

Elm Creek Golf Links of Plymouth

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A Dream Come True

By Michael Klatte CGCS
Owner, Superintendent

The history behind Elm Creek Golf Course dates back to the middle 1950s. Construction started in a wooded, hilly area north of Hamel, Minn.

My father, Mervin Klatte, created a nine-hole layout out of old machinery left over from the family farmstead. It's difficult to tell of the amount of time and effort he put into this project in this short article. Elm Creek took five long years to complete.

My Dad had a great knack for working within his means. He would stretch the dollar to the limit whenever possible. This really taught me some strong values and principles. I've been very lucky to have had such a strong parent and a special relationship with my Dad. I will never forget him and what he meant to me.

Dad passed away June 8, 1987 in a hospital two months after open heart surgery; he was 76. He was well loved by many of the old-timers in this association. His dream and work inspired me at an early age to go into what is now a dynamic profession, that of a golf course superintendent.

Since those early days, when life was a little less demanding, I've watched the golf industry make some significant changes. It seems like the '60s and '70s were steady years, but the '80s brought renewed growth in golf course construction and expansion. It seems like every state in the union is into the golf rage now. Minnesota is rated first in golf interest.

Locally, my family felt the pressure to expand three or four years ago. At that time we stretched out three holes on the original nine and added about 120 yards. This change evoked great encouragement from the players and motivated us to think of more ways to improve the course.

Dad always seemed a little afraid to expand the course for fear of high taxes. He had been a tax assessor years ago, while still on the farmstead, and knew how large tax assessments could be. For



A VIEW from the top of the 12th tee, looking back at a pond on the 11th hole.

this reason I did some checking and evaluation with the Plymouth Planning Committee about the future. Plymouth, is one of the fastest growing suburbs in the Twin Cities, second only to Eagan, and could accommodate up to 106,000 residents by the year 2010. Our area of Plymouth, the northwest corner, will be one of the last bastions to be developed residentially. With this in mind and the willingness of a bordering neighbor to work with us on a contract for deed, we started drawing up plans for development of a new regulation nine holes. This would give us the full 18 holes needed to compete with other courses of equal length. This is an oversimplification of two years of trying to purchase land bordering our course. If you've ever had to deal with developers or land speculators when it comes to putting in a golf course, you'll understand how difficult it can be.

You really have to be careful in the area of controlling the situation from the beginning to the end. The construction work was the easiest part of the project. Trying to satisfy the people you were trying to buy the land from was another thing. The first man was going to sell his property to us surprisingly cheap but wanted us to use swamp land for our greens and tees. The next individual had

us stretched out over vast amounts of land, somewhere in the neighborhood of 120 acres, creating just six holes. Most of this land was planted with corn for many generations. On further review, we found that Atrazine levels would probably not allow us to plant grass for several years.

The land we bought was really the best of the three options, with natural rolling terrain, pasture and hayfields. We needed 23 acres and somehow, through long negotiations, it was acquired. The next step was to design a new nine holes from an original executive type par 29 course. This had been our second nine for over 20 years. It was built by my Dad in 1963 as a par 27 short course on approximately 15 acres. He thought it would be a good idea to sell enough green fees to pay the taxes on the land.

Well, it did a little better than that but not much. Our present situation had us taking 87% of our green fees from the front (original) nine holes. We figured the extra income generated from a new, improved nine holes of equal length and beauty would more than pay for the development costs.

With the accent on a Scottish type links design so popular these days, and

(Continued on next page)

Elm Creek—

the land with its openness, it seemed to lend itself naturally to this type of design. The rolling hills on the new land flowed perfectly with the present course, which is quite hilly. My design called for creating level landing areas from the tees with berms to separate adjoining fairways from one another. This would not only be practical but added the desired effect of a Scottish design.

My twin brother, Mark, helped a great deal with his input on integrating the two nines together in a balanced fashion. For instance, the original nine was a par 34 with two many par 3's. We devised a plan that would eliminate one of the par 3 holes and developed a breath-taking new par 4 overlooking the course.

But, before all this took place, the process of getting the plans passed through the City would take time. We hired Sathre-Bergquist, Inc. of Wayzata to help in the surveying and engineering to create the plan which was needed to pass through the City and Elm Creek Watershed District. They were a great help in this area and created a plan used by the construction company.

B & J Construction was retained as the general contractor. B & J had put in the new executive course at Brookview (Golden Valley) two years earlier. Greg Begin, the construction supervisor, did everything that was asked of him. I've never seen a better operator and a dedicated worker.

We changed or rebuilt 10 holes to create a par 70, 6,235-yard course from the blue tees. Four new greens were built and four others were enlarged or changed. A total of 27 new tee areas were built to accommodate all levels of play. We used the natural surroundings to create these magnificent multi-level tee areas.

