

# For men only

*Sharon's founders spared no  
expense in producing this fine, new  
course and a clubhouse that has  
strictly male appeal.*

by Herb Graffis

**J**erry O'Neil saw that men highly important to the progress of Akron, Ohio, needed a golf club. It had to be a distinctive club, for golfers and golf; a club with a fine course and an attractive, bright clubhouse, that would be simple but amply adequate in its comforts. The club had to be an Eveless Eden where the burdened businessman didn't have to worry about serpents or apples. To this spot he could escape and revive himself, resting his mind from computers, concrete and the madding crowd, but close to the command post . . . just in case. Two years after O'Neil got the vision, Sharon Golf Club was in play.

When O'Neil looked at the golfing picture in the heavily industrialized northern Ohio area in and around Akron, he got the view in terms of the sort of men who have to create and conduct tough executive jobs; the kind of work that calls nation-wide for talent and wears that talent hard. But when this select young stock was developed, or brought into Akron, the long waiting lists of the territory's fine older clubs had the New Guard shut out.

Sharon's 308 acres are 12 miles from the heart of Akron and about 25 or 30 miles from the great industrial establishments scattered around the rim of Cleveland. The Sharon location was ideal, and in roads, soil, topography, water and trees a fine canvas on which a golf course could be painted.

The two farms that were acquired for the Sharon club meant a combination of luck and swift, comprehensive and successful searching. First-class, naturally roughed-in golf course sites conveniently

located aren't too easy to come by these days. Golf course builders with armadas of earthmoving equipment have to mold most of the terrain. However, Jerry O'Neil figured if you get the right guys you can get the right ground.

So the first thing was the 12 founding members. Each of them put in \$11,000 to get the Sharon Golf Club breathing. The majority of them were young executives; second generation big names in Akron. O'Neil himself, Michael Gerald (for Jerry), is the son of the late W.O. O'Neil, founder of General Tire and Rubber Company. The current chief of the clan-O'Neil is president of that company and chairman of the board of Aerojet-General Corporation. He is 45 in calendar years and six in golf handicap. His father didn't play golf but was one of the American Hibernian transplants who financed the fine golf course alongside Killarney's romantic lake.

The 225 membership limit of the Sharon Golf Club a year after the course was in play is so near to the shut-off point, the waiting list problem begins to loom. What has saved the situation and has given qualified members time and room is foresight in the classification of members. There are three classes: corporate for \$5,000, which allows a corporation to get acceptable junior executives into the club; charter membership, which has an initiation fee of \$3,000, and non-resident for \$500. Dues are \$600 annually and, although they do everything necessary for course, clubhouse and clubhouse grounds at Sharon and cost



is considered after need in dictating decisions, the \$600 has proved to be the adequate figure even in the years of the club's cradle period when unexpected expenses are sure to pop up.

Again, when you got around the Sharon story, you come back to Jerry O'Neil. He runs the place and, except for Dick Michaelson, who, in effect at Sharon, is O'Neil's executive officer, and Frank Dobie, the club's manager and ground superintendent, the club is an O'Neil job.

The influence of several of the nation's foremost golf clubs is in evidence at Sharon. It was because of his work in revising some holes at the Augusta National, and his design of the intriguing par-3 course where the Masters play their tournament preliminary, that George Cobb was chosen as architect of the Sharon course. It was the Moselem Springs Golf Club at Fleetweed, Pa., that provided the example for Sharon's Merion bluegrass fairways and Penncross tees and greens. The rough is Kentucky bluegrass and fescue.

**C**obb was fortunate and foresighted in getting his artistry converted into a course that begins to look as if it was there forever. Young Frank Dobie is the sort of a chap architects pray will be hired when they start a course, and will stay on to be its manager. Dobie is a Penn State course-management graduate. He did his post-graduate work as an aide to Bob Williams, superintendent at Bob o'Link in suburban Chicago, also a men-

*Continued on next page*



On the seventh hole, upper left, eight springs were tapped, rocks exposed and 15 feet of fill were put in on right side of fairway.

Picturesque lake, at top, is key to Sharon's fine drainage, irrigation system. Note small lake that catches sliced approaches.

This fearsome short hole, above, illustrates Cobb's good use of Sharon's natural resources. If you miss this shot, you can always go fishing--the lake is stocked with bluegill and bass.



Sharon's clubhouse is a functional, one-story structure designed to provide the ultimate in comfort for the club's all-male membership.



What could be more inviting on a hot summer's day than to flop into one of these leather-covered beauties and down a long, cold drink?

## Men only *Continued from preceding page*

only, deluxe plant in course, clubhouse and operation.

There was considerable difference in elevation of the land with which Cobb worked. From tee to green on the first hole (its yardage is 530, 545 and 580) the drop is 120 feet. That makes a comfortable start for the vigorous businessman, and even for the fellow whose golf but not business has been neglected. The way Cobb has the bunkering around this green—and the rest of the greens too—is the touch of art that reaches its influence back to the placement of the tee shot.

