

'New' Highland Park to be Flagship of St. Paul Courses

Reconstruction Mixes Best of Old With Most Advanced of New Practices

When reconstruction of the City of St. Paul's Highland Park National Golf Course is complete later this year, the course will feature the best of two worlds. Those worlds range from the beauty of its mature trees and the spectacular view that overlooks the metro area to those of the most advanced practices in golf course construction.

The course, which has been redesigned and was put to bed last fall with the greens and tees seeded in a four to six-inch layer of an 85-15 ratio of sand to peat, is now in the grow-in stage that is expected to make it the flagship of the four golf courses owned and operated by the City of St. Paul.

Features are Kept

Retained from the past in the \$3.5 million project are the magnificent trees - some as old as the course itself - along with the ornate Spanish mission style clubhouse. "It sure won't be like a suburban golf course that has been built into a cornfield," Ken Wehrle, project manager for the city, says of the course, which overlooks the downtowns of Minneapolis and St. Paul from one of the highest points in the Twin Cities.

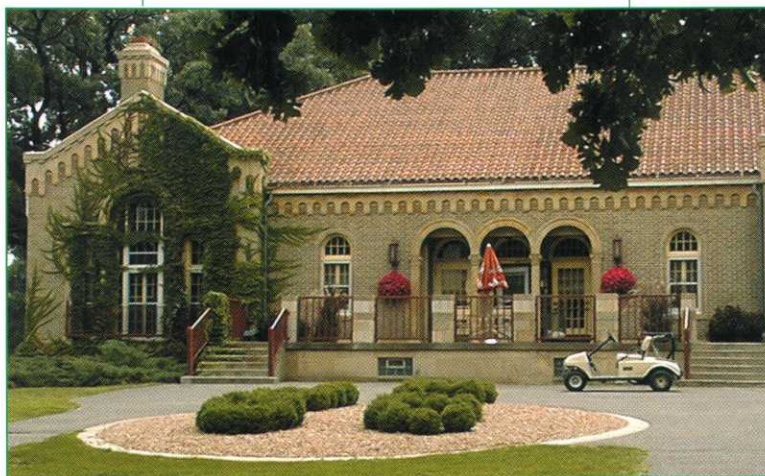
Newly incorporated into the 135-acre site is a reshaping of the contour of the golf course, an elaborate storm water and sub-surface drainage system, a reconfiguration of the layout of the holes to reduce play into the sun and to have the holes start and finish closer to the clubhouse, a new 55-station range, and new greens and tees built to the highest of USGA standards. "I'm really pleased with the way that things are turning out," Wehrle says of the work that has been done. "I'm happy with all of the contractors; they're a quality group. I think we've solved all the problems that we wanted to solve."

First Opened in 1926

Many of those problems were almost as old as the course, which was developed shortly after the city purchased the land in 1925. The first nine holes were opened in 1926. The second nine were ready for play

in 1927 and the clubhouse was constructed in 1929. Although his involvement is not substantiated, the design of the clubhouse is similar to other works by Clarence Wesley Wigington, the nation's first black municipal architect and an employee of the City of St. Paul from 1915 until 1949.

Reasons for the reconstruction include that it didn't drain very well and had a



high water table, which made maintenance difficult and affected playability of the course. A focus of the project, which was designed by golf course architects Paul Miller and Garrett Gill of Gill Miller, Inc., River Falls, Wis., was to properly grade and drain the site to accommodate ground water and to facilitate play immediately following storm events.

More Than a Renovation

"It's a totally new golf course now, not just a renovation of what was there," Gill says. "The course has a new configuration and new routing and it has been lengthened to just over 6,600 yards. It is remarkably different and yet, we have preserved virtually all of the mature trees that have been very much a part of the golf course. When it re-opens, the course will look as if it has trees that have been there for the 80 years, which many of these large trees have been."

The beautiful, old clubhouse had served little function in recent years in the old design. In the new design, the starting and finishing holes have been brought back to the clubhouse to give it a much bigger influence on the course. The par 72

course will have multiple tee sets with junior tees on several holes. The sale of golf tickets, along with the pro shop, will be moved to the clubhouse.

Greens and Tees Critical

The construction of USGA grade greens and tees was a critical component of the project, Gill relates. "Dakota Peat provided the peat for the greensmix and its sister company, Dakota Analytical, was responsible for all the protocol testing to determine and maintain the proper blending to meet the specs. The thing about Dakota Peat is that it can meet USGA specs over a wider use of sand. This was particularly helpful to the contractor (C. S. McCrossan, Inc., Maple Grove, Minn.), which was using sand from its pits."

Dakota Analytical, one of only eight A2LA-accredited labs in the world (seven are located in the United States with the eighth in the United Kingdom), worked with Gill Miller to establish and monitor the quality control limits. "We were working with a new sand company (McCrossan) and we needed to bring the sand into compliance," Diane Rindt, Dakota Analysis manager and chemist, says. "McCrossan did a good job of that. They washed the sand and we did a sieve analysis to determine the appropriate particle size before determining the optimum mix."

Course superintendent Denise Kispert was impressed. "The rootzone mix looked beautiful," she says. "The Dakota staff was really supportive. They were on site several times and really kept us informed and updated on each step of the project." Quality control tests were done on each 1,000 tons of the 85-15 mix. "There was really good communication between all parties," Rindt notes. "Bob (Oelke, Dakota's staff agronomist) did a good job of coordinating communication on our part of the project."

