and included in Golf Magazine’s listing of the top 100 teachers in the United States. Prior to Ballantyne, she started a golf school in 1987 at River Hills Country Club in Lake Wylie, S.C.

Says Bissell, “Ballantyne’s Dana Rader Golf School was located between holes 1 and 18, 330 yards uphill from the driving range tee box so that people making a shot off the practice tees and others making shots from the school tees wouldn’t hit one another.” He smiles, “Truth be told, it wasn’t exactly planned for that reason, but the school just fit right in there.”

According to Cato, however, making room for the golf school was just a little more complicated than just ‘fitting it in.’ He explains, “The Dana Rader Golf School was a huge coup. Dana brought credibility and visibility to the golf course. However, the building itself was an afterthought in terms of the course design and there were several challenges we had to overcome to get it delivered in time for the course opening.”
Ballantyne’s tunnel (shown during and after construction) is one of many decorative hallmarks of the course.
"We had to dig through a lot of what we had already put down, especially in terms of routing electricity to the building. But that was just another contingency we were able to accommodate, and the payoff has been huge. Dana Rader was instrumental in consulting on the design, installing professional staff, getting a Women’s Amateur Tournament to Ballantyne, and establishing women’s tees, and has become the course spokesperson. Her talent and charisma provided instant credibility and we were proud to be able to build the accommodations she deserved."

Dana Rader became Ballantyne’s director of golf and managed the 4,500-square-foot teaching facility with outdoor practice tees, and a portico with a retractable hurricane shutter from which students hit during storms. Interactive swing screens allow students, groups and private classes of any age to learn about their golf swings. The whole place is swollen with an "I get to play for a living" atmosphere.

To say the school is a success is a mild understatement. Rader’s Golf School draws about 16,000 students per year, and has been named to Golf Magazine’s Top 25 Golf Schools. Both Dana Rader and Julie Cole, the school director of instruction and former LPGA pro, are ranked in the Top 50 instructors by Golf for Women Magazine. Rader received the Wachovia/Queens University 2003 BusinessWoman of the Year Award, is a member of Nike’s golf advisory board, writes for several publications, and is in great demand as a public speaker.

Ballantyne Resort Golf Club as a whole has fared well also. Since the course opened, it has won several coveted awards including "Best
New Golf Course of the Year in North Carolina” by North Carolina Magazine (1998), a “Great Golf Resort of the World,” by PGA Magazine, and Charlotte Visitor’s Choice Gold Award as “Best Golf Course” out of 63 public courses. Over 30,000 rounds are played at Ballantyne annually, so the grounds staff stay busy keeping the greens. In addition, the Ballantyne Course has become popular among many PGA pros for work and for leisure.

Comments Nelson Cato, “What can I say? The doors opened, we completed on time, we won awards and people said that it looked like it had always been here. Those things coupled with the highest compliment — that people really enjoy playing the course — and knowing that it is built right is a great source of pride for all of us.”

One of Cato’s most prominent memories features the construction and revision of the 18th hole. “With a golf course, number 18 is going to be your signature hole. If it is done right, the golfer takes away a positive feeling and the best memory of his game. If done poorly, it lessens the experience.” After the original hole had been completed, Jeffrey Stein, the golf course construction contractor, still was not satisfied. He approached Mr. Bissell and offered, “This hole is not dramatic enough for a finishing hole. I am going to fix it, and do so at no cost to you.” Stein then proceeded to redo the crucial green so that it tucked around the existing pond and installed a sandtrap the length of the pond’s edge. These modifications finished the dramatic 18th hole that exists today.
Above: The 18th hole.
Bottom left: Golf Pro
Davis Love III.
Bottom Right: Golf Pro
Jason Gore.
Since their first meeting, Sara Harris and Smoky Bissell were an immediately and intensely compatible couple. After Smoky’s early service in the Navy, his stint as an educator, his initial exposure to real estate, and the couple’s eventual return to Sara’s Charlotte roots, they began a course of partnership that was not only matrimonial, but business-oriented as well.

Smoky and Sara became a team that jointly made the business decisions that would affect not only their lives, but also the future of many communities. Smoky Bissell solicited his wife’s opinion on every matter, large or small, and she became his fiercest advocate. It continues to be clear that Sara Bissell is not just a beloved wife, but also a consultant who inherited the Harris business acumen and gleaned experience from the birth of both SouthPark and Ballantyne Corporate Park. She brings a lot of perspective to the table of her own accord.

The two became deeply committed to The Park Hotel in SouthPark after Smoky purchased the property from his partners and commissioned his wife to give it a major design overhaul. It was Sara Bissell’s keen eye that would outfit the Charlotte landmark with the sumptuous accommodations that would become its seal.

However, once The Park Hotel was completed, and had achieved prestigious Mobil Four-Star and AAA Four-Diamond designations, Ballantyne Corporate Park revealed itself as the Bissels’ next major undertaking. The time and resources that Ballantyne would require precipitated Smoky’s decision to move his headquarters from SouthPark into Ballantyne.

Recalls Sara Bissell, “It was difficult moving from SouthPark. It was a big part of our history. But Smoky was passionate about what he was doing, and it was fated that we should be working on it together.”

On weekends, Sara and Smoky would picnic on the same creek banks that Smoky and his
Dalmatians walked when the potential of Ballantyne Corporate Park was unfurling its slow reveal. Says Sara, "We would eat lunch, walk around and talk about our big plans." She adds, "Smoky has always included me in everything he does, and that has meant so much to me."

Those who know the Bissells agree that the couple personifies complete synchronicity in their plans, tastes and opinions. Most also hasten to add that, while the couple’s warmth and respect for one another is unsurpassed, Sara’s talent, intelligence and affinity for design continues to be an important resource, and her opinion is of paramount importance, in any of Bissell’s important decisions.

The result of their impromptu picnics would become a major landmark for Charlotte as a whole. The Bissells were carefully designing what would become the pièce de résistance for Ballantyne Corporate Park, The Ballantyne Resort Hotel.
The Ballantyne Resort Hotel would provide luxury accommodations with walk-on access to its award-winning golf course, and was designed to provide the same abundance that The Park Hotel provided in SouthPark. Initially, the Ballantyne Resort Hotel was planned as 13 stories with 348 rooms, which was scaled back to eliminate the need for parking decks that threatened to obscure the view of the hotel. They settled on a final room count of 214, but continued plans to design common areas, amenities and meeting space to accommodate the original, larger numbers. “We wanted to be able to hold three wedding receptions in the middle of a Saturday afternoon and not have any of the parties’ guests cross paths,” Bissell explains.

