

# THE LAST HURRAH

THE TEAM  
AT VESPER  
COUNTRY CLUB  
HAS SOME  
FUN SAYING  
GOODBYE TO  
ITS GREENS.

BY TRENT BOUTS



Water hazards can add to the challenge of a course – but usually not in the middle of a green.

**“We knew the greens were going so we decided to have some fun.”**

— Paul Kaplan, Vesper Country Club

**S**urely it’s a rare thing in golfing history that a club president vandalizes the course and is celebrated for doing so.

Under cover of darkness, this president, with the help of the golf course superintendent, Chris Morris, and his assistant, set about digging holes in green after green. Some were several feet deep, some were many feet wide. Even in the smaller ones they shoved stands of native grasses several feet high.

With a tournament due late morning you might have expected a riot. And they got one, just not the kind with lots of yelling and screaming. Instead, golfers were soon in stitches laughing. Vesper Country Club’s last day before a major renovation will be

talked about for years and might just provide inspiration for similar “wakes” at other clubs engaging in heavy plastic surgery.

“We knew the greens were going so we decided to have some fun,” says Paul Kaplan, the president and mastermind in question. “Those of us who knew what was going on were sworn to secrecy.”

On some holes, Kaplan and his cohorts buried beer-filled coolers lid-deep near the flag. On others they built bunkers in the middle of the green. On one they created a water hazard. At the Tyngsboro, Mass., club with roots dating to 1875 and a Donald Ross pedigree to boot, the “attack” pushed mischief to the point of sacrilege.

“It was crazy,” Kaplan admits. “Some approach shots are to slightly elevated greens so golfers couldn’t see the coolers but they knew something was up when they’d hit a good shot expecting it to sit near the pin only to hear a loud bang then see their ball bouncing 20 feet in the air!”

In the end, the tournament was hailed as a great success, serving more as a wake where members toasted the dying day of their much-loved but sorely ageing greens. For more than 50 years the greens had been covered in Vesper Velvet bentgrass, developed right on-site by long-time former superintendent Manny Francis. There was a time when the Vesper Velvet was a point of pride but it had lost ground to newer bentgrass varieties laid on modern foundations with less compaction and better drainage.

Kaplan was acutely mindful of the sentimental attachment to the Vesper Velvet and so each golfer in the tournament was presented with a small ribbon-tied sod from the greens at the end of play. Today though, the Vesper Velvet is a distant memory thanks to the success of the \$1.4-million renovation, which made MacCurrach Golf Construction a winner in the legacy category of this year’s Builder Excellence Awards. Members are reveling with their new A1/A4 putting surfaces but some are still trading stories about their approach shots that found the water – or the beer – three feet from the flag. **GCI**

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The cooler lid gave the ball plenty of hops, but at least players didn’t have to wait for the cart.

