

White Manor C.C. Hopes Course Shines Through for Summer Tournaments



WILLISTOWN >> Just down the road from White Manor Country Club is what used to be Edgmont Country Club, but it's now fallow and soon to be developed for housing.

It's a cautionary tale for private clubs in the region: evolve and adapt or face some potentially serious implications.

The members at White Manor tackled the issue aggressively late last year, selling the club to Concert Golf Partners, a California-based owner-operator of golf properties nationwide. As part of the transaction, Concert agreed to pay off the

club's debt of about \$6 million and promised to make an additional \$1.5 million in improvements. But very little is being done to the 18-hole, par-71 championship golf course.

"During the purchase, the deal closer was the golf course itself," said White Manor General Manager Dave Heiser. "There is a masterpiece out there, in our opinion, and we don't have to mess with it. It was built and later redesigned properly. They spent the money and did it the right way at the time, so you don't mess with those things."

White Manor sports an impressive pedigree as the host of professional championships and many of the world's top players. The club actually started in 1948 after the purchase of the existing Paxon Hollow Golf Club in Delaware County. White Manor stayed there for 15 years before moving to the current site, a 165-acre plot that was formerly a dairy farm.

Since debuting in its current form in 1964, White Manor has played host to LPGA's McDonald's Classic (1981-86), the Senior PGA Tour's Bell Atlantic Classic (1991) and later the Tylenol Kids Classic, a mid-week charity event featuring PGA pros.

"If you go back into the attic and basement of this club, you will find (references) to the old names and the old tournaments," Heiser said. "We want to build on that. We want to create showcases to highlight that history."

In 2002-03, White Manor underwent a \$6 million renovation with golf course architect Bobby Weed overseeing the project. It was a major upgrade, but the members struggled to pay off the debt until Concert's arrival.

“I played here when I was a kid in junior events but that was before the renovation,” said Gilbertsville native Kyle Kolarz, the club’s director of golf. “Even though the course is very different now, I’ve known about the aura and respect White Manor has around the (Philadelphia PGA) Section for a long time.”

Golf Digest named White Manor as one of the state’s top 25 courses in 2015, and Golf Week Magazine has bestowed similar plaudits. In an effort to promote the course, White Manor will play host to two tournaments this summer: the 104th Pennsylvania Amateur, as well as a qualifier for the USGA Mid-Amateur Championship. The 54-hole Pennsylvania Amateur will take place July 28-Aug. 2. The qualifier is scheduled for Aug. 28.

“We want the best players in the state and region to come and see what’s here,” Kolarz said. “It is a little tucked away. We are a little off the beaten path. We don’t have the recognition of a Merion or a (Philadelphia) Cricket Club, so we want to get people introduced or reintroduced. Hopefully down the road we’ll host more events.”

Concert is very reluctant to make any changes to the course, which plays from just over 7,000-yards from the tips. There has been some talk about reworking the 13th and 14th greens and, perhaps, adding a set of forward tees, but those potential projects are years from being addressed.

“These aren’t knee-jerk reactions but long-term projects that we would bring in the proper people to do it,” Heiser said. “We consider this course a Ferrari and we are not going to hire a mechanic down the street – if we do it, we are going to do it right.

“We don’t have a problem with bringing the standards up a little bit, but our members told us that the conditions are the best they’ve been in over a decade.”

So far the upgrades have been away from the course. Paddle courts have been added and the lower level of the clubhouse is in the process of being converted into a fitness center. In addition, all of White Manor’s dining facilities are going to be modernized; there will be a facelift for the locker rooms; and a year-round Golf Performance Center will open this fall for club-fitting, lessons and play on simulators.

Concert recently acquired Philmont Country Club in Huntingdon Valley, and is looking for more properties in the Philadelphia area.

“We love the Philadelphia market and that’s why we’ve acquired two clubs so quickly,” Heiser said. “We have a third club in the mid-Atlantic market (Country Club at Woodmore in Maryland). This area feels like the perfect place to grow our business model.”