

Lohmann Golf Designs and senior designer Todd Quitno have been working with Westmoor's superintendent Jerry Kershasky since the 1990s, when the club decided to restore William Langford's work.

# LONG TIME COMING

Westmoor Country Club's renovation – including green, tee and bunker upgrades – preserves the spirit of William Langford.





BY HAL PHILLIPS

**W**hen Westmoor Country Club reopens late this month, the innovations implemented by Lohmann Golf Designs, contractor TDI International and Westmoor superintendent Jerry Kershasky may well change the way upper Midwestern golf courses are renovated and maintained.

At Westmoor, which is located in Brookfield, Wis., Lohmann Golf Designs directed significant green, tee and bunker upgrades. The bunkers are dramatic, sporting the deep, flat-bottomed, steep-faced style reminiscent of William Langford, who worked at Westmoor during the late 1950s.

Marengo, Ill.-based Lohmann Golf Designs also regressed all 18 putting surfaces with something relatively new to a climate this far north – A1 bentgrass, a premium turf that its extreme density helps it resist *Poa annua* encroachment. The greens' drainage was enhanced before the fumigation and seeding process.

Only four greens were rebuilt from scratch. Soil profiles were prepared on the new putting surfaces to replicate the other 14 greens, allowing consistent maintenance practices coursewide. Lohmann's redesign also included removing about 500 trees, which increased the course's slope rating.

"This was an extraordinary project on so many levels," says Bob Lohmann, founder and principal of Lohmann Golf Designs. "There were so many interesting technical factors involved below the playing surface, in terms of agronomy and construction, it's easy to gloss over the work we did above ground, where we transformed an OK golf course into a spectacular golf course."

LGD was lucky to be reminded of what's important by the members, Lohmann says.

"We've had members who opposed the renovation acknowledge the project's success," he says. "It has been a long winter of anticipation for them – waiting to play the new Westmoor."

#### IN THE MAKING

A new and thoroughly improved course at Westmoor has been a long time coming. The members laid out the course in 1926, and several architects have left their marks on the course since. In 1957, William Langford

completely redesigned five holes along the new interstate at the time, and they're the best holes, says Kershasky, who added that shortly after Langford finished, the club softened the bold features.

Langford is one of golf's great practitioners from the golden age of course design, widely known in the Midwest for his work at places such as Lawsonia Links in Green Hill, Wis.; the Wakonda Club in Des Moines, Iowa; Skokie Golf Course in Chicago and neighboring Ridgemoor Country Club, where Lohmann Golf Designs authored a comprehensive, sympathetic renovation in 2003.

Lohmann and senior designer Todd Quitno have been working at Westmoor with Kershasky since the early 1990s, when the club resolved to restore Langford's work and carry it throughout the course. LGD managed to restore the bunkering on several of the original Langford holes, but its plans for the remaining holes stalled for various reasons.

### At A Glance: Westmoor Country Club

<b>Location:</b> Brookfield, Wis.
<b>Web site:</b> westmoor.org
<b>Type of project:</b> Renovation (greens, tees and bunkers)
<b>Golf course superintendent:</b> Jerry Kershasky
<b>Architect:</b> Lohmann Golf Designs
<b>Builder:</b> TDI International
<b>Course closed:</b> Aug. 1, 2008
<b>Course reopening:</b> Late May 2009
<b>Turfgrass on greens:</b> A1 bentgrass
<b>Course length:</b> 6,800 yards
<b>Greens:</b> SR1119 bentgrass
<b>Tees and fairways:</b> SR1119 and Providence bentgrass
<b>Immediate rough:</b> a blend of bluegrass, ryegrass and fescue
<b>Far rough:</b> a straight mix of fescue





Fast forward to 2007 and the decision to regrass. *Poa annua* infestations made Westmoor's putting surfaces inconsistent, difficult to maintain in the summer and susceptible to winter kill. The decision to go with A1 – based on success stories from clubs in nearby Chicago and recommendations by the USGA Green Section – convinced the club to finish the remaining green, tee, bunker and tree work.

Because of the climate in the Midwest, the fumigation and regrassing process requires an August 1 course closing. With that sort of scheduling mandate, Lohmann and the club resolved to equip the greens with enhanced drainage capability before August 1 and renovate the remaining holes before the snow fell – in a fashion consistent with Langford's steep-'n-deep bunkering and strategic angles at greenside and along fairways.