Of course, the resort was also designed on a grand scale to accommodate corporate conferences, retreats and business travelers, as well as their spouses. In addition to the 18-hole golf course, amenities include a 16,000-square-foot spa, a 35-room executive retreat named The Lodge, a 30,000-square-foot clubhouse,
Top: Ballantyne Resort Hotel and Golf Course circa 2006.
Bottom: LS3P’s original rendering of the Ballantyne Resort Hotel.
20 meeting rooms, several ballrooms, a piano bar, a gourmet restaurant, a casual grille, a gift shop, tennis courts, a fitness center, a swimming pool and lavish presidential suites.

The Resort Hotel, consistent with all other Ballantyne Corporate Park buildings, was designed by architect Jeff Floyd and broke ground in 1999. Says Floyd, “We combined all the traditional elements we used in the building clusters for unity, and then provided flourishes that gave the resort a distinctive presence that was defined by the quality, character and value that the Bissells’ vision brings to any project.”

The result gives the impression of a Southern plantation on steroids. The alabaster façade is juxtaposed against rolling verdant landscapes. A golden-domed cupola provides a commanding reference on the horizon. The level of architectural attention is profound and well balanced; a Palladian window complements a prominent angled gable on the façade, sprawling porches and comfortable balconies overlook the fountain and golf course in its back.

While Floyd maintains that the level of detail and consideration for the building’s design aesthetic was considerable, the attention given to creating the inside of the fortress bordered on the obsessive.

While considering room appointments, the Conlans and the Bissells decided to set up two mock-hotel rooms in the bottom floors of existing office buildings. Every detail from light receptacles, cabinetry, bathroom fixtures, furniture layout, linens, artwork and fine details were laid out, considered, revised, and reconsidered until final agreement could be reached for the ideal accommodations.

Much like The Park Hotel, the Ballantyne Resort Hotel would have Sara Bissell as its touchstone for all the interior design specifications. Her eye for detail and considerable expertise from her education, her travels, and her passion — fine antiques and custom art became the centerpiece of the undertaking.

While developing Ballantyne, Sara and Smoky Bissell were also traveling companions
with their close friends, Jane and David Conlan. Their trips became learning experiences that took them throughout Europe and to the Far East, where Bangkok, Hong Kong, Bali and Singapore would portend several lessons in service and extravagance.

The voyages would manifest themselves in big ideas, not to mention countless wares from shopping excursions, the booty from which would come to outfit Ballantyne Resort Hotel.

The foursome’s travels yielded unique pieces, like a stately breakfront from the Prince Charles Trust and The Four Seasons paintings which hang in the resort’s Grill Room. The group also harvested accent pieces they purchased in bulk, like original art for the hallways of each hotel floor. However, the team brought home even more ideas than wares. A luggage holder for the rooms was designed from one Conlan saw in Europe and simply could not locate in the U.S. They eschewed traditional wide-countertop bath vanities in favor of marble-topped two-tier vanities that Sara found to have more storage.

Comments David Conlan on these “Best Practices” endeavors, “We took hundreds of pictures, printed them in duplicate, and later in the evening discussed the idea and put them into scrapbooks. The pictures were always sorted by subject — whether it was maid service, bellmen, restrooms, a golf hole, or a towel holder, everything had its place and there was absolutely nothing too small to be considered for improvement.”

Conlan says that since he came on board with Bissell, “Best Practices” have been a large part of his responsibilities. Bissell attributes this to Conlan’s keen eye for detail and his astute analytical mindset. For his part, Conlan says, “The attention to detail in any Bissell project is excruciating — and that is the defining and differentiating factor in what he does. What I do is actually quite simple by comparison — find out what works and what doesn’t. It’s a combination
Above: Traveling companions Smoky and Sara Bissell with Jane and David Conlan.

Right: Smoky and Sara in Europe.
The Ballantyne Resort
Lobby and Lobby Bar.
of common sense and the ability to get people to talk about their own accomplishments and experience. More often than not, you can ask three questions and your fact-finding mission is off and running.”

Each of the Ballantyne Resort’s 214 rooms carries one of two themes in terms of design, fabrics and appointments. Each carries its own flourish here or there, but keeping the mammoth operation of linen and supply storage confined to two sets was a lesson Sara Bissell brought back from her days at The Park Hotel. Says Mrs. Bissell, "At the Park we had 10 room décor themes, and that created a need for storage, and educating the staff on what linens go with what theme, and with each other. Reducing the themes made things much simpler in terms of outfitting and maintaining the rooms.”

She adds, “One theme is a set of rooms we call the 'Frou Frou' rooms because we specifically decorated them to accommodate the tastes of the female business traveler, with noticeably more feminine touches and décor.” Twelve of the rooms were fashioned this way.

Sara Bissell says she wasn’t quite as hands-on with the interior of the Ballantyne Resort as she was with The Park Hotel. Because of the size of the undertaking and the tight timeline, they enlisted interior designer Jim Looney to assist in the finishes of the resort. However, the designer was ultimately answerable to Mrs. Bissell; her touch is evident in every room and every hallway.

“The Bissells, particularly Mrs. Bissell, love colors. They are always buying fresh flowers and choosing bright hues,” comments Bissell Development President Clifton Coble. “I remember the first go-around to look at the hotel finishes; the designers had laid out a bunch of brown and gray samples on the table. Tom Pizzo and I just looked at each other and braced ourselves for the rest of that meeting. We knew it wasn’t going to fly.”
chapter 1
Previous pages: The Ballantyne Resort
Hotel Presidential Suite.

Hotel breakout room and restaurant.
In designing and decorating the guest rooms of the Ballantyne Resort Hotel, no stone is left unturned.
Mrs. Bissell admits to her passion for color, “Pink, reds, greens and blues — I have always loved diving into bold colors and texture.” Notably, Mrs. Bissell’s eye is also reflected in the Chancellor’s Residence at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, which boasts her portrait and has been named after her for her championing of the university.

The most popular of the signature attributes of the resort are custom furnishings and original artwork. The Bissells chose display pieces and room furnishings from the English countryside and Parisian flea markets. Small paintings in some of the rooms were purchased from a small artist’s shop in Singapore, room corridor artwork is from Bangkok, and a picture in the presidential suites was painted by Donald Regan, former U.S. Secretary of the Treasury and Chief of Staff to President Ronald Reagan.

But the most commented upon, and the most significant pieces, were commissioned by the Bissells from artist, Thomas Vieth. Sara Bissell’s former college roommate sent her a watercolor postcard printed from a Vieth painting, and Sara knew she had found someone capable of outfitting the hallways of the resort with color and vibrancy. Vieth was teaching in Vermont, and at the end of the 1999 school year he left teaching to work on retainer for a year for the Bissells. He set about spending the year visiting and sketching Charlotte landmarks like the Mint Museum, local parks and streetscapes; he rendered them first in watercolor, and then in oils. Says Sara Bissell, ”We wanted to connect the Ballantyne Resort with Charlotte and its people. What better way to do that than to memorialize its beautiful places in works of art?”