Approximately 139,000 cubic yards of dirt was excavated and contoured during the project. Before the greens were put in, the creation of mounds, smoothing and leveling of fairways all took time, especially with the amount of rainfall we had. Along with all the work routing out new fairways and clearing of trees through two creek crossings, an irrigation system had to be expanded. Bob Reihe from MTI helped design the new irrigation expansion, which included the digging of a new 12" well. A 30-



ON THE 14TH TEE, you see this stretch of fairway.

horsepower, electric, submersible pump was installed with a capacity of 320 gallons/minute. This new pumping station will work very well in conjunction with the present 220 gallon/minute, 30-horsepower, submersible pump we have on the front nine. We installed 660 electric heads on greens and tees and 688 electric heads on the fairways on a single roll system. Seven new fairways were automated, and the old fairways have quick-coupler valves. All of the greens and most of the tees are automated.

The four new greens were built by using the fill out of the heavy black loam soils from two ponds. Heavy rains from July and August caused this fill to be quite wet. Greg recommended the use of Miriafi 500 Geo Textile soil stabilization fabric to keep the base from sinking or forming pockets. This fabric has been used quite extensively in making roads over swamps and wet areas in the past with tremendous success. Partial drainage was built into the greens using pea rock over a flat fabric tile. This system was put where natural drainage would appear.

The green mixture was a 90-10 mix of medium fine washed mason sand and sphagnum peat moss. The sand analysis, which was sent to Raleigh Physical Soil Testing Lab in Raleigh, N.C., was excellent. Dr. William Gilbert said, "The sand is excellent with peat being somewhat stemmy." We wanted a perk rate of 14 inches per hour in our greens and,

after a few more samples were sent to Twin City Testing in St. Paul, we were able to get it using the 90-10 analysis. The mix was spread out evenly to a 12-inch depth, using a 450 bulldozer. A Toro Sandpro was used to further compact and smooth out irregularities on the surface, at first using a steel drag and later using the machine alone.

We then sprinkled the new greens for 20 minutes with our new 660 electric Toro heads to further compact the soil. Later we seeded with Pennlinks creeping bentgrass at 1½-2 lbs. per 1000 sq. ft., using a cyclone spreader. I choose Pennlinks bent for its thatch resistance and upright growth habit. The Sandpro was used to get good soil/seed contact by driving back and forth in different directions. This really did a nice job of stabilizing and firming the surface.

Soil testing was done prior to seeding through Precision Turf Company. Dave Krupp was very helpful in recommending the right fertilizer and analysis to correct any deficiencies in the soil. The soil was from 6.1 to 6.7 ph; fairly neutral. There was a phosphorus deficiency in the fairly neutral. There was a phosphorus deficiency in the lowland acres where the five-acre pond was built; so a 10-18-22 fertilizer analysis was incorporated into the soil at 200 pounds per acre. Phosphorus was found predominantly low in all areas of the new land, so this fertilizer was used in lesser quantities here.

(Continued on Page 22)

ELM CREEK—

(Continued from Page 7)

All the seeding was done between August 15th and September 5th. We seeded the fairways with a mixture of 25% Touchdown and 25% Banff Bluegrasses along with 25% Fiesta II, 12½% Dasher II and 12½% Blazer II Perennial Ryegrasses. This blend was chosen because of its rapid development, aggressiveness, dark green color and ability for low mowing heights and wear resistance. We dragged the fairways first with a harrow and chain link fence weighted down with logs. I seeded with a Lily Cyclone spreader attached to a Ford 2000 model tractor with PTO. We were seeding at 150 pounds per acre.

Next we used a 3½ x 10-foot roller to smooth and cover the seed. We contracted with a mulching company to throw straw over all the seeded fairways and roughs. The roughs were seeded with a 35% Common Kentucky Bluegrass, 15% Park Kentucky Bluegrass, 40% Creeping Red Fescue and 10% Perennial Ryegrass. All the tees were seeded with the same mixture as the fairways.

October brought more construction work to the project. Four holes from the

existing land had to be altered or changed. The second green was taken out and remade next to an existing pond. This made room for a new par 4 third hole which had been a par 3. Twelve large Spruce, Arbor Vitae and Pines were transplanted from our nursery area into or along this third hole to protect the golfer. The 12th hole was changed by placing a new tee on top of a hill overlooking the 12th green. The 18th hole was the most difficult to reconstruct. We took out a number of large deciduous trees and leveled the banks along Elm Creek to create a most spectacular hole.

The great Halloween blizzard in late October really helped insulate the newly germinated fairways and greens. Over 10,000 sq. yards of Baron Kentucky bluegrass sod was laid in October on numbers 3, 12 and 18 fairways, and around the second green because of change and re-routing. The snow will help compact the sod, and the seeded areas will have a tremendous head start for spring growth.

These new additions and changes will be a great boost to our business. The 23 acres of new land expansion has three of the four new greens. The new 13th

hole which is a 630-yard, par 5 and the longest par 5 in the state has a rather small green of 3,200 sq. ft. Next comes number 14 which doglegs left around the new 5-acre pond to a double-tier green 4,500 sq. ft. An elevated tee is featured on the next hole, where the golfer can see a beautiful view of water and fairway all the way to the 15th green which measures 5,400 sq. ft., snugly bordering the pond. These are magnificent holes and should challenge even the best of golfers.

We are anxiously awaiting the upcoming season and look forward to seeing the results of our work.

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