

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.



Phillip Friel Jr.

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 Hatchville, and Hampden CC; 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.I.) 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 Nonesuch River Golf Club in Scarborough, Maine, who worked for Friel at Sable Oaks Golf Club (a former Friel property) in nearby South Portland.

"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 met."

Jeff Brown, head superintendent at Souhegan Woods in Amherst, N.H., worked for Friel most of the past 25 years.

"He was always reading articles about grass and was a great one for experimenting," Brown said. "He always wanted to find 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 very loyal to his superintendents..."

"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.



Left to right, Norm Pelletier, Phil Friel, Pete Drown and Jeff Brown.

Friel remembered by those he helped

Editor's note: Jeffrey Brown is superintendent at Souhegan Woods Golf Course in Amherst, N.H. Golf Course News asked him to write this article shortly after the recent death (see obituary at left) of Phil Friel. Brown was one of a group of five teenaged boys — Brown, his brother Mickey, Peter Drown, Bill Andrews and Greg Misodulakis — who were introduced to the game at Friel's Green Meadow Country Club in Hudson, N.H. a quarter of a century ago. "We grew up playing golf together at Mr. Friel's course and ended up in the golf business mainly because of him," Brown said.

By JEFFREY BROWN

It's difficult to put 25 years of friendship and golf experiences into a few words.

My first encounter with Mr Friel was at age 12, when he showed me the way off the course for spending too much time hunting

for lost balls in the woods. I think Peter and Mickey had similar experiences. Mr. Friel kicked us off so many times, he finally gave up and offered us all jobs.

Billy and Greg grew up on the other side of town at a semiprivate course called Whip-Poor-Will, which Mr. Friel later bought. Billy, who eventually became a professional golfer, began taking golf lessons from Mr. Friel at age 15. According to Billy: "My father knew I loved golf and wanted to be a golf pro. So he talked Mr. Friel into giving me lessons."

Greg met Mr. Friel for the first time at a golf clinic held at Green Meadow. We were laughing at how many times Mister came up to us on the driving range, grabbed our left hands and turned them over. After every session he would chuckle and say "Don't you write this stuff down?"

In the mid-1970s, the five of us played

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Valid complaints elude even the pros

Editor's note: This is a response to articles in the September issue regarding the drought plaguing the Northeast.

To the editor:

When the superintendents of the Northeast Region golf clubs try and explain to their members how they were affected by the prolonged drought, their members may point to the comments by Lee Janzen, in the *Chicago Tribune*, during the PGA which stated that "bad weather is no excuse for not having perfect greens."

His comments and other similar ones by a few other complainers will hold more weight than the golf course superintendent's valid reasoning. My question to Tiger Woods would be: "How can you shoot 10 under par, win the event and then complain about the course?"

Gary Grigg, CGCS, MG
Naples, Fla.

Interns and the learning curve

To the editor:

I couldn't agree more with Terry Buchen's article about turf students and assistant superintendents. As usual, Terry enlightens us with an excellent article.

Personally, starting at the bottom and working at low-budget golf courses has been a valuable asset in this profession. One needs to be very savvy, learn a number of skills and work quite hard to produce a quality playing surface when not having all the tools. We have also heard from interns at our course who have

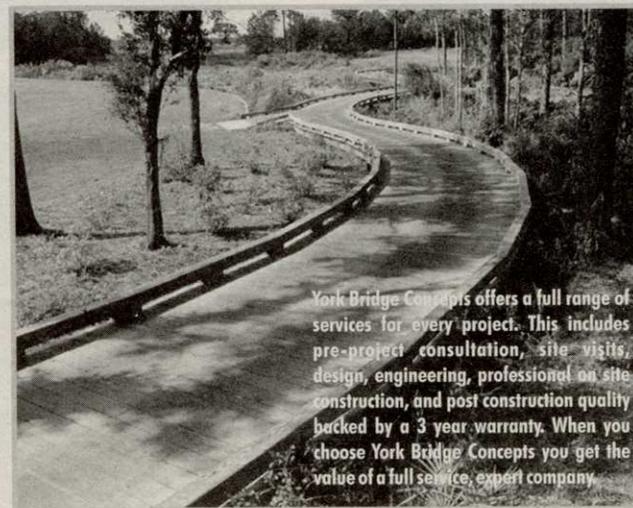
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Friends remember Friel

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on the same high school golf team. Mr. Friel would always make himself available to us while we practiced after school. Greg recalled how, "Mr. Friel would see me at the range. He'd come over and ask 'How's it going.' Then always 'Let me see you hit one.' Those were some of the best days of our lives."

We were all very competitive and liked beating one another. We still do today. We won the Tri-City Tournament one year, with Peter making a key putt on the last hole to give us the title by a single stroke. Mr. Friel can take some credit for that putt.

By the late 1970s we were all working for Mr. Friel at Green Meadow. His nephew, Dennis Friel, was the superintendent. Dennis taught us the techniques he and his uncle had perfected for growing grass. We can all still remember Mr. Friel riding his mini bike around while checking out the course.

By the early 1980s our careers had begun to take shape. Peter became superintendent at Green Meadow. I was in college and working as Peter's assistant. Mickey was contemplating turf school.

Greg was the assistant pro at the Whip. Billy had graduated from college and was working as the assistant superintendent at Wentworth-by-the-Sea in Portsmouth while contemplating turning pro. The following year, Mickey, Greg and I enrolled at the University of Massachusetts' turf school.

After graduation, Greg returned to Green Meadow as Peter's assistant. Mickey came to Texas to work for me at Austin Country Club (ACC), where we were both fortunate to meet and befriend the late Harvey Penick, the longtime pro who coached Tom Kite and Ben Crenshaw and wrote "*The Little Red Book*."

The turf experience and knowledge of the game we gained from Mr. Friel while at Green Meadow helped us prepare ACC for the Harvey Penick Invitational.

While Mickey and I were in Texas, and Peter and Greg were running Green Meadow, Billy was working at becoming a golf pro.

"It was Mr. Friel," Billy recalled, "who called the golf director at John D. MacArthur Golf Club [in West Palm Beach, Fla.] and secured my golf pro apprenticeship."

I returned to New Hampshire in the mid-1980s and began work-

ing again for Mr. Friel. Mickey had taken the assistant superintendent's job at Haverhill CC. Billy was the golf pro at Rutland (Vt.) CC. Greg had returned to his roots, taking the superintendent's post at Whip-Poor-Will.

Over the years, our professional and personal lives have

continued to cross. We have shared jobs, worked together, and helped one another. We are friends who share two things in common — the love of the game and the dearest admiration for a man who helped us turn that love into successful careers. Mr. Friel is gone.

But he will always be one of us.

He taught us the basics of growing grass and what it takes

to run a golf course. He taught us the game, the swing, how to work the ball. Without him there never would have been a Green Meadow.

Peter and I are still superintendents in the Friel organization — Peter at Overlook Golf Club in Hollis, N.H., and me at Souhegan Woods. Mickey is superintendent at Dublin (N.H.) Lake Golf Club. Greg, who was a superintendent for more than 15

years, has become a salesman for Tom Irwin Inc., a golf course equipment distributor. Billy is head pro at Nashua Country Club.

It's nice to have us all back home, near Green Meadow, where our careers began. But something is missing.

"Things will never be the same," Peter said shortly after Mr. Friel's passing.

He's right. ▶