True to Sara Bissell’s druthers, the large paintings in the resort’s main hallway sparkle with both liveliness and delicacy, and employ every color of the rainbow in their depiction of the city. The scarves given to ladies at the opening of the Ballantyne Resort Hotel included a Tom Vieth screen print of the hotel, a testimony
Tom Vieth’s artwork.
to Sara’s appreciation of Vieth’s successful artistic vision. Not surprisingly, the scarves were made of a silk produced in Bangkok by a company Conlan found on a ”Best Practices” tour.

Mrs. Bissell also worked frequently with Wayne Shusko. Shusko was recruited by Bissell as the general manager to lead The Park Hotel, and later to oversee development of the Ballantyne Resort Hotel. He played a vital role, responsible for overseeing operations and personnel, as well as contributing to its design. Now longtime friends, Bissell says that Shusko was a key person in the construction, upfit and start up of both the resort hotel and the corporate retreat overlooking the golf course, The Lodge.

Shusko said that the toughest sell in putting together the resort was The Spa at Ballantyne Resort, now one of its most famous amenities. “Smoky is not a spa person; he doesn’t really ‘get’ the idea. He finally said, ‘Listen, if you had to choose between the lodge and a spa, which would you choose?’ I explained to him, ‘Smoke, if you make me pick one, I am going to choose the spa.’ At the end of the conversation we ended up with both — in fact, we expanded the plans for the spa from 5,000 square feet to 16,000 square feet.”

Sara Bissell paid careful attention to the ladies’ spa area, where windows look out through crepe myrtles to the golf course fountain and white wicker chaises longues stretch out beside pitchers of iced cucumber water and delicate sprays of lavender. The spa’s steam rooms and saunas provide quiet resting places and the massage rooms are channeled with soft music and peopled with the best massage therapists in the business. From the time The Spa at Ballantyne Resort was up and running, it was only a short time before Condé Nast Johansens recognized it among its Top 5 Spas in North America, and its booking backlog began to strain capacity.

Offers Shusko, ”I think this story just goes to show that if you can back up your suggestions with solid facts that point to the bottom line,
you have Smoky Bissell’s support. He uses his assets very wisely, and doesn’t spend money just because he can. Everything has to be for the good of the customer, the community, and the staff — it is all about people with him.”

Another change in plans occurred with the Ballantyne Resort Hotel Clubhouse. Originally planned at only 1,500 square feet to house the pro shop, the design grew to 30,000 square feet to house a ballroom, meeting rooms and a kitchen. The clubhouse also includes a separate lounge and changing area within the women’s restrooms to accommodate the special needs of brides during the many weddings the resort hosts annually.

By the end of these plans, the resort footprint was an elongated U-shape. The spa entrance was installed on the far left, the hotel/resort entrance in the middle, and the ballroom/clubhouse to the right. Each has a separate entrance, but are connected as part of the whole.
Top: Ballantyne Resort Clubhouse.
Bottom: Ballantyne Totem on grounds of The Lodge.
A disconnected, yet principal part of the resort is The Lodge, a 35-room cedar and stone corporate retreat, nestled back in the pines of the golf course. Its décor patronizes a decidedly masculine taste with the accoutrements of a hunting lodge. Hunter green walls, elk antlers, mallards and leather bound books are common trappings, wrought iron and deep leather furnishings provide suggestions of leisure. A balcony with an English snooker table overlooks a mammoth wide screen television, while the conference facility has a 2,000-square-foot conference room with four breakout rooms and complete Internet connectivity.

The Lodge also provides 19 king bedrooms, 12 queens and four double rooms. Upon rising, guests can enjoy a cup of coffee on one of several rocking chairs resting on the spacious front porch and watch early golfers tee off. The Lodge provides a different kind of Ballantyne stay than the Resort, and is utilized primarily for leadership outings, executive meetings or social events. It is either 100 percent in use or completely empty, since the entire facility can be rented by only one group at a time.

All four components, the golf course, the spa, the hotel and the lodge, work symbiotically to affect a multi-tiered commitment to any ‘Stay’ requirement a visitor could ask for. Opened on September 5th, 2001, the Ballantyne Resort Hotel has provided a AAA Four-Diamond resource to travelers and local businesspeople, invited an incredible amount of attention, and brought momentum to Ballantyne as a whole.

In addition to its other accolades, The Ballantyne Resort Hotel was also designated as a prestigious Starwood Luxury Collection Hotel in May of 2005, ranked alongside the Phoenician in Arizona and the Palace Hotel in San Francisco.

Five years after its opening, Ballantyne Resort Hotel is as esteemed in its home as The Park Hotel became in SouthPark, and has become nationally recognized for its service and accommodations. It has become the crown jewel in Ballantyne proper, an area that has truly come of age.
The interplay between three crucial development features, Ballantyne Corporate Park, Ballantyne Resort Hotel, and the contiguous high-end residential properties, secured a formidable platform for the subsequent build-out of the area.

Comments Ned Curran, “When Crescent purchased its land for high-end homes, and Smoky came in and decided to do the business park, the two created what must be one of the boldest strokes in Charlotte real estate history.”

Creating a business park in close proximity with homes that would appeal to company executives was a significant milestone. Explains Bissell, “I had a meeting with the decision-maker of a major corporation looking to combine two offices in Charlotte. He came into our office, looked at the topographic model we had made of all 2,000 acres in Ballantyne, and as we made our spiel, he interrupted us and asked us to show him the location of his new home in Ballantyne Country Club. I did so while explaining the traffic patterns. He then asked me to put my finger on his Ballantyne home and hold it there while I placed a finger of my other hand on his proposed office site. Then, to my dismay, he quickly thanked us and went to his next appointment.”

“I was flabbergasted, thinking we had lost the deal,” continues Bissell. “But later we found out that the gentleman decided to choose our Ballantyne offices based in no small part on its proximity to his home.”

After Crescent Resources’ homes were constructed to accommodate corporate executives within the Ballantyne Country Club boundaries, several developers sensing the potential of the market began designs to accommodate the employees of the corporations.

Comments Ned Curran, “Once this started happening, we had a scenario where we could say to the boss, ‘Not only is your drive to work going to be under 10 minutes, but you can tell your employees that their drive will be under 10 minutes.’ By providing a residential option for everyone from the company heads to the entry-level assistant in close range of the business park, recruiting gets easier, relocation is easier, and productivity is improved by avoiding long commutes. It practically sells itself.”
The golf course and resort was another matter entirely. While the financial formula for the resort wasn’t nearly as promising, it added untold value to the area as a whole. Explains Curran, “When Sara and Smoky Bissell said that they were going to build the finest hotel in the market, it was a very bullish statement. One of the objectives it would fulfill was solidifying the quality of the submarket. The Ballantyne Resort matched other quality assets in the area, like the Ballantyne Country Club and several quality retail centers in development, which also solidified Ballantyne’s reputation for quality.

