

Civic Pride Prompts Durango To Restore Its "Perfect" Course

Tourists Once Turned Up Noses at Hillcrest But Now They're Eager to Play It

When Joe Kirkwood, Sr., the venerable trick shot artist who knows and has seen as much golf geography as many alive, first looked out upon the Hillcrest course in Durango, Colo., he was as completely awe-stricken as any gaping tourist getting his first view of one of the many natural wonders that abound in Colorado.

"Here," said the well-travelled Joe, upon regaining his breath, "is the most perfect natural golf site I've ever seen!"

That was in 1955. A year or two before, an exasperated Kirkwood probably would have added: "But why in the name of Hagen and Jones don't you do something about it?"

It is to the credit of a handful of Durango's golfing citizens that they became nettled about their course and did something about it back around 1954. Until that time they had been playing on sand greens, it was almost impossible to distinguish fairway from rough and outside of 40 or 50 people, who belonged to the club, nobody seemed to care whether Durango had golf or not. Tourists, who occasionally stopped to play the 9-hole course, took one look at what they had to contend with and didn't bother to take their clubs out of their cars.

The townspeople laughed this off, saying, "Well, visitors come here to fish."

But at the same it was noticed that 50,000 tourists were flocking into Durango every summer. The town had a lot of attractions to offer such as hunting lodges, fishing resorts, Indian monuments and burial grounds and plenty of scenery — but it didn't have a decent place where a man could swing a golf club. If Durango is to continue to be a tourists' mecca, a few forward looking citizens reasoned, then we'd better start mowing the fair-



George Mackey, Hillcrest pro, and his son, Jeff, talk golf shoes as well as the youngster's chances in the club's Pee Wee tournament.

ways around here and put in some grass greens.

Raise \$10,000

The city couldn't afford to finance any golf improvements but it gave the Hillcrest members a \$1 a year lease on the municipal property the course occupies. Forty businessmen agreed to advance \$10,000 in exchange for notes that will be paid in the indefinite future.

With the \$10,000, Hillcrest's board of directors was first able to install a watering system but not until after it had done some involved horse trading in 3-, 4- and 10-in. pipe with a local oil company. In the meantime, Henry Hughes, a Denver course architect, designed nine greens for the Durango group, worked out other course specifications and recommended that Lee Stottern of Colorado Springs be engaged as construction supervisor.

At Hughes' suggestion, Hillcrest's new greens were built adjacent to the old



Two views of the beautiful Hillcrest course which Joe Kirkwood, Sr., who has seen them all, says is the most perfect golf site in the world. Course is helping town increase tourist business.

tees and the old sand greens were kept in play until the new putting surfaces were ready. At the same time, tees were put in adjacent to the sand greens. Thus grass on both the new tees and greens got a good start and at no time during construction were golfers denied their games.

Durango, located in the San Juan basin, is blessed with excellent soil, thereby doing away with any need for importing soil for green construction. The original \$10,000 was stretched further when many of the townspeople, seeing or hearing of what Hillcrest members were trying to do for the town, volunteered their labor in getting the course into shape. Equipment dealers also got into the spirit of the thing by loaning tractors and machinery.

H. N. Foster, secy-treas. of Durango Municipal Recreation, Inc., under which name Hillcrest is incorporated, has supplied the following figures to show just what was invested in reclaiming the course:

Greens	\$ 1,209.44
Water System	6,581.04
Seed for fairways	793.50
Supervision	913.81
Disc & greens mower	502.21

Total \$10,000.00

In 1955, Hillcrest's membership was in-

creased from 50 to 205 and in 1956 this number jumped to 243. Dues for men run \$40 a year while women are required to pay \$20 for membership. Foster and his group are now shooting for 300 regular patrons.

Intrigued by Enthusiasm

Pro, manager and supt. at Hillcrest is George Mackey, who came on the scene early in 1955 after having put in about four years at courses in Arizona. The big reason for Mackey's taking the job was that both he and his wife were intrigued by the new enthusiasm shown by the Durango citizens in reviving their course. So far as George is concerned, it's contagious. Besides handling the many tasks that come with a three-in-one job, the Hillcrest pro has devoted much time and effort to promoting interest in the game by conducting big scale group lessons for women and juniors, all of which have been free. Another stunt he has used to make Durango citizens conscious of golf is the one of taking an untried announcer and making a pretty decent clubswinger of him via a series of radio programs.

