



Picturesque setting of Willow Wood CC clubhouse located in valley of the Allegheny foothills some fifty miles west of the famed resort, White Sulphur Springs.

Toil, Trouble and Triumph at Small-town Club

By KELLY J. COOK

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In 1946 we had one of the most exclusive golf clubs in the world. In fact we were so exclusive we were almost out of business. We were down to about 25 members. The young men around here were either away at war or had found employment in the industrial centers. The older men who were left had so much work to do they didn't have much time for golf, even if they'd had the inclination. And that wasn't the first time we were down—but not out.

But now—just two seasons after hitting bottom—we're in better shape than we've ever been. We haven't got a waiting list but at the rate golf interest is growing in the community and the way the youngsters are beginning to think about the game, Willow Wood is looking forward to the future with a great deal of confidence and cheer.

You club officials, greenkeepers, managers and pros who are traveling around might drop in to visit us sometime to get a close-up on the way the golf club situation is developing in the smaller towns. It's in places like Hinton that golf is being made truly the national game.

We haven't got the best 9-hole course in the nation, but it's an enjoyable, interesting place to play. And we do have one of the loveliest locations. We're in a picturesque valley on the banks of the Greenbrier river in the Allegheny foothills about 50 miles west of White Sulphur Springs. We're six miles from Hinton, the gateway

to the rich coal fields of West Virginia and the site of the Bluestone dam where an important flood control and power plant is being constructed.

Elks' Tie-up a Life-saver

What put us back on our feet was having the controlling interest in Willow Wood acquired by Hinton Elks' lodge No. 821 two years ago. Every Elk then became a social member of the country club. This is one of the financially and socially wise life-saving moves for the struggling country club in the smaller places. The Elks lodge or the American Legion post or some similar outfit in the smaller towns usually is well established and needs to expand and rejuvenate to meet the competition of the movies, night clubs and the highways that take people away from home to spend money for recreation.

A considerable part of the membership of these older organizations may not be golfers but the desirable middle-aged and older can be attracted to the game and it'll become one of their great delights. Certainly to get younger men in those organizations there's nothing like adding golf to the usual facilities of smaller town clubs.

Furthermore, the feminine angle is becoming increasingly important in club life in the smaller towns. The young women, married and single, who read, see and hear about country clubs in larger places are not going to be content without a country club

in their own community. You can see that factor in evidence as you look around Hinton, a town of about 6000 population, and observe smartly dressed girls and young women who would look perfectly in place on Park avenue in New York or Michigan avenue in Chicago.

This women's influence is growing—and rapidly—in making use of our small but attractive log clubhouse. This clubhouse, which includes men and women's locker-rooms and showers, a kitchen and combination dining room and lounge, and a pro shop was built in 1940 after we had outgrown the farmhouse that was our original clubhouse. We could use a larger clubhouse right now.

Up From Depression's Depths

I came here in 1936 when we were deep in a depression. Not as deep as we got in 1946 but still so close to giving up that if I'd known what I know now I wouldn't have taken the job. The pay was low, the work was long and hard and the capital to work with was practically nothing. I used to look at GOLFDOM and dream of the miracles we could work with the club if we only had the money we needed. Never an issue of GOLFDOM have I missed for 12 years and if the greenkeepers at the larger clubs and the technical experts only knew how much I've got out of their articles they'd realize that I think of them as personal friends and helpers. They kept me informed and inspired.

It is unnecessary to tell any greenkeeper how I fell in love with this job and got so that instead of feeling licked by its difficulties and disappointments I felt that everything about the job was a challenge to test me. There were times when I could see that if Willow Wood kept going it was going to be by the grace of God and Kelly J. Cook.

I made my mistake learning the hard way and sometimes I wonder if providence in its mysterious operations hasn't made a few mistakes just to try my patience.

Lately I've been reading a lot in GOLFDOM about improper green construction producing troubles sure to result from aeration and drainage deficiencies. Well, the fellows who are distressed by those faults should have seen my place.

Willow Wood was organized in the early 20s by some business and professional leaders of Hinton. They got 65 acres in a charming location. The course was built in the customary manner of those days, with no drainage under the greens and, as far as I have been able to learn no attention being paid to greens subsoil. Being pretty much river-bottom land Willow Wood was expected to grow anything anywhere on the course.

Bunkers were spotted around the course and certainly weren't designed or located with machine maintenance as a possibility. A small lake was built as a hazard at the seventh hole.

The club prospered intermittently for several years then the 1928 depression hit and a Willow Wood reorganization to bring in new capital was forced. Unless you have been in a railroad and coal mining section in a depression you don't know what a depression is. It sure hangs the number up on a small club that already has been having rough going.

