



Unveiling Bowes Creek Country Club

By Greg Jourdan

Rick Jacobson's first original design in Illinois opens in late September. *Golf Chicago* has yet to swing our sticks on the amazing course, but we have had numerous site visits to a facility that will earn national honors as one of the best new courses for 2010.



When Libertyville-based golf course architect Rick Jacobson first set foot on the ridges, wetlands, and farmlands that would become Bowes Creek Country Club, alarmists across the country were preparing for Y2K and the certain peril that would stall technology during our entrance into the next millennia. Our nation's computers transitioned seamlessly across Y2K, but the golf course development two miles west of Randall Road had a few more obstacles to overcome to reach fruition. Jacobson has waited over a decade for his first clean slate golf course design in Illinois. "It has

been a bit of a roller coaster ride," admits Jacobson. "It has taken a lot of patience and persistence for all involved."

The bureaucratic challenges Bowes Creek Country Club faced included a deal from the City of Elgin to waive a reported over \$7 million in fees for the Toll Brothers, the development firm who has brought Bowes Creek to its opening next month after the project changed hands a couple times. The Toll Brothers' recent efforts at Hawthorn Woods Country Club brought the Illinois Open to the club, along with high praise from members and media. The waiver grant-

ed from the City of Elgin totaled half of the golf facility's construction cost, which includes an impressive clubhouse.

Unlike Hawthorn Woods CC, Bowes Creek CC is open to the public, but do not expect a typical public golf experience. Elgin resident and Bowes Creek CC's director of golf, Mike Lehman assures golfers, "Bowes Creek is every golfer's chance to experience country club service. We have members, and we welcome members for the day. That is what we want players to experience, being members for a day." Bowes Creek is actively seeking members, but the club, a property of the municipality, is open to the public for daily play, which is a modest \$75 to \$89 per day play rate for the rest of the 2009 season. Remember, this rate is for unlimited golf with cart and GPS, and unlimited range balls. Next year, rates will increase to \$79 weekdays and \$95 on weekends and holidays. Annual memberships are available with pre-opening commitments to individual and corporate memberships discounted \$800 for the 2010 season. After the turf begins to fly in late September, memberships at Bowes Creek CC return to \$4,400 annually for individual and corporate annual rates.

Jacobson, who was Jack Nicklaus' chief designer before branching out to create Jacobson Golf Course Design, used the Golden Bear's knowledge as a player and architect to solidify his design beliefs that there is a desire to create every new course for the professional horses, but there is a greater need and appreciation for golf courses that create interest in the other 99.9% of golfers. The Bowes Creek layout obviously is geared to fascinate all players and to allow those players to experience success. Jacobson explains, "There is a lot of room to hit the ball. The average golfer will not reach most of the bunkers that he will see from the tee." Moreover, those bunkers are Jacobson's signature features at Bowes Creek CC. "The fescue grasses on the eyebrows of the bunkering give it some definition. It is a rugged look, more of a prairie-feel to the context of the golf course." As golfers step to the first tee box, these artistic, eyebrow'd bunkers wave like a golden-fingered temptress as the course moves your sight lines diagonally across the fairway searching for a landing strip. Although you are also hitting into the prevailing wind, there is plenty of room to swing the big stick.

Listen to the designer. Most of those eye-catching, hypnotizing wispy collars are not in play. Bowes Creek CC is not full of illusions; the terrain afforded opportunities to present golf holes from different levels. "We tried to get





the golfer up high for tee shots,” Jacobson comments. The tenth and eighteenth tee boxes at Bowes Creek exemplify this strategy on a grand scale. The tenth hole, a 516-yard, par-5 that affords a highland panorama of the coming and going holes to the clubhouse, encourages golfers to use the swing muscle between their ears. A quick look at the 18th fairway gives golfers a sneak peak of the landing area for their final drive. Again, from the 18th tee box, set on the property’s highest ridge, this hole looks diabolical! Not the case if you are on the correct tees. The meddlesome bunker in the middle of the fairway is not in reach unless you hit a career drive with the prevailing wind.

Bowes Creek CC uses strategy to challenge players, so forget about bloated yardage to reach PGA TOUR lengths. Better players using the back tees will be presented with visual challenges. “Using the angle of the tee boxes, I positioned the back tees to be more difficult,” Jacobson says. This challenge is evident on hole 12, a short 333-yard par-4 that forces players on the back tees to carry a marsh toward a pair of penal bunkers. A driver could lead to an eagle putt, but a lost ball in the wetlands or through the fairway is a more likely outcome. Yet, from the middle and forward tees, the short two-shooter is a straight shot to an elevated green with only the marsh bordering the right side of the fairway the length of the hole.

If you are looking for a signature hole at Bowes Creek CC, there are plenty of options, but we prefer Jacobson’s assessment. “There is a WOW factor here,” he states. “Actually, a lot of them. The 18th hole is a dramatic finish to a round, but there are great feelings throughout the course. The holes go from lowland holes along Bowes Creek to the ridges that provide backdrops to greens and elevation for tee boxes. There is a lot of environmental diversity, and diversity in each golf hole.”

Bowes Creek CC is completing all the punch lists that will finally allow Elgin to unveil the facility to the public. In coming weeks the club will welcome her members and “members for the day” for their own sneak peak at an amazing course that is sure to garner national praise as one of the country’s best new courses for 2010.

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