

SUPER-N-site

Ryan Tully and Harborside International

Luke Cella, MAGCS

PHOTOS: LUKE CELLA

Harborside International is one of the few golf facilities in the proper bounds of Chicago and certainly one of the newest. It comprises two separate 18-hole courses, Starboard and Port. Both layouts were designed by Dick Nugent on a landfill site in the links style and tradition.

The Port Course opened for play in 1995 and still ranks in Golfweek Magazine as the 47th best municipal course in the US.

The Starboard Course opened a year later and upped its sister course by quite a few spots, holding at the 13th best modern municipal course one can play. Both courses

feature rolling fairways cut into the former sprawling unregulated landfill site of the city's solid waste, incinerator ash, treated wastewater sludge and construction debris. Once at capacity the landfill owned by the Illinois International Port District, the "Harborside Project" became a golf course. The course attracts residents from all over Chicagoland (68% of the 45,000 rounds are players from Chicago) as well as many out of town guests. It is fifteen miles from the Loop, a short trek down I-94. Kemper Sports currently manages the facility and employs Golf Course Superintendent Ryan Tully to oversee day-to-day operations.



Ryan Tully, Golf Course Superintendent of Harborside International and Endor, his one year old puppy and also the name of a moon in Return of the Jedi.

Ryan has been at the helm of Harborside International since last year. In 1995 Ryan was armed with a degree in Diesel Technology from Universal Technical Institute and searching for a new career path. His brother Sean, Golf Course Superintendent of Meadow Club in California suggested he give the profession a try. Ryan took a job at Prairie Woods in Avalon, Wisconsin on the crew and fell in love with the job. He soon moved to Geneva National and his passion continued. Soon after he completed the two-year turf program at Michigan State. After interning at Spyglass and Pebble Beach during the 2000 US Open and 2001 AT&T Pro Am he returned to Geneva National as the Trevino Golf Course Superintendent (54 hole property) until 2005 when he became the Assistant Superintendent at Harborside Interna-



tional.

Ryan enjoys the freedom the profession offers him each day along with new and different challenges to overcome. He tells me he has never had a boring day on the golf course. I asked him as one of the Midwest's younger superintendents a piece of advice to give our assistants.

He answered, "prepare yourself. It's possible you may be an assistant for a long time, but enjoy it while you are, because once you become the superintendent there will be days you ask yourself why you desired it so much."

When not on the course, Ryan has been restoring a 1972 Datsun 240Z and enjoying time on the Wisconsin River camping, canoeing and snowmobiling in the off-season. When on the course, his companion, Endor is never far behind or in front, a 1-year-old rescue puppy from a local pound.

Though newer, the courses are not without their

The 17th on Starboard Course is named Buccaneers Cove, a par 3 that is not terribly long (175 tips), but as with most holes at Harborside, the wind will play a factor in club and shot selection.

challenges. Like most landfill courses, the soil or lack thereof prohibits the mass plantings of trees but can also provide less than ideal conditions for turf cover. Much of the turf is grown on sludge, a thick wet substance left over from different industrial process including water reclamation. Because of the facility's proximity to Lake Michigan the turf is slow to wake up in the spring. This year, Ryan and his staff were anxious to get out and repair a few areas that didn't make it through winter but had to wait as soil and air temperatures slowly rose. When I met Ryan early this summer, he and his staff were tired of continually pushing sand from torrential rain events in the 200 bunkers on the courses.

The courses both feature undulating greens and offer five tee locations to "combat the changing wind direction to keep the playing the distance intended," as described by Dick Nugent. Flat lies are on the fairways but seldom found once off the short grass. Holes are framed by bunkers and fescue areas that have received plenty of moisture this spring to make them more difficult that normal to advance the ball. Roughs filled with trees





sometimes are not all bad, as Ryan explained, “there is a fine line with the fescue mounding to keep all of them looking good but also playable as possible.”

Ryan enjoys the work environment at the facility as he and his assistant Steve Kellerman are key components in the operation. “Our clubhouse staff is very understanding and flexible, and I’m lucky to have an Assistant like Steve who knows what he is doing and can take charge when needed.”

Ryan has challenged himself with providing faster and firmer conditions, especially in the fairways. He’s been adjusting fertility, regulators and will tweak irrigation scheduling if and when there is a need this year. He continues to find creative ways to improve conditions with a leaner staff to meet the needs of the golfing community. Future project plans include new cart paths and bunker renovations, both items original to the course and a little tired.

The whole property takes up 556 acres, of which

202 are golf course. Ryan manages 6 acres of greens, 12 acres of tees and 62 acres of fairway. Several holes border Lake Calumet, the largest body of water within the city that once drained into Lake Michigan. Through development Lake Calumet now drains in the Des Plaines River and the Mississippi River Basin and is used by the Illinois International Port District to handle freight where any commodity can be moved throughout the world. Views of the Chicago skyline are seen from the course, approximately 650 feet above sea level (the highest point in Chicago is in the Beverly neighborhood 672 ft). Both courses can play from over 7100 yards each with a slope of 132 and rating of 75.1 – a fair test of golf, especially if the wind is up and it is a rare day to find a calm day on the windward side of the Windy City. For those competing in the MAGCS Championship, knock downs, punches and bunker plays may be the shots to practice before the event.

Harborside International is a fitting name for a golf course whose city is known throughout the world. @

The finishing green on the Port Course is bordered by Lake Calumet all the way up the left side. In the distance is the 18th fairway of the Starboard side, a longer par 5 that is tough to reach in two if played from the tips.