When I came in the spring of 1936 membership was down to almost nothing and that wasn't to be wondered at when you looked at what was called a course. The greens could have been called greens only by poetic license. The fairways were not even in pasture condition and the rough was full of briars and sprouts. The machinery already was worn out and had to be patched together to operate.

Too Busy to Worry

But, if there hadn't been a depression on I wouldn't have been there. Fortunately I had too much work to do to worry about any one detail of my job. As I look back at those days I not only wonder how Willow Wood got through but how the Cooks got through.



With the Allegheny foothills for a backdrop and the banks of the Greenbrier at fairway's edge, what more beautiful setting can one ask for an afternoon of golf.

One of the great things about working on a golf course that's in terrible condition is that you can see some signs of improvement soon and they keep teasing you on. People who ventured out to the club also noticed those improvements and passed the word around. By mid-season we'd signed 25 members and had others playing on a daily fee basis.

I kept on being the only workman on the course. I was greenkeeper, supt., foreman and the whole force. A horse wouldn't have taken the beating I gave myself in getting that place so it began to look like a golf course. My son, Bob, as he grew up, began to help me a lot and proved to be one of those gifted boys who just seemed to have the knack of doing the right thing in improving turf. Eventually he was hired as my assistant. He worked with me until August, 1942 when he went into the Army. After 3½ years working for Uncle Sam he came back and again is on the job with me.

Course Improvement Pays

With Bob's help I got Willow Wood in such condition that people enjoyed playing the course and in 1939 revenue was up to the point where we could pay as we'd go. The new clubhouse was built the next year. Now the old clubhouse has been converted into a two-family house so Bob and I do not have to travel to and from work but live on the grounds which makes it in some ways better for our families and a good deal for the club too as any hour of the day or night we're apt to think about some possible emergency need of the course and rush out to inspect the situation.

We do not have a full-time pro here. The revenue isn't sufficient. Bob acts in that capacity after completing his course labors. He's doing a good job at developing golfers and golf interest, too. As a pro, Bob and I both will candidly admit Bob isn't in the same class as that other West Virginia young man, Sam Snead, but I doubt if Sam would work for what there is in this part-time pro job and have to nurse a golf course in addition. Probably Bob worries as much about our greens as Sam does about his putting—and that's plenty of worry for anybody.

Outlook Brighter

Things are looking bright now after a long struggle. We had rebuilt our greens prior to the war and had installed an excellent greens watering system. Our dues have stayed at nearly pre-war level. Our daily fee rates have gone up a little. We still stretch a nickel so thin the buffalo sweats blood. Last year we bought a new tractor and fairway units—the first new equipment we've had in 12 years.

Now we've got fine greens of Coos county Seaside bent. Up to the time we got

water for our greens we had about every kind of grass you could name—and wouldn't want—on greens as our putting surfaces, including an abundant crop of crabgrass in season. Now that we've found the right chemical control for crabgrass it's no longer a problem.

We cut our greens three times a week and give them an extra cutting on special occasions. We water three times weekly in dry weather. We topdress five times a year. We apply brownpatch control once a week in season for prevention and find that is a thrifty procedure. We fertilize our greens spring and fall with organic fertilizer and treat with arsenate of lead once a year for grub control. We use a power greens mower with a wire brush to eliminate nap.

Prior to the war we had started making our own topdressing material on an acre of ground at the club. We had plowed under the third crop of rye, soybeans and clover when we were compelled to stop this practice due to labor shortage. Then we went back to buying about a half-car of mushroom soil per season.

Again this year Willow Wood will be host to the annual West Virginia Elks' Open golf championship. A record attendance is expected. The visitors will see larger and improved facilities in the clubhouse and the course in better condition than ever—heaven willing.

There's still plenty I see that can be done but we'll have to wait until the club's finances permit hiring more help. In the meanwhile we'll hold on to what we have and continue to build optimistically. We've proved to ourselves we can't be licked and that country clubs in smaller towns can be soundly developed as valuable community assets.

GLEN HEAD CATCHES UP

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them turf. Grieve will replace half of the turf courts and restore the clay ones. He will have two pitch-putting holes adjoining the tennis courts. He also intends constructing a putting area near the clubhouse.

Glen Head CC's newly acquired layout consists of 186 acres of rolling terrain. Jay Gilman, formerly of the Glen Oaks GC, is pres. Other officers include: Irving Spanier, vp.; Dan Gold, 2nd vp.; A. R. Farber, secy. and I. Rossman, treas. Charles K. Howard is head of the finance committee.

"When we get through with our improvement program this year, we'll have one of the outstanding layouts in the country—and I've seen most of the better ones," predicts Grieve.