Prominent New England course owner Friel dies

NASHUA, N.H. — Phillip J. Friel Jr., 83, a former golf pro who owned and operated 13 golf courses in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, died here Aug. 30.

Friel was born in Boston and served in the U.S. Army during World War II before becoming the pro at Woburn (Mass.) Country Club (CC). He later worked as head pro at Bellevue Country Club in Melrose, Mass., and Nashua (N.H.) Country Club.

He enjoyed considerable success as a golfer, competing in seven PGA championships and winning the New England PGA as well as the Maine and New Hampshire Opens.

But he had his greatest impact on the New England golf scene as a course developer, owner and operator. While the head pro at Nashua CC, he designed and built Greenmeadow Golf Club in Hudson, N.H., in 1960.

He and his sons — Phillip, Thomas and David — went on to design, build and acquire numerous courses throughout New England.

In addition to Greenmeadow, Friel Golf Management’s Massachusetts operations include Beverly Golf and Tennis, Cape Cod CC in Hyannis, and Hampden CC in New Hampshire. New Hampshire courses include CC of New Hampshire in North Sutton, Overlook Golf Club (GC) in Hollis, Pheasant Ridge GC in Gilford, Souhegan Woods GC in Amherst, Waumbek GC in Jefferson, Whip-Poor-Will GC in Hudson, White Mountain GC in Ashland, and World Cup Golf Center in Hudson; and Foster (R.L.) CC.

“He was a very thorough person in terms of what he saw and wanted done on a golf course,” said Chuck Welch, head superintendent at Back Bay GC in Manchester, Mass. “He was one of the most gracious people I ever met.”

Jeff Brown, head superintendent at Souhegan Woods GC in Amherst, said, “He had a good eye for what needed to be changed to make a golf course more playable for the average golfer. He was one of the most gracious people I ever meet.”

“He was always reading articles about grass and was a great one for experimenting,” Brown said. “He was always interested in finding new ways to do something on the golf course. He never wanted you to fertilize 18 greens the same way. He’d have us fertilize half a green this way and half that way to see what worked best. As long as you worked with him, he was always loyal to his superintendents.

“Well, if you listened to him and had a bad year, he didn’t use that as an excuse to fire you. He really cared about people. He’ll be missed.”

Friel’s sons continue to operate the family business.