

By HAL PHILLIPS

NEWTON, Mass. — In 1979, the bleeding finally stopped at city-owned Newton Commonwealth Golf Course.

Today, under the leadership of superintendent and course manager Kevin Osgood, this venerable Donald Ross design — which had suffered through two bankruptcies and decades of suburban encroachment — has clearly turned the corner.

"I've seen all the changes in my 14 years here," said Osgood. "It's been pretty wild. But the city is committed to having a top-notch public golf course here in New-

Superintendent Kevin Osgood leases course, aims to turn its fortunes

ton. And it's putting a lot of money back into the course."

Enough to pay for a new, non-potable irrigation system, complete with on-site effluent pond. Five tees and two greens are scheduled for renovation, and the pro shop has already been upgraded.

Some might say, 'Just goes to show what can happen when you give the superintendent complete control.'

"I don't know about that," Osgood said with a laugh. "But things are looking up."

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The outlook wasn't always this positive.

Surrounded by the comely homes off Commonwealth Avenue, the golf course opened for play in 1921 as the private Commonwealth Country Club. Ross actually lived nearby and referred to CCC as his

home course from 1920-22.

However, by 1958 the suburban Boston club was in deep financial trouble. In order to stay afloat, members sold 20 acres to a condominium developer. The back nine suffered a crippling blow, in terms of length. But the course as a whole — now called Chestnut Hill Country Club — had new life.

In 1979, the bottom fell out. Faced with a bankrupt golf club

whose demise might result in even more development, the city and abutters teamed up by selling two more small parcels to developers and soliciting state open-land funding. Some neighbors even put tax liens on their properties. All this enabled the city of Newton to purchase the beleaguered course, which assume its third name, Newton Commonwealth GC.

That same year, Osgood came on board. Armed with a degree from the Stockbridge School of Agriculture, part of the University of Massachusetts, he took over the dual role of superintendent and course manager. In 1992, the city decided to put the course management contract out to bid. Osgood bid successfully and assumed management duties Jan. 1.

"The city owns the golf course. I lease it from them and run it," Osgood explained. "Basically, I've handled the management duties all along, but now it's official."

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As you pull into Newton Commonwealth, you can see how the course has changed. On your immediate right is one of the small parcels sold in 1979... Condominiums. On your left are the 20 acres sold in 1958... More condominiums.

On your right is the course — a magnificent piece of land with huge elevation changes, natural ponds and rows of mature trees. It used to occupy 125 acres. Now it's 81.

No one knows the original length, but the current par-70 track measures just 5,590 yards. The 16th hole used to be a splendid par 5, winding tightly uphill to an elevated, severely undulating green. Now it's just a cute par 4.

"It's not the course it once was," said Osgood. "But these 81 acres are protected now — there's no way they can be developed. Because of the state open-land funding, if the course somehow went defunct, it would become parkland."

But Osgood has big plans for Newton Commonwealth. The non-potable irrigation system should be up and running by June 1, and he's getting ready to hire an architect for the green and tee renovation. The troubled tees and greens have a common problem: They're small and shady, meaning they have trouble coping with an average of 45,000 rounds per year.

Despite its troubled past, Newton Commonwealth has always been one of the best kept public courses in Greater Boston.

"We've always shown a lot of pride in that," said Osgood, who makes the most of a \$350,000 maintenance budget. "Our greens are always in great shape. We do a lot of bentgrass overseeding and mow the fairways with lightweight mowers."

Donald Ross was clearly taken with Greater Boston. He lived here and three of his better designs — Woodlawn, Charles River and Brae Burn (site of the 1919 U.S. Open) — are located within three miles of Newton Commonwealth.

For a while, the plight of Newton Commonwealth might have had Mr. Ross tossing and turning in his grave. Now he rests in peace.

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