

Golf: fairway to the future

The history of golf in Otsego County has its roots where K mart and Carter's Food Center are located today.

The retail locations are the former site of the Gaylord Country Club, the county's first golf course.

Janet Deneen, bookkeeper and secretary for the Gaylord Country Club, said the country club began as a nine-hole course in 1924. The course has always been open to the public, she added.

The building now occupied by the Elks Club was the clubhouse, and nine holes fanned out from that point.

In 1972, Deneen said, the country club moved to M-32 West.

Louise Shepard, wife of the late Jack Shepard, president of the country club in 1972, said her husband was instrumental in acquiring the property where the present course is located.

Shepard said the country club originally intended to expand into an 18-hole course on land it owned that is now Aspen Park.

When the golf course architects looked at the property, it was decided there wasn't enough room for an additional nine holes, she said.

The alternative was to purchase property and build a new course.

She said her husband began looking for property during the fall of 1971 and found a parcel owned by the Brandenburg family on M-32 West. The board of directors voted to purchase the property in February 1972, she said.

She said her husband died in May 1972, and never lived to see



the new course built.

Construction began that year, she said, and first play on the new course started in 1975.

She said her husband told her the only difference between the country club and the course at Hidden Valley was the country club property didn't have any red maples.

"Later, they planted one there in his (her husband's) memory," she said.

Hidden Valley is second in terms of longevity among golf courses in Otsego County, with construction beginning in 1955.

George Barker, senior assistant manager at Hidden Valley, said the course was designed by William H. Diddle in 1955, with play on the first nine holes beginning in 1957.

Construction on the second nine waited a while, with play beginning in 1962.

The golf course was operated as a membership-only course for the first 30 years, Barker said, opening to the public in 1985.

David Smith, owner of

Wilderness Valley, and grandson of founder George Wellington Smith, said the first nine holes at Wilderness were built in 1971. The course was designed by Al Watrous and Emil Beck, Smith said.

Smith said Watrous was a former PGA champion who was a friend of his grandfather.

The second nine followed in 1972.

"The business has changed a lot," Smith said. "We began with 2,500 rounds a year, and had 30,000 rounds last year."

Smith plans a new 18-hole course, with construction to begin in the spring of 1990.

Mike Husby, golf pro at Michaywe', said the first Michaywe' course opened in 1974, designed by Don Childs and Bob Bills. A second course, the Lake Course, opened in 1988, Husby said.

The Lake Course was subsequently judged one of the top three new courses in the United States for that year, he said.

Sylvan Resort opened "Treetops", its Robert Trent Jones designed course, in 1986 and has a second course planned, with construction to begin in the spring.

Other Gaylord Golf Mecca courses in the area, but not in the county, are Garland Golf Course in Lewiston, and Lakes of the North between Gaylord and Mancelona.

With the advent of the golf mecca promotion group in 1987, golf has grown into a multi-million dollar business in the county, and turned Gaylord into a destination for golfers throughout the Midwest.

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Hidden Valley Resort

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