“The Resort Hotel became, and remains the standard bearer, of Ballantyne’s offerings and that extends to the service standards of the corporate park as well.”

He continues, “At the time, there was no way to look at a piece of paper and say that a resort hotel would generate the kind of return we wanted. There was the cost of building a luxury resort, then the cost of competing with ourselves against the Staybridge Suites and the Courtyard Marriott. But basically we hoped that by introducing a project of this scale and quality, the resort would appeal to a broader geographic area, as well as represent the top of three different price points designed for
three different needs.”

The reasoning made sense. A company a couple of hundred miles away would choose to have a retreat or conference at a resort with an 18-hole golf course close to a major city. Similarly, while that same company doesn’t want to pay for its relocating employees to stay in a luxury hotel for two weeks, it will use the Staybridge Suites for this purpose. Between the Courtyard Marriott and the Resort Hotel there were also appropriate accommodations for short-term stays for golf course guests, businesspeople, and everyday travelers desiring different price points.

Concludes Curran on the decision to build the Ballantyne Resort Hotel, "If you look at Resort performance alone, the financials might appear weak, but when you (rightly) gauge its performance by broader metrics and what it has added to Ballantyne as a whole, it has a been phenomenal success. The Resort Hotel’s presence increased our leasing momentum exponentially."

Of course, this is just what Smoky Bissell counted on. ‘In real estate, momentum is crucial,’ goes the Bissell refrain. The mere presence of bulldozers clearing monumental tracts of land on each side of the highway created quite a buzz. The buzz only continued once plans of the golf course and resort leaked out, and then crescendoed once people actually started experiencing the synergy of Ballantyne Corporate Park’s layout.

Since the project has evolved over the past 10 years, the momentum rests largely in the reputation of the corporate park and its ownership, as well as its constantly evolving amenities, and manifests itself in being able to build ‘on spec’ — an attribute many experts say is atypical of the Charlotte market. “With only two exceptions, AXA Equitable and Pinkerton, we have never known who our tenant was going to be as we started a building,” remarks Bissell.

Prospective leads have been drawn to Ballantyne Corporate Park by the credibility of major players like AXA Equitable, LendingTree and SPX, and the flexibility Ballantyne has demonstrated in accommodating companies’ emerging needs. As a result, The Bissell Companies has consistently had at least one building in development while the last existing occupancies are being leased. It has followed this formula through the park’s build out, and is currently in the process of completing the last of the buildings on its west side properties.

By offering the buildings’ large amount of space, generally over 100,000 square feet each on spec, the buildings are open to single or multi-tenant use. In addition to reducing the extra costs incumbent in build-to-suit projects, the flexible use of space provides allure for a variety of business models. This also allows Ballantyne to remain competitive with newly emerging properties adjacent to the healthy commercial environment it helped to create.

The financial blueprint of spec building has also proved successful. “I have never been scared of
bank debt, and we generally don’t involve other partners,” comments Smoky Bissell. “Our building formula made it possible for me to borrow against the buildings I already had to build new ones.” In the first 10 years, commercial office and medical buildings with a market value of approximately $450,000,000 have been constructed. Add to that three hotels, a lodge, a golf course and retail establishments and you have investments in excess of $650,000,000. Surmises Bissell, “Fortunately, the economy and the market have been in a continuous up-cycle for the past 15 years, so thus far the gamble has been a good one.”

“When construction began in 1996,” adds Curran, “we had reasonably low interest rates running at about five or six percent. So, if leasing came in underneath our expectations, it wasn’t extremely expensive to carry the properties, and we knew we could lower rental rates if we absolutely had to.”
“But,” he continues, “interest rates are generally low when jobs are low, so we had to balance the figures; office rates are based upon your capacity to fill them at a given time.”

Fortunately, Bissell’s instincts again proved right on the money. “We were dedicated to building a product that was on par with the quality delivered in SouthPark, and the Ballantyne Corporate Park properties were able to maintain rates to match. While we always have a contingency plan, we didn’t have to use it. The momentum supported our model,” says Curran.

Ten years later, Curran says the model works better than ever. “We make sure we always have inventory, and rates have been sustainable.”

Comments Clifton Coble, president of Bissell Development, “Mr. Bissell watches what the brokers are leasing, and when we get under 150,000 square feet of space, he invariably says, ‘It’s time to build!’”

Coble adds, “Spec building is a nervy, bold move. Industry people are constantly saying to me, ‘You guys are crazy building all that out there!’ It is really nice to be associated with these projects when everyone is just astounded by the results.”

There was a bump in the late 1990s, however, when there was a real concern about the new age of telecommuting potentially sabotaging the need for office parks. Would home-based PC’s and DSL make the office park obsolete?

The team again relied upon Bissell’s foresight as he dismissed this apprehension, and again Bissell prevailed. “Everybody was saying that large offices were going to be replaced by networks of home offices, but it has become clear that this plan doesn’t offer the same productivity at the end of the day. Telecommuting has become what is essentially an adjunct to traditional office environments,” comments Curran.

Curran contends that the conveniences provided by office environments offer something that workers cannot get away from. By example he cites mailrooms, networks, fast and reliable fax machines and copiers, scanners and other technological efficiencies which have made themselves to this point compulsory. Then too, there is the utility the traditional office space affords a company’s human resources and the organic environment it needs to sustain productivity.

“There is no question that the use of offices has evolved. No longer are we talking about simply jointed walls to hold equipment and faceless worker bees. Any modern business recognizes that the attribute that differentiates it from its competitors is the quality of the talent it can attract. This means the responsibility of any company is remaining highly sensitive and adaptive to the needs and wants of its talent pool.”
remarks Curran.

In today’s office environment, this means several things. Offices must be organized in a manner that facilitates the work to be done, in a style that employees find complementary to their work process. Often this means a creative, social work environment that functions to sustain development and reinforces the structure of an organization.

A progressive office environment must also be able to not only facilitate current technology, but also have the capacity to add-on as the business grows. In a real-time, real-inventory world, a business must also have some provision for surviving in the event of a major malfunction, like power outage, earthquakes, storms, terror attacks — the list goes on and on.

Curran says that businesses that understand this have already, or are in the process of, making plans for these contingencies. “A trend that we have been seeing for some time is offices becoming decentralized. Rather than having one corporate headquarters, we see companies opting for several smaller, yet substantial, offices.”

He continues, “We are also seeing the emergence of satellite offices. A company like Bank of America has its foundations firmly rooted in the uptown high-rise, but it also offers a satellite office in Ballantyne Corporate Park for employees to check e-mail, hold meetings and access company resources without having to drive back to the office at 9 p.m.”

While on the surface, plans for these new spaces might appear to be grounded in getting people to work more, it is important to recognize that it is the employees driving these changes. “Employers are playing to a lifestyle that people have come to expect. Most people realize that time is the new commodity, and they want to be able to have family time, have down time and enjoy life. Any company that doesn’t respect a worker’s right to seek a balanced quality of life has a good chance of being unpleasantly surprised,” offers Curran.

