

Pristine Prestwick: A Championship Venue



If you visited the quiet little town of Woodbury, Minnesota 30 years ago you probably would never have guessed that it would become the very definition of suburbia. With no downtown and acres upon acres of farmland, it was the definition of rural. What a difference 30 years makes. Woodbury has grown from a tiny blip on the edge of St. Paul to a 70,000 person super-suburb, and perhaps the heart of its growth is the Wedgewood Sub-division and its crown jewel the Prestwick Golf Club- host to the 2013 MGCSA Championship.

In its infancy, Prestwick was known as Wedgewood Valley Golf Club. The original idea of the golf course came

from a man named Norb Anderson. It was Anderson who dreamed and executed the process of procuring a golf course in Woodbury. However, the ball really got rolling when the Minnesota Mutual insurance company purchased the project and designed Minnesota's first planned golf course/residential community. That plan would become the standard across the metro area in the decades to come.

Wedgewood opened in 1985 and was designed by a host of contributing architects but the main layout was by Anderson. It opened as a public golf course that provided unlimited play memberships and remains a public course to this day. It regularly hosts outside tournaments while



By Dave Kazmierczak CGCS

Photo credit Dave Kazmierczak, CGCS

preserving a country club feel for its regular play customers. The high water mark for rounds was 42,000 in 1998 but has leveled off to between 32,000 and 36,000- the total for last year.

In 1996 the golf course and clubhouse were sold to John and David Mooty, who partnered until David eventually became sole owner in 2000. The name of the course was changed to Prestwick at the request of the seller, and reflects the Mooty's desire to link the course to the heritage of golf (Prestwick in Scotland is considered the second oldest course in existence) as well as the Mooty's Scottish ancestry.

Mooty has been the sole owner since 2000, and has shown his commitment to the course and the community by making solid changes to the course itself and by installing a full service restaurant in the clubhouse in 2005. Doubling the clubhouse, Mooty partnered with the Axel's chain of restaurants and opened Axel's at Pretwick in July of that year. In 2012 the Axel's people were bought out and the name changed to David's Chophouse, the restaurant that exists today.

While the initial layout between the large lots of Wedgewood was great for selling homes and protecting real estate property from errant shots, it left a little to be desired for playability from a golfer's prospective. For that reason Mooty hired Kurt Sandness from Sandness Design Group to devise a long term renovation plan for Prestwick in 2001. Under the direction from Sandness, Mooty and even the course Superintendent, Don Slegers and Park Construction undertook the task of changing the golf course into what it is today.

The major emphasis of the renovation was the bunkering. The total number of bunkers only changed from 67 to 76 but the positioning and location of them was a dramatic change. Holes number four and eighteen, both par fives, changed from linear, boring straight holes to strong par fives with shot placement critical to avoid bunkering designed to capture a missed shot on either side of the fairway.

Drainage was placed in every new



The Prestwick “A” Team, photo by Steve Sandberg

bunker along with a bunker liner in attempt to remedy the problem of bath tubs and contamination that was plaguing the old design.

Along with the bunkering, many tees were added or expanded to meet the demands of more and more rounds, and three of the greens; numbers seven, nine, and 13 were also re-shaped back to their original design that was abandoned for a more circular style of green.

Renovation was started in 2002 with holes two, three and nine and continued each year until 2009 when the economy worldwide and in golf in particular took a nose dive. Holes one, ten and 17 are still left on the renovation list.

But before any renovation was to take place, what Prestwick really needed was a new irrigation system. The old original block system was 16 years old in 2001 and in very bad shape. It was unable to meet the demands of higher turf quality and Mooty decided to pull the trigger on an \$850,000 tip-to-tip Toro and Flowtronix system comprising of 1,025 large sprinkler heads and roughly another 500 small heads to provide precision irrigation for the next quarter century.

It was a very hard, but very wise decision. That same system today would more than likely cost near double that price and continues to service the playing public at Prestwick at a high level. The system has grown since then, with the addition of another 175 heads to provide optimal

coverage.

The lineage of caretakers at Prestwick is a short list. Dennis Hendrickson served as the original superintendent from grow-in until 1994. He was there from the beginning and recalled Anderson literally telling him to go throw a stake in the ground, and that was going to be the first green, tee, etc. Hendrickson was succeeded by Jerry Webb, CGCS in 1994. In 2001, Dave Kazmierczak, CGCS became the third Superintendent and remains to this day.

Though the course has seen many recent changes, the people behind the scenes have been constant. Along with Kazmierczak's 13 years at the helm, Chad Braun, Equipment Manager and Building Supervisor is in his 17th



Hole 17, par 3 from the back tee. It could be your ace! Photo by Chad Braun.



Looking back onto the third hole. A pretty shot by Dave Kazmierczak, CGCS.

year. Dick Reig, Horticultural Manager is serving his 19th year as Lord of the annuals and perennials. Second Assistant Alejandro Leon has eight summers of experience under his belt. While he does not have Prestwick experience, first assistant Adam Lesmeister provides veteran leadership from years on the golf course. Even the Head Golf Professional, Tom Wahl, is in his 16th year at Prestwick. Many of the other part-time operators are at or past a decade of service. Together, they are the backbone of a team effort that makes Prestwick a high quality, beautiful course that challenges players of all skill levels.