

# Our Favorites

## GOLFChicago Staffers Share Their Favorite Courses Across Chicagoland

For twenty years, we have been asked one question more than any other.

What is the best course in Chicago?

Actually, there is an easy answer to this question.

We do not know best, but we can tell you our favorite courses. Back in 2005, during a chat with golf journalist Jeff Rude, golf course designer Greg Martin, and videographer Dave Lockhart, we tried to reach a consensus for the criteria of best course. After a few rounds, Rude, Martin, Dave Weretka, Lockhart, and Greg Jourdan agreed that best is far too subjective. The national magazines rank courses by design era, by state, and country. These lists are fun talking points at work, on the patio, or while waiting to tee off on a par 3. However, these conversations are benign because a national list is not an intimate collection. When a regional magazine lists its Best Courses ranking, it is like ranking your kids with a rubric chart. That is not our intention here.

Because it is our 20th year, we thought we should share a few of our favorite courses with our readers. It was our intention to select the courses that hold special memories. Obviously, we love Chicago's Mount Rushmore of golf courses. After all, Chicagoland is home to Cog Hill, George Dunne National, and Harborside International. Moreover, we would be remiss not to mention our affections for places like Arrowhead, The Glen Club, Cantigny, Shepherds Crook, and Big Run. We may have missed your favorite, but we encourage you to share your favorite course on our facebook.com page before the season is over. After all, is there anything more fun than talking about your favorite golf courses?

### Something Old and Something New

By Dave Weretka, Publisher

I am a sap for old golf courses from the golden era of golf design. When I am at Old Oak Golf Club in Homer Glen, I cannot help but envision golfers playing golf here almost 100 years ago. This family-owned course has been around since the 1920s. It has gone through a facelift recently, and it is a real test of golf. It is always in great shape and continues to



be a course that stands the test of time. With mature tree-lined fairways, shot placement is the key on this gently rolling track. Hole 11 has been redesigned, and it is a true test of golf. This long par 4 is a dogleg right that requires a long iron approach to an island-esque green. [www.oldoakcc.com](http://www.oldoakcc.com)

Mistwood Golf Club in Romeoville has positioned itself as one of the best golf facilities in the nation. I play a lot of golf and very few places compare to Mistwood. The course is a shot-maker's dream. Mistwood's signature, sod-faced bunkers make it a unique experience here in Chicago. Don't feel tempted to pull out the driver on every hole, or you may end up blowing up a scorecard from one of the deep, gnarly traps.

A quick trip through my favorite places on the course begins at hole five, which is guarded by water on the right and fescue on the left. Pot bunkers, left and right, guard the three-tiered green. Next, avoid Lake St. James and enjoy all that Kelpie's Corner has to offer (holes 14 - 16). On the 15th tee, be sure to gauge the wind direction and decide on how much of the corner you want to chew off.

Mistwood is comfortably settling into its own skin with the addition of the new amenities that include McWethy's Pub, a pro shop, and a world-class practice facility. Mistwood is a Chicagoland treasure—every golfer must stop and play this season to experience a long awaited dream that has now become a reality. It doesn't get any better than this! [www.mistwoodgc.com](http://www.mistwoodgc.com)

### Photographic Intimacy

By Greg Jourdan, Editor

My favorites list could fill an almanac, so I have selected two courses that I have photographed and learned their nooks and crannies with a lens. I spent a few days photographing The Highlands of Elgin before the full 18-hole layout was open for play. I waited for clouds to clear and the sun to shine. I also followed deer into an eerie graveyard adjacent