Which is why the area has been tagged the perfect place to “Live, Work, Play and Stay.” By providing optimal Class-A office space, close to several hotel options for traveling business folks, nearby a number of residential communities of different types, and integrated with retail and entertainment amenities both inside and outside the park proper, Ballantyne has become a self-sustaining community. Add to that the massive infrastructure and the momentum that the original developments continue to bring to the area, and it is easy to see how the Corporate Park, Resort Hotel and Golf Course and adjacent residential communities are the trifecta that launched Ballantyne into its own submarket — perhaps, according to some people, even its own edge city.
chapter X

BISSELL BRAND OF QUALITY

Whether one is speaking of the four-star Ballantyne Resort Hotel, its award-winning spa and golf course, or the architecture and amenities of the Ballantyne Corporate Park, what has come to be known as Bissell’s brand of quality transcends expectations.

Comments LS3P architect Jeff Floyd, “It is sincerely difficult to articulate the value that a Bissell project, especially one of this magnitude, brings with it. His attention to every little detail eventually ricochets off every layer of an undertaking, and before you know it, the entire thing just glows. It’s his stamp.”

In terms of the corporate park, the Class-A buildings boast expansive lobbies, immaculately-maintained restrooms clothed in marble and stone with touchless appliances, and office spaces whose customized layouts are outfitted with the latest high-tech amenities. The buildings are erected with careful attention to detail in terms of materials and safety, and rest amid greenscapes that a park and recreation planner would envy.

Jeff Floyd was responsible for the architectural brainstorms that brought unity and artistic brandishments to these buildings, and Bissell recruited another seasoned artist to add life, color, and ‘next level’ qualities to the Ballantyne landscape. Nationally renowned landscape architect George Betsill became responsible for the flora embroidering the park grounds.

Betsill, a long time friend of the Bissell’s who engaged him to create designs for their SouthPark properties, carries several impressive projects in his design portfolio, not the least of which include the famous luxury Greenbrier Resort in West Virginia and the Eseeola Lodge Resort in Linville, North Carolina.

Apparently Mr. Betsill is long on knowledge and short on compromise, and that is one of the reasons that, in addition to hiring him, Smoky Bissell also named a building after him. Comments Clifton Coble, “Mr. Betsill is yet
another example of the colorful and inspira-
tional leaders you meet when you work for Mr.
Bissell. He shares the same attention to detail
and the same emphasis on quality, which is one
of the things that characterizes all of Mr.
Bissell’s long term relationships.”

Mr. Betsill also shares Bissell’s penchant for
humility. Says Betsill, “It’s hard to describe the
process of what I do, especially for a project this
large. What I can tell you is that we broke down
the whole park into small units according to the
topography, the footprints of the buildings, and
the routes throughout the park, and then each
place began to tell its own story. It’s not unlike a
painting. Eventually the design expresses itself
through the artist, not the other way around.”

Nearly every quarter, George Betsill arrives
in Ballantyne to do a checkup, during which he
orders more trees planted, bushes yanked, or
flowers added. Coble admits to simply following
Betsill around and doing what he says. “I have a
special line item in my budget just for Mr.
Betsill, because what Betsill says goes.”

Floyd also cites Betsill’s contributions as a
large component of the place-making agenda
envisioned for the park. “Every ‘place’ we have
set aside has a function and an element that
defines that function. The first building on the
lake had a natural water feature that made our
job easy, as water naturally focuses people. Mr.
Betsill accommodated the water feature with
plants and trees that brought out its character.”
Similarly, the Brixham Green Buildings boast a
fountain and a formal lawn with dogwood, crepe
myrtles and flowerbeds. Cullman Park is marked
by a waterfall, bronze cranes and large boulders
surrounding a treed mulch bed. Benches sit
across from tall grasses and azaleas face the gen-
tle slope across the creek.

Says Floyd, “We route the idea, and Mr.
Betsill brings it to life. Like Mr. Bissell, every-
thing that Betsill does appears inspired. There’s
just no other word for it.”

These careful touches are motivated by a
desire that extends beyond beauty for its own
sake, to the people who will eventually enjoy it.
“Everything in Ballantyne is designed for the community,” says Clifton Coble. “The plan was created so that people will have the opportunity to eat their lunch outside with a friend or spouse, visit the their child at school next door, or get out and take a walk. These are places we have created in the park, so the community can enjoy the area that they spend so much time in.”

Tom Pizzo, president of Bissell Property Management Services, arranges events allowing several local restaurants to serve tenants under a white tent several times during the summer months. Up to 3,300 people have come together at once to mix and enjoy the outdoors while they eat their lunch. Sidewalk vendors are encouraged to apply for permits in the spring and summer, and small festivals are not unusual.

Annually, The Bissell Companies also host the Shull Cup, a putting contest for team members assembled from the corporate park, named after the buildings’ property manager who conceived it. The corporate park is also home to the YMCA’s Ballantyne 5K Family Fun Run, which has become a huge attraction for active families. These events provide entertainment as well as a carefully nurtured sense of unity and community, and are being embraced by tenants pursuing their own traditions and company events in the corporate park.

Pizzo, who has been dubbed ‘protector of all things in Ballantyne Corporate Park,’ also has the dubious charge of caring for “The Bulls.” The enormous 2,000-pound bronze bulls were transported through major interstates from New Mexico to Ballantyne, and corralled through center city Charlotte. Created by lauded animal sculptor, Peter Woytuk, each of the three bovines is lovingly nestled into position and more than occasionally straddled by young children visiting the park. The animal sculptures were adopted by Bissell to clearly exemplify his company’s enthusiasm for the future. A plaque resting at the foot of The Bulls clearly reads, "Bullish on our families. Bullish on our work. Bullish on our country. Add value in all you do.”
Tom Pizzo and Ballantyne tenants at the 2006 Tenant Spring Fling, The Shull Cup Trophy, and the 2006 YMCA Ballantyne Fun Run.
After a long journey, Ballantyne Corporate Park’s 2,000-pound bronze bulls are welcomed home.

“The day the bulls came to town, I walked into my office to find a bronze care manual for them laying on my desk. So, then I knew... I’d be taking care of The Bulls.” Pizzo adds, “People like to kid me about it, but the Bissells went to a lot of effort to get those creatures here after they had seen them first at Hotchkiss School and later Sante Fe. So, I suppose it should be considered an honor,” he chuckles.

Comments friend and advisor David Conlan about The Bulls, “It was my job to figure out how to get those animals here. Because, I know that when Smoky Bissell says to make this kind of thing happen, he has been thinking about it for a good, long time and has a definite plan in mind.”

