



Newly renovated, the clubhouse at Ould Newbury Golf Club was built in 1916.



# Staying the COURSE

Pub renovations bring 'new energy' to Ould Newbury Golf Club in its 100th year

**T**he "19th Hole" at golf clubs is known as a social retreat for those who have finished a round or a place to grab a bite between nines. At some courses, it is an afterthought.

But that's certainly not the case at the Ould Newbury Golf Club, which recently made its bar-restaurant the centerpiece of a financial comeback.

Until recently, the club was struggling. Membership was down, and its financial future was carrying a high handicap. But major renovations of the indoor facilities have helped it increase membership, and as the club prepares to celebrate its 100th year in operation, it is stronger than it's been in decades.



Regulars meeting up at the pub include, from left, past president Ed Shea, Peter Clay and Roger Fuller, all of Newburyport.

"The club has new energy," says member Roger Fuller, who plays regularly and also manages some of the club's tournaments. "We were losing members, and not as many people were playing. The new bar-restaurant helps,

and a new structure for membership makes it easier for newcomers to join. The course is in great shape, and now so are the finances."

"There's been a 100 percent improvement in the club in the last year or so," says Ed Shea, a former president of the club. "An attractive bar-restaurant helps. People stay at the club longer, and you can mix with your friends in a great facility. This is a good moment for Ould Newbury."

The Pub at Ould Newbury offers a shiny wooden bar with about 20 stools, along with dining tables for several dozen. Visitors have spectacular views of greens and fairways.

Photos of golf greats from Sam Snead to Michelle Wie line the walls, and several color TVs inform tired

By DYKE HENDRICKSON • Photos by BRYAN EATON





Ron Margeson Jr., general manager of the club, stands behind the new bar inside the renovated restaurant.

athletes what's happening in the rest of the world.

Viewers' preference appears to be The Golf Channel.

Several factors have been responsible for the club's scrambling recovery: the improved bar-restaurant, reorganization of finances, revitalization of a youth program and increased number of community events.

In personnel terms, the ascension of Ron Margeson Jr. to general manager has been a key factor in the improvement, members say. Margeson is a teaching pro, but in the last year, he has taken over management duties. He knows the game on the course, and in the clubhouse.

"The board felt we needed some added energy and new members, and we agreed that increasing the social part of the club would be helpful," says Margeson, a



Courtesy photo

The clubhouse is seen under construction in the 1900s.

gifted golfer who shoots under par.

He manages the club, gives lessons and is instrumental in working with the board on future planning.

"We wanted people to stay around and

enjoy the club and the members," he says. "So we got the approval to redo the restaurant, and we're pleased with the way it turned out."

Much of the work and materials were





Bartender Tony Kataxinos delivers a steak and cheese grinder with french fries to a customer.

donated by members. The handsome bar, for instance, was installed by Meadows Construction. Members chipped in, and some helped with labor. The renovation cost was about \$58,000, but its value is greater because of donated goods and services.

"I wanted to build something that was ours," Margeson says. "Our social events are outstanding now, and members bring



The ninth hole of Ould Newbury Golf Club is not far from the bar-restaurant.

their spouses and friends. It is open to the public, so visitors can dine without being members."

Another factor in its resurgence is a new approach to finances.

The property is owned by the nearby Governor's Academy. Club treasurer Hank Moore renegotiated the lease agreement, and the club appears to have more favorable terms.

"We are running the club like a business now," says Moore, a longtime member and local company owner. "We have a better agreement with the academy, and we take a closer financial look at everything we do. Our new membership rates make it easier for newcomers to join."

Cost of a full annual membership is \$1,655. A weekday membership is \$985.

Most members live within the Newburyport area, but some hail from as far away as Norton, Lexington and southern New Hampshire.

The club has about 250 members, up from 160 a half-dozen years ago.

"Some of that increase is because the economy is improving," Margeson says. "But it's also because we have a great core of membership, and people find they have a good time here. They tell others about what we offer."

Nonmembers are encouraged during the week.

"I paid \$30 today, which I think is fair," says Pat Ladd, a Salisbury resident who was enjoying a sandwich after playing

## TEeing OFF

- ▶ **Course:** Ould Newbury Golf Club, Route 1, Newbury
- ▶ **Founded:** 1916
- ▶ **Holes:** Nine
- ▶ **Greens fees:** Range from \$15-\$25 for nine holes, \$33-\$38 for 18. Open to the public Mondays through Fridays. Tee times are not required but can be reserved by calling 978-465-9888 or online through <http://bit.ly/2bx4k6G>.
- ▶ **More information:** [www.ouldnewbury.com](http://www.ouldnewbury.com)

on a recent day. "I don't play enough to join any club, but it's a treat to play here. The course is green and well-maintained. Some courses are brown this summer for lack of rain."

The club has its own well, and greens superintendent Nate Walker and his staff have been able to water regularly despite this past summer's drought conditions.

The course is a nine-hole layout of about 6,230 yards for men and 5,250 yards for women.

The head golf professional is Jim Hilton, who has been at Ould Newbury for more than three decades. He says that he is having some of the best seasons that he's ever had.

The teaching pro/pro shop manager says that equipment sales are up about 18 percent in the past few years, and he is seeing more members taking lessons.

"There's a lot of enthusiasm now,"

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Youngsters attending a golf clinic led by head pro Jim Hilton break for lunch.

Hilton says. "Members are working on their games, playing a lot and making use of the facilities. We've been very busy, and the events and tournaments are well-attended."

Club leadership has stressed junior programs in recent years. This summer, for instance, it hosted three separate sessions of golf camp. Each term had about 40 youngsters, and all three were at capacity.

The course is used by high school teams, including those from Governor's and Triton Regional High School. Junior tournaments are often held, and the presence of teenagers is encouraged.

Margeson stresses support of juniors, perhaps because he did not have such an opportunity. He grew up in a blue-collar neighborhood in Chelsea, and golf wasn't on the agenda.

"I didn't know what golf was," he says. "And then I hurt my leg as a kid, and I had to find something I could do (other than skating or running sports)."

He found golf – and also learned he was a natural. To play below par is a remarkable achievement.

"Golf is a tough game," Margeson says modestly. "If you look at (hockey's) Wayne Gretzky, who had maybe the best hand-eye coordination of any athlete, he is about a 10 handicap. (Basketball great) Michael Jordan is a 4 or a 5. I don't get to play as much as I'd like, with running the club and still giving lessons. But it's a great game."

And talking superlatives, veteran members say that the club's 100th year of operation is one of its best ever.

A special "members party" planned for October will take note of a century

of golf.

Based on the momentum of good feelings, a great green course and a boffo bar-restaurant, that anniversary celebration should be a winner. *MB*



## OCTOBER SPA EXTRAVAGANZA





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