The overall supervision provided by Gill Miller was also very good, Oelke notes. "I was impressed by their attention

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to detail. They were meticulous in their follow through and were on the job regularly. And McCrossan, which was doing its first golf course job, was really thorough, too. They have an abundance of high tech equipment for shaping bunkers, tees and greens, and they really wanted to do things right. All the checks and balances on this project were very good."

First Golf Course Job

An experienced earth-moving contractor specializing in heavy, highway and commercial projects, McCrossan was doing its first golf course project. "This was our first golf course job," says McCrossan project manager Troy Weis. "We had been interested in getting into golf course work for several years but nothing had come across our plate before this project.

"Most golf courses are privately owned and bidding is done by invitation only, so if you hadn't done golf course work in the past it was difficult to break into the business. This, being a project where there would be competitive bidding, we thought we'd give it a shot."

While McCrossan was new to golf course work, the company's extensive use of GPS equipment was not. "We have equipment installed right on our earth movers. Our dozers have small computers to show the operator just how much cut or fill is needed at each specific point on the job. We can grade without a lot of need for elevation stakes," Weis says. "Using GPS makes a job much easier and much more efficient."

Scott Greenseth, an experienced golf course shaper, participated with McCrossan in the final shaping and detailing of the golf course.

Other contractors working on the project were Premiere Irrigation, Hastings, Minn., which did irrigation and electrical work; Heikes Farms, of Lakeville, Minn., which did the seeding, sodding and erosion matting work and Morris Excavating & Drainage, Jordan, Minn., which assisted McCrossan with some of the subsurface drainage work. The new course will have a fully automatic, radio-controlled Toro irrigation system.

Clubhouse is Landmark

While the course is being updated to a first class facility, funding needed to bring the clubhouse back into top shape has not yet been fully secured, according to Vince

Gillespie, who as manager of special services for the City of St. Paul is in charge of all four of its golf courses.

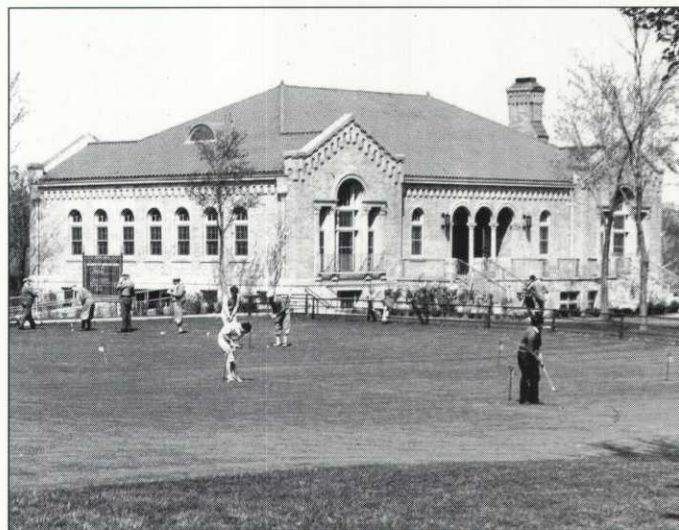
The clubhouse, an important landmark within the Highland Park community, is built of limestone and has stone columns and a red tile roof. The building, which is virtually unchanged since its original construction, is eligible for designation to the National Register of Historic Places.

"We're still hoping to find all the funding for that project," Gillespie says. The clubhouse is in need of both exterior and interior work to preserve its historical character and to make it a more useful resource for the community.

One area that could provide some of the funding for that project and for other needs, he says, is the sponsorship program that is being initiated in which 24 business sponsors are being sought to commit from \$10,000 to \$15,000 each to support special projects.

Lifetime Memorials

In addition, the 10 ponds that were created to control ground and storm water will be sold and signed as lifetime memorials. "This can be done in memory of



someone who played or caddied on the course, or may have had some other involvement with the course or in the community," Gillespie says. "It is a way for people to build a memory for a family member." About the renovation schedule for the course, Gillespie says, "Everything is looking pretty good. We hope to be hitting off the practice range grass later in the year. The course itself probably won't be re-opened until the spring of 2005. We don't want to re-open it prematurely; we have too much of an investment in the course to risk that."

The re-opening schedule, by Oelke's determination, might be a little conservative. "With the 85-15 mix, which is a click above normal," he says, "we'll have tees and greens that will be ready to rock long before the course is scheduled to be re-opened. The performance of the turf," he says, "won't come up short."

Snoopy Bunker

A Snoopy-shaped sand bunker is among the features of the rebuilt Highland Park National Golf Course in St. Paul that is planned to re-open in 2005.

Designed and built as a tribute to Snoopy creator Charles Schulz, the feature is located on the 15th hole and includes a pond.

"This was the home course of Charles Schulz, who had caddied and played there as a youth," Garrett Gill of the Gill Miller, Inc. golf course architectural firm, says. "So, as a tribute to him, Paul Miller of our firm came up with the idea of putting in a Snoopy bunker. This has gotten national recognition. Mrs. Schulz and the Schulz Foundation have approved the feature."