Conlan was also tapped to formalize the logistics for another pet project — the installation of the tuk-tuk. While visiting The Oriental Hotel in Bangkok, Thailand, the Bissells and the Conlans saw a tuk-tuk for sale. This unusual hybrid of car and bicycle was once used to pick up and deliver items to hotel guests from around Bangkok. To Bissell, The Oriental Hotel represented the epitome of service and the display is used by the Bissell Companies to symbolize the
quality of service visitors may expect. Bissell says, “It is my piece of the rock.”

While the Bissell tuk-tuk now rests in a conference space in The Bissell Companies’ headquarters, it was for a while one of the more discussed pieces on display in the Ballantyne Resort Hotel, and one of many distinctive touches in the hotel working to drive home the Bissell commitment to quality.

But no display exhibits this commitment more personally than Sara Bissell’s commission of Thomas Vieth for nineteen paintings to adorn the hotel lobby. Watercolor, sketches and oils of venues such as Freedom and Marshall Park, the carrefour of Trade and Tryon, Charlotte-Douglas Airport’s Queen Charlotte, The Mint Museum, the Charlotte skyline and the resort itself, connect Ballantyne with its Charlotte roots in a colorful, jocular homily.

Sara Bissell also handpicked special pieces from her travels, and generously displays them in any room, or hangs them on just about any
The carrefour of Trade and Tryon, Charlotte-Douglas Airport’s ‘Queen Charlotte,’ Ballantyne Commons East, and Freedom Park — commissioned artwork by Tom Vieth.
bare wall she can find. "Mrs. Bissell’s commitment to a beautiful environment is as powerful as Mr. Bissell’s is for a quality experience. Between the two, nothing gets overlooked," comments friend, Wayne Shusko.

Not even from the air, it appears. At one point, when Smoky Bissell repurchased the 108 acres of State Farm land when that company chose not to build, the developer had an idea. Bissell commissioned students from a neighboring state agriculture college to determine if the soil would yield corn. When it was determined that corn wouldn’t grow, but wheat would, in went seed for over 100 acres of wheat.

Next, Bissell commissioned a surveyor to stake out the Ballantyne emblem, a stylized letter B, in the wheat field and had a tractor cut a swath that would reveal the Ballantyne B logo. Recalls Clifton Coble, "I mean really, who thinks this way? Mr. Bissell isn’t just sitting around all day — he is hammered with meetings and decisions, appearances and more meetings, and somehow he finds the time to envision the Ballantyne logo in a field?"

Incidentally, the wheat field B, like all of Bissell’s projects, was not an exercise in extravagance. The field was directly in line with the flight path of planes passing overhead the corporate park en route to Charlotte Douglas International Airport. Some would call this ‘extreme guerilla marketing,’ some call it genius, while still others might call it crazy, but the legendary wheat field B logo functioned like a giant arrow screaming, “Corporate travelers: Look here!” Even the Bissell’s home time, which is religiously guarded from work, is still hostage to the occasional nagging brainstorm. Bissell’s bedstand is apparently girded with the appropriate artillery, the omnipresent sticky note pad and a pen, and a clipboard so that he can jot ideas down in the dark, without disturbing Sara.

A designer once famously said that "God is in the details," and, if this is the case, Ballantyne has won its admonition of being ‘divine.’ Between the initial vision earmarked by Johnny Harris’ formidable four corners monuments, and Sara and Smoky Bissell’s unrelenting execution through their carefully chosen business and personal relationships, Ballantyne has become a living tribute to the people who inspired the
project and those who helped make it reality.

In fact, many of the roads, buildings and parks within Ballantyne Corporate Park have been thoughtfully dedicated to the people who have had major influence in the Bissell’s lives. Plaques dot the entrances to buildings with names of early teachers, mentors and friends with an explanation of their contribution.

Perhaps one of the most prominent and most-inquired about road names, John J. Delaney Drive, was dedicated to Bissell’s long-time friend and trusted advisor. He was an engineer/developer who was one of Bissell’s first real estate mentors and whom Bissell says, “Taught me everything I know.”
The honor of dedicating the buildings is not in name only. When the steel skeleton for each building has been completed, The Bissell Companies indulges in a 'topping out' ceremony. A luncheon is hosted for all the laborers in the project, tee shirts with the building name are handed out, and a final beam inscribed with the name of the person of honor is erected. In April of 2006, landscape architect, George Betsill, was on hand to consume his fair share of fish and chips, southern coleslaw and calabash shrimp with a host of 100-plus construction staffers working on 'his building.' Per tradition, the spruce-topped beam, a totem of workplace safety, luck and prosperity, was raised to its final resting place on the top story of his namesake.

Despite being pleased and flattered, most of the honorees (much like Bissell himself) exhibit genuine modesty and seem almost uncomfortable with the attention. Says Betsill, "It's a funny thing to have all this fuss. You really don't know what to think about having something that will be around for so long, named after you. You just know that it is a very nice gesture, and a significant one, to be in the midst of all these hard working, dedicated and talented people, and be recognized in this way."

David Conlan's name is formally heralded on Conlan Circle, the gateway to the retail section and restaurants across from the medical buildings portion of the park, and informally on the eighth hole (the number one handicap hole) of the Ballantyne Golf Course which has been called "Conlan's Revenge." Conlan, too, is not keen on being singled out for his contributions. "I asked him not to do that," he says simply.

There is a silent understanding that the long-term relationships that Bissell develops in his enterprises are ones of mutual respect, and that that respect is not confined to station, title, industry or education. Rather, it formalizes a symbiosis of similar values with regard to qual-
Right and top: Chandler Building and its dedication.
Above: Smoky Bissell’s friend and mentor, John J. Delaney.
ity, honesty, integrity and loyalty, not to mention a gritty work ethic.

Explains Clifton Coble, "Everyone knows that working for Mr. Bissell is working with Mr. Bissell. He is right out there shoveling snow off the sidewalks after a storm, bringing the guys coffee, and walking up to them to get their feeling on how a job is going and to see if they have everything they need. He knows everybody’s name, and they all know they are valued."

It is the little things, like calling these folks by name, bringing them coffee, and treating them to lunch that makes the job pleasant. It is the big things, like commitment to their safety, the appreciation of the work they do, and the sense that they are part of the whole, that is said to define a Bissell project from any other.
Over the past 10 years, Ballantyne has fallen into place piece by piece, to find itself on the verge of becoming its own “edge city.”

Edge city is a recently coined term to denote a “relatively new concentration of business, shopping and entertainment outside a traditional urban area, in what had recently been a residential suburb or semi-rural community.” A term invented and popularized by Washington Post writer Joel Garreau, the edge city is considered by many as having replaced urban downtowns as a standard feature of 20th century development.

Garreau contends that an edge city must have more than five million square feet of office space, which is precisely what The Bissell Companies’ Ballantyne property has been zoned for. It must also “have more than 600,000 square feet of retail space; more jobs than bedrooms; must be perceived by the population as one place; and must have been nothing like a city 30 years earlier.” Ballantyne is ambitiously working toward fulfilling all these parameters.

