

SUPER FOCUS



Riverside's Joe Esposito

Esposito: Part superintendent, part traffic cop

By VERN PUTNEY

Joseph B. Esposito, course superintendent at by far Maine's most heavily traveled — and trampled — golf course, is strictly a man of soil and toil.

His roots are embedded at Portland's Riverside Municipal Course. Dad Vincent (Jimmy) and maintenance crew associate Pete Walsh built most of the 14th hole, and in 1932 helped shape the first nine.

The senior Esposito long was Portland's Park Department supervisor. Joe, first employed at Riverside in 1958 after a four-year naval hitch and course super since 1983, follows closely chemical technological

advances of the past decade but won't shed tradition and long-held standards.

No matter what Nature or man devises, Esposito sees his primary function as "Keeper of the Greens" and upgrading course facilities.

"Joe has been a gold mine to the city," declares Harold (Tuss) Whitmore, a Riverside member who seldom has missed a day of play there since 1946. "Joe's knowledgeable, indefatigable and courteous."

Best testament to Riverside's undiminished popularity is the infighting of New England and mini-tour professionals for a starting spot in the annual Maine Open. With the excep-

Esposito has been at Riverside, Maine's most heavily traveled — and trampled — course since 1958.

tion of five years since 1946, Riverside has been the prestigious tournament's showcase setting.

The field was treated to a few score-testing course revisions shepherded by Esposito in this year's mid-August gala. Only 30 yards were added. The 533-yard tenth hole now is 563 because of tee extension.

The regular fourth hole, an easy par five, gained a degree of difficulty with installation of three small traps 250-280 yards from the tee. If any caught a drive, reaching the green in two was unlikely. Another trap was added 50 yards short of the green.

Before tourney time, a trap was tucked on the right side of the fifth fairway, about 280 yards from the tee and 50 yards from the green's center.

Course changes overseen by Esposito and his crew of 14 to 20 in recent months recognized safety as well as cosmetic reasons. For instance, players in golf cars often zoomed up the right side of the seventh fairway, headed for the green uphill. They were dangerously close to those teeing off from the back markers. That risk has been eliminated. They now go the left and back of the green.

A new cart path in back of the 17th green brings the golfer to the back of the 18th tee, not, as before, in range of a stray shot from the tiger tees.

The \$200,000 course improvement projects were the result of close cooperation among city officials, Director of Golf David Grygiel and Esposito. Grygiel, a PGA pro since 1980 and a member of a golf family that owns or controls 12 courses in New York State, came to Riverside in 1989.

Grygiel has been allotted ample funds for manpower, equipment and materials. Esposito quickly acquired diesel greens mowers, two triplex mowers, two utility vehicles, back hoe, dump trailer and pickup truck.

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An over-abundance of water has plagued Riverside for a half-century. The fourth hole, long the North course's wettest spot, with the installation of 700 feet of drain pipe last spring now may be the driest. About 200 feet of drain pipe remedied a soggy fifth fairway.

New technology made it possible to activate sprinklers anywhere on the course at the touch of a button. Unfortunately, the watering system never worked. Leaks cropped up in the wrong places. Another attempt at water damage control, in 1986, also was an embarrassment of mini-ponds.

Riverside is, by modern yardstick, a small parcel of land. The former Hawkes farm of 123 acres was bought in 1931 for \$18,359. Another 10 acres in 1933 cost \$1,650. The first nine opened in 1932, the second in 1934.

Esposito's domain also embraces a nine-hole course designated Riverside South, opened in 1965. Annual play there is in the 15,000-round range, compared to 25,000-30,000 rounds on the North course.

Esposito hopes he is following in the footsteps of Johnny Davis, who died in 1983. "He taught me a lot. He would applaud the improvements."

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