One of the fascinating things about Hillcrest, in Mackey's estimation, is that since it isn't heavily endowed with money some ingenuity is required to raise funds for making additions to the club. The combined pro shop-clubhouse at the moment is in need of floor covering and money will be raised for this item through proceeds realized from a big, gala dinner. Ball washers were promoted by offering to inscribe the name of donors on them. Other funds will come from the showing



Raising money can be painless especially when you do it by putting on a clambake for members.

of PGA films, golf clinics and similar devices.

Hillcrest's combined clubhouse and pro shop is small and not too pretentious. Nobody doubts that this will be changed in the next few years. For one thing, the club has a real hardworking man of vision in George Mackey, the board of directors and various committeemen are in a mood to continue to expand and enlarge facilities and the town, in general, is beginning to take as much pride, for instance, in its revived course as in its picturesque narrow-gauge railroad, the only one of its kind in the U.S. that still handles passenger traffic.

Everything in Focus

The pro shop-clubhouse combine, incidentally, is built in such a way that it doesn't put an impossible burden on a man who is tripling as pro, manager and supt. Mackey can see every spot on the course from the pro shop porch and the practice range, green and pitching green are so arranged that he can keep an eye on both the shop and clubhouse while giving lessons. When the building housing his shop and clubhouse is enlarged it will be done in such a way that these features will be retained.

Hillcrest's golf history is somewhat parallel to that of its pro. Both, says Mackey, were late starters in the game. George served as a Marine pilot from 1937 until he retired as a Lt. Colonel in 1947 and didn't get interested in golf until 1946, when he was 32 years old. His earliest efforts produced 100 plus scores, but by 1949 he was shooting in the low 70s. Two years later he was registered as a pro.

Can Start Late

Thus, he doesn't go along with the theory that top golfers necessarily are fellows who take up the game while still in the T shirt stage. But the Durango pro does make one concession. He was an athlete long before he ever thought of golf. A University of California decathlon star, he barely missed making the U.S. Olympic team back in 1936. Mackey once held the Pacific Coast Conference record for the shot put and played a little college football and basketball, but gave up the latter sports to concentrate on track. The coordination and competitive zeal George picked up in collegiate athletics, he concedes, undoubtedly helped him to develop his golf game to the point where he thought it was solid enough for him to

make a living at it. Even so, he still maintains you're never too old to take up golf.

Late starter or not, Mackey feels he has found a real opportunity at Durango, especially when the long range advantages are considered. The townspeople are no longer only telling the tourists about the wonderful fishing thereabouts, but instead are pointing toward Hillcrest and telling them what Joe Kirkwood said about the course. And the tourists are no longer shrugging Hillcrest off when they see it. They're falling all over themselves to get their clubs out of their cars and play.

"Golf for Industry" Is Latest Foundation Publication

"Golf For Industry," the National Golf Foundation's most recent addition to its growing technical library of golf information, is designed to help company officials, industrial recreation supervisors and league secretaries to plan, organize and put into use all types of industrial golf facilities and programs for employees.

Material in the book reflects actual experience of nearly 200 American business organizations surveyed by the Foundation with the cooperation of the National Industrial Recreation Assn. over the past three years. These experiences range from the operation of a relatively small company golf league to the all-out company programs such as sponsored by E. I. Du Pont de Nemours & Co. (Inc.), Wilmington, Del., which offers complete country club facilities and activities to its employees.

Has Many Uses

Although the book is intended primarily as an aid for more than 20,000 American business concerns which will feature golf to some degree in their employee recreation programs in 1957, "Golf For Industry" can be used by the course operator in encouraging league play on his course, by municipalities in organizing activities for the community and by school systems in setting up a golf program.

More than 100 photographs and diagrams illustrate the new book. It describes the practice putting green, miniature putting course, driving range, par-3 course and regulation 9 and 18 hole courses.

Price of the 56-page book is \$1.50 post-paid. It can be obtained by writing the National Golf Foundation, 407 S. Dearborn st., Chicago 5.