Spurred by Ballantyne Corporate Park, its high profile tenants and voluminous work force, as well as the draw of the adjacent Ballantyne Resort Hotel and Golf Course, new office parks, retail centers and outlying residential components, the Ballantyne area at the very least has become independent of uptown Charlotte, and created its own submarket.

Yet the spirit of Ballantyne’s development as characterized by The Bissell Companies is one of collaboration rather than competition. Remarks Ned Curran, “The city’s health is our health, and we work in earnest to make changes and create new ideas to tackle the challenges incumbent with a rapidly growing region.”

Since Ballantyne’s initial planning stages, Johnny Harris worked closely with state and local governments and carried on in the tradition of his grandfather “Good Roads Governor

— Jeff Floyd

*Edge City definition and parameters as defined in Joel Garreau’s Edge City, A New Frontier, New York: Doubleday, copyright 1991
Morrison” to devise road and zoning plans that would outfit the region for the growth he foresaw. The infrastructure to which he committed his considerable resources freed the city from investing heavily in Ballantyne’s early development.

As the area has grown, increased emphasis has continued on managing traffic, which has become a challenge for the Charlotte region as a whole. All new development plans, including budding concepts for the east side of Ballantyne, make this major consideration a top priority. Efforts are constantly underway to maintain the ease of delivery from home to work and between points of interest, to develop practical parking solutions, and to minimize the environmental impact of idling vehicles. Plans for expanded roadways have been in the pipeline for several years, as have discussions for mass transit.

However, the roads within Ballantyne itself are not as much of a challenge as the congestion on neighboring Interstate 485, which is still years from completion. While Ballantyne Corporate Park was developed with circumferential road designs that make accessing areas within the submarket easy, the heavily travelled interstates have provided a challenge since increasing numbers of commuters must use them to get to and from downtown and other
emerging suburban centers.

Says Smoky Bissell, “This is a task we deal with every day. We work with the city closely to try to come up with the answers that will take the congestion off of these roads. One of the best things that we can try to do from where we sit is not make the problem worse — and that is to not channel a bunch more traffic into those roads. That, and work on getting the roads that were planned built.”

Just as traffic has increased, so has regional competition. South of Ballantyne are burgeoning new office centers encouraged by Bissell’s example. Just across the border in South Carolina, incentives threaten to lure some prospects away from Ballantyne Corporate Park into areas like Lancaster County. However, these developments at present do not offer the consistency of quality and infrastructure Ballantyne can provide.

Explains Ned Curran, “We attract a certain kind of company; one that recognizes the value of its people and wants the level of service and product we are known for. If an employer is
simply looking for office space and places no premium on immediate interstate access and the quality of life aspects of a location, then Ballantyne will simply not emerge as a competitively-priced alternative. In an effort to induce employers to locate to the south of Ballantyne, governing bodies have offered lucrative financial incentives to compensate for key elements missing from some office product offerings. While most companies find the lure of such incentive dollars to be compelling, they typically ultimately reject them in favor of Ballantyne because they perceive the Ballantyne Corporate Park to be a much better place from which to recruit and retain their most valuable asset — their employees."

What today’s employees are insisting on more and more is a good quality of life, and Ballantyne seeks to provide that. Comments Jeff Floyd, "Smoky Bissell’s overall vision for Ballantyne has been entirely driven by his character and the values he represents. A lot of that has to do with concern and respect — for the people who work in his buildings, who drive through the corporate park, and who work with him. That respect also extends to the land, its topography and its integrity, and for the process of design and development as a collaboration. He truly wants to create something lasting, of value and for enjoyment."

Amenities continue to enrich Ballantyne. The Ballantyne YMCA Express was dedicated in 2005 on Ballantyne Commons Parkway, and The Goddard School for Early Development has provided a sterling resource for parents to educate their children close to their workplace. Biking paths, parks, stocked fishing ponds and walking paths traverse Ballantyne’s boundaries and have become spots for families to visit on weekends as well as during the week. In the surrounding area, retail centers have exploded, providing high-end retail and gourmet eateries aside fast food fare and convenience stores. The elementary, middle and high schools fed by
Ballantyne are some of the most highly regarded in the CMS school system, and several private schools are within a short drive. Many churches have also made the Ballantyne area their spiritual center.

On August 15th, 2006, Ballantyne Corporate Park celebrated the first 10 years since its groundbreaking, and has achieved what most experts claimed would take 30 or 40 years. During that time there has been much progress in the area, and a lot of challenges seeking it. But in the words of Smoky Bissell, “Plink, plink, plink — water goes through rock.” The Bissell Companies keep in hot pursuit of creating the next best place faster.

The last building on the west side of Ballantyne Corporate Park has been topped out, completing that portion of the original master plan. Now, territory on the east side is fair game. Bissell’s now well-seasoned team of developers and his network of experts plan to bring the west side experience of the past 10 years to the table to construct plans for the next decade.

Bissell himself admits to being surprised at the outcome at Ballantyne Corporate Park so far. “I never in a million years thought I would be sitting here 10 years later on an 535-acre office park, a golf course and three hotels to boot. Things just worked out that way.”

While the east side plans were yet to be released at the time of Ballantyne Corporate Park’s anniversary date, everyone is certain that Bissell has a vision that will again reveal itself over time. What the future could hold is anybody’s guess.
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In Honor of Tina and Rusty Chandler.

Good friends. Leaders and role models whose influence has benefited thousands at the secondary school level.

THE RICHARDSON BUILDING
December 2000

In Honor of Ros and Jerry Richardson.
Good friends. A team who has taken our community to a new level.

THE SIMMONS BUILDING
March 2004

In Honor Of George E. Simmons.
A strong leader whose legacy serves more families each year.

THE CHANDLER BUILDING
June 2003

In Honor of Tina and Rusty Chandler.
Good friends. Leaders and role models whose influence has benefited thousands at the secondary school level.

THE HIXON BUILDING
September 2004

In Honor of Joseph M. Hixon & George C. Hixon.
Good friends — environment a priority; philanthropy a byword.
In Honor of Wyatt E. Harper, Jr.
Commanding Officer
USS Myles C. Fox
(DDR-829)
1960-1961

A Demanding Mentor.

In Honor of Stacy F. Gibson.
Member of the Ballantyne Resort Golf Course Design Review Committee.
Friend, supporter and avid golfer.

In Honor of Gary P. Frenette, M.D., Ph.D.
A caring giant, brilliant and of warm heart.

In Honor of James B. Hall, M.D.
Of bright spirit, keen interest and unparalleled ability.

In Honor of Wyatt E. Harper, Jr.
Commanding Officer
USS Myles C. Fox (DDR-829)
1960-1961
A Demanding Mentor.
In Honor Of
George Betsill,
ASLA.