"Renovating around existing greens is an exciting challenge," Quitno says. "Of course, it would've been easier to blow up every hole

and start from scratch, but that's not what the members were looking for. They like their golf course. So we worked hard to preserve Westmoor's character and still evoke the Langford spirit on those holes that were lacking."

As part of the project, Lohmann rebuilt a couple of putting surfaces that lost pin locations because of extreme slopes.

"Westmoor's greens have always run fast, and some were downright unfair," Quitno says. "The new greens will still be fast, but the A1 will make them consistent, and the Langford style we used will make them dramatic, but fair."

Quitno singled out the pond and putting-surface scheme planned for the 10<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> holes as examples of this balance. The project team recontoured the surface of the 10<sup>th</sup> green and raised the 14<sup>th</sup> putting surface about 3 feet and connected it with the 10<sup>th</sup>, creating a double green with a deep, Biarritz-like swale in between.

The team also expanded the ponds in front of each green and decorated the greenside banks with boulder walls, similar to those found elsewhere on the course.

"It's a dramatic change and an interesting look," Quitno says.

LGD's master plan lengthened the course from 6,846 to more than 7,050 yards from the tips. It also includes a combination of practical objectives and creative flourishes. It will restore, for example, much of the 1<sup>st</sup> hole yardage Westmoor lost when it built a new clubhouse in the 1990s. LGD also created a series of attractive chipping areas that surround the greens and occasionally sweep up to form tees on the following holes, adding a subtle flare to the routing's transition areas.

#### DOWN THE DRAIN

The drainage plan is creative, too. Last spring, Stuart, Fla.-based XGD Drainage – a subsidiary of contractor TDI International – removed 2-inch strips of sod on each green before digging 15-inch drainage trenches spaced every 6 feet in a modified herringbone design. XGD then laid down 2-inch drain tile and refilled the trenches with a 7:2:1 mix of sand, soil and peat – an attempt to match the greens' existing push-up soil profile. The sod then was relaid and members played the greens until Aug. 1.

When the course closed, the existing putting surfaces were killed via fumigation. Samples of the soil profiles underlying these greens were sent to a testing lab to determine their characteristics.

"This was an extremely important phase, because when this course reopens, we want all 18 greens – the four we rebuilt and the 14 that weren't rebuilt but were regrassed – to be cared for in a reasonably identical manner," Quitno says.

Westmoor's holes 6 (above) and 10 (below) after being redesigned by Lohmann Golf Designs. The upgraded bunkers are deep, flat-bottomed and steep – a style reminiscent of William Langford, who worked at Westmoor during the late 1950s.







The lab recommended a 7:2:1 construction mix of topsoil, sand and peat, the same mix used for the XGD drainage backfill. It's a dirty mix, not a USGA mix, but it matched the existing profile closely, and that's what LGD used on the four new greens.

"We had to go this extra mile because it made no sense to put the same grass on 18 greens

that didn't have the same soil profiles," Quitno says. "Of course, we could have rebuilt all 18 greens, but that was a considerable expense. Maybe the most important new information the Westmoor project will demonstrate is that clubs in this climate, and of this age, have viable alternatives to rebuilding their greens."

#### AMONG THE TREES

The tree situation at Westmoor typified the complicated anxieties attached to removal. Most acknowledge courses this old were built on land that was treeless originally or sparsely forested. And most agree tree encroachment hinders play and steals sunlight/soil nutrients from turf. But removing those trees after 80 years remains touchy, politically. At Westmoor, all those anxieties were joined by another: Members thought removing so many trees would make their slope rating decline – the secret fear of club members everywhere.

However, John Warren of the Wisconsin State Golf Association walked the course this past fall, and his findings surprised and

delighted the Westmoor faithful. Warren explained WSGA raters look at 10 different obstacles when rating a golf course – trees are just one of them. In his opinion, and based on a few measurements, he says the rating and slope at Westmoor will stay the same at minimum and likely increase.

"Part of this is because we've added considerable distance to the course, especially from the back tees," Lohmann says. "But also because we have added considerable challenge in the landing areas and around greens with the new bunkering, and we have removed trees that, by majority, didn't affect the immediate strategy of the golf course previously."

Still, the course is surrounded by more than 2,000 mature trees, and the ones LGD removed weren't key trees.

"The WSGA feels the course has actually been toughened for most players," Lohmann says. "I guess time will tell." **GCI**

*Hal Phillips is a freelance writer based in New Gloucester, Maine.*

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