**T**here is no monotony about the greens, or any other element of the holes. The green of the 16th covers 7,500 square feet. The hole varies from 160 to 195 yards and is framed with hungry traps. The finishing hole, with a tee that can stretch the yardage from 354 to 420, has a green that spreads over 14,000 square feet.

There is some finishing bunkering and tree planting to be done, as play discloses the advisability of tightening areas that now may allow carelessness or reveal chances to reward shrewd strategy, and perfect execution of masterly shots. A tree planting program is to run for five years.

Cobb's philosophy of design was to produce a course that would be a "smartie" rather than a "monster." The "monster" courses are for strong-backed commercial golf specialists, and maybe for masochistic amateurs who never have been identified and found guilty. It has been repeatedly demonstrated

that championships are won or lost at the guileful shorter holes rather than at the long brutes. The idea of golf as a game of brains fits into the spirit of the Sharon club.

Part of the farmland on the Sharon course was heavily wooded. Sixty per cent of the trees were eliminated. All the elms went, beating the Dutch elm disease to the job of extermination. Trees that were left were at least six feet apart to simplify maintenance.

In spending approximately \$2 million to build the course, the founders considered maintenance carefully. The maintenance equipment and material building is centrally located between the higher-level first nine and the second nine in the valley. There were 12 springs on the site and they've been drained into a 16-acre elbow lake, part of which you shoot over on the par-3 third, with your drive on the fourth hole that's from 365 to 405 yards, and which you cut over when you go for the sixth green that's from 170 to 220 yards from the tee. The lake, after stocking, has had a population explosion of bluegill and bass, so after knocking balls into it if you want to continue playing, go fishing or drown yourself, you are a free American and can do as you please.

This picturesque lake is the key to Sharon's fine drainage and irrigation installations. Drainage had to be exceptionally good right from the start, because the terrain threatened severe erosion that might have delayed completion of a well-turfed course. The first and seventh holes were reseeded three times, despite all of Sharon's 250 seeded acres being straw-covered during construction.





Sharon's members enjoy a great view of the finishing holes from the dining room, a wonderful viewpoint for future tourneys.

The whole course got an immense moving-around of rich farm topsoil for grass-growing, shifting of earth for playing and drainage contours, cutting in to limestone for tile lines and poking through the land for a full automatic drainage system that has been done in making a golf course. The course is in finished condition, except for the traps that are to be added to the 66 now installed and some trees that have to be moved into the bends of doglegs, where the members proved to be smarter than George Cobb thought they would be. When you can get members who can read a golf course so well that they have the architect candidly admitting he was out-smarted, you get interesting design.

**T**here are at least 50 to 60 playing the course most days and on weekends and Wednesdays play is heavier, but never is there any approach to crowding. Although the course is virtually next door to a high school, whose lads are available for caddying and course work, Sharon is mainly a golf car course because it has a great deal of play when the boys are in school. There is interesting consideration of golf car traffic in Cobb's design.

The notion of helping the members enjoy golf somehow has got into all the staff, and perhaps that's why the place has the atmosphere of being far remote from the world's rat race. The club's employees are encouraged to play golf on Monday, the traditional day of rest at private clubs. There are 30 employees on course and clubhouse during the height of the season.

You can get figures about the Sharon course until

your adding machine blows a fuse. The seventh hole, a 405-440 yard hole hacked out of the side of a limestone hill, cost \$75,000 just to "rough in." The automatic watering system, which cost about \$250,000, has 16 miles of lines, controlled by 52 miles of wiring. It's got a few buttons in the maintenance headquarters that outthink rain, starting with a syringing operation in the morning to knock off the dew and break up developing fungus formations. The irrigation system has pumped 2,000,000 gallons a day on the course to offset a baking drought.

What sort of championships will this playground of hideway husbands have? No Sharon member seems to care. The Firestone spectaculars for pros take care of the area's golf circuses and Sharon members figure they'll take care of their general responsibility to golf by being host to whatever championship fits. Probably the USGA Seniors would find this the ideal arena for its test. The matter of prospective tournaments at this club that was created for the champions of American industry will settle itself.

A Sharon charter member relates that a friend said to his wife one evening, "Darling, I have joined the Sharon club, where there are no women admitted." Then the husband got set to slide the punch and was happily surprised to hear his spouse say, "How wonderful, dear. Now you put \$3,000 dues in my checking account."

It was the Akron version of the Mexican stand-off: you lose your money but you save your life.

These bright young men who are in the high executive spots around Akron have money to use for real living. You can guess that from the size of their families. O'Neil has seven children and if the second generation of Sharon's members were to stand in company front on the course, you'd have to admit the club enrollment consists of builders of the nation. □



Frank Dobie, Sharon's course superintendent/club manager, shows a couple of the irrigation system controllers.