A creative mind,
unparalleled sense of
humor with a touch 
that continues daily 
to enhance our 
surroundings.

In Honor Of
Winslow
Morrison Harris.
A favorite niece, great 
dance partner and a 
fine young lady.

In Honor Of
George Betsill, 
ASLA.
A creative mind, 
unparalleled sense of 
humor with a touch 
that continues daily 
to enhance our 
surroundings.

In Honor of
Emily and John 
Crawford.

Good Friends.
He, a great sportsman, 
and she, a most 
creative woman.
Bullish on our families.
Bullish on our work.
Bullish on our country.
Add value in all you do.

May the serenity of this park add daily to the lives of those who live and work here.
**Dedicated to Edgar and Louise Cullman.**
Great friends and contributors to the good of all.

CULLMAN PARK
March 2001

In Honor Of Rose and Bailey Patrick.
A strong voice in the land use at Ballantyne. Good friends, great children. Charlotte is a better place because of them.

PATRICK PARK
May 2005

Bullish on our families. Bullish on our work. Bullish on our country. Add value in all you do.

OUR PARK
February 2005

In Honor of James M. Horton, M.D.
A masterful, meticulous and caring professional.

HORTON PARK
March 2006
pre 1996

HBH (Harris Bissell Harris) inherits 1,500 acres and purchases 700 acres of wooded lands.

Johnny Harris and Terry Knotts develop Ballantyne Community Master Plan and obtain planning commission approval.

Residential parcel sold to Crescent Resources; proceeds used to construct the infrastructure for Ballantyne Community (roads, sewer, water, electricity, etc.)

Four corner monuments constructed to make a statement for the new Ballantyne Community.

Sold 108 acres to State Farm Insurance for a regional center and possible hotel development.

1996

| Jan | Bissell acquires from HBH 414 acres designated for commercial development in the master plan |
| Aug | Ballantyne One groundbreaking; first commercial office building |
| Nov | Clearing for golf course construction begins |

1997

| Jul | Ballantyne One office building completed – 100,500 sq. ft. |
| Aug | Dana Rader Golf School ground breaking; building completed in October |
| Sep | Phase I Resort Clubhouse ground breaking |
| Dec | Repurchased 108 acres previously sold to State Farm Insurance |

Total office buildings
sq. ft. placed in service 100,500
Cumulative sq. ft. 100,500

1998

| Feb | AXA Group office building completed – 169,900 sq. ft. |
| May | Resort clubhouse completed; golf course opens |
| Jul | Ballantyne Two office building completed – 102,000 sq. ft. |
| Nov | BLS Partners office building completed – 30,000 sq. ft. |
| Nov | Courtyard Marriott completed – 90 room hotel. |
| Dec | Ballantyne Resort Golf Course named best new course in NC for 1998 |
| Dec | Wachovia Branch Bank opened |

Total office buildings
sq. ft. placed in service 301,900
Cumulative sq. ft. 402,400

1999

| May | Petro Express, gasoline and variety store opened |
| Jul | Brixham Green One office building completed – 100,600 sq. ft. |
| Jul | Corporate Villas (6) office buildings completed – 42,000 sq. ft. |
| Aug | ESPN office building completed – 37,800 sq. ft. |
| Sep | Ballantyne Resort Hotel ground breaking |
| Oct | Lending Tree office building completed – 37,800 sq. ft. |
| Nov | Teamvest office building completed – 37,800 sq. ft. |

Total office buildings
sq. ft. placed in service 357,200
Cumulative sq. ft. 759,600

2000

| Sep | Cullman office building completed – 105,000 sq. ft. |
| Dec | Richardson office building completed – 90,000 sq. ft. |

Total office buildings
sq. ft. placed in service 195,000
Cumulative sq. ft. 954,600
2001

Mar  Staybridge Suites completed
      – 118 room hotel.
May  Brixham Green Three office building completed
      – 102,000 sq. ft.
Aug  Adams Restaurant opened
Sep  Resort Hotel completed
     – 214 room resort hotel
Total office buildings
     sq. ft. placed in service 102,000
Cumulative sq. ft. 1,056,600

2002

Jan  SPX ‘build to suit’ office building completed
     – 104,700 sq. ft.
Apr  The Lodge completed
     – 35 room executive retreat and tennis complex.
Apr  The Spa at Ballantyne Resort completed
     – 16,500 sq. ft.
Jun  Bank of America Branch Bank opened
Total office buildings
     sq. ft. placed in service 104,700
Cumulative sq. ft. 1,161,300

2003

Jun  Chandler office building completed
     – 125,000 sq. ft.
Aug  Medical One office building completed
     – 38,000 sq. ft.
Aug  Medical Two office building completed
     – 38,000 sq. ft.
Aug  Allen Tate office building completed
     – 24,100 sq. ft.
Total office buildings
     sq. ft. placed in service 225,100
Cumulative sq. ft. 1,386,400

2004

Jan  BB&T Branch Bank opened
Mar  Simmons office building completed
     – 125,000 sq. ft.
Sep  Hixon office building completed
     – 125,000 sq. ft.
Nov  CVS Pharmacy opened
Dec  Hall office building completed
     – 76,000 sq. ft.
Dec  Frenette office building completed
     – 76,000 sq. ft.
Dec  Gibson office building completed
     – 76,000 sq. ft.
Total office buildings
     sq. ft. placed in service 478,000
Cumulative sq. ft. 1,864,400

2005

Feb  “The Bulls” Arrive
May  Dikadee’s Restaurant opened
May  Starwood Hotels Luxury Collection affiliation
Sep  Goddard School opened
Sep  Retail/restaurant complex opened
Oct  Backyard Burgers opened
Nov  Flat Rock Grill opened
Nov  Harper office building completed
     – 48,000 sq. ft.
Dec  Winslow office building completed
     – 48,000 sq. ft.
Total office buildings
     sq. ft. placed in service 96,000
Cumulative sq. ft. 1,960,400

2006

Jan  Retail complex opens
Dec  Sherrill office building completed
     – 140,000 sq. ft.
Dec  Betsill office building completed
     – 140,000 sq. ft.
Dec  Crawford office building completed
     – 125,000 sq. ft.
Total office buildings
     sq. ft. placed in service 405,000
Cumulative sq. ft. 2,365,400

10 YEARS OF PROGRESS
appendix III

STAGES OF CONSTRUCTION

December 2, 2005

January 26, 2006

February 1, 2006

February 27, 2006

March 8, 2006

March 29, 2006
BETSILL AND SHERRILL BUILDINGS

April 24, 2006
May 12, 2006
May 30, 2006
June 15, 2006
June 30, 2006
September 11, 2006

betsill and sherrill buildings
THE FIRST 10 YEARS...

“ALL I HAD IN MY MIND WAS, ‘THIS IS A BLANK CANVAS — DON’T SCREW IT UP!’”

H.C. ‘SMOKY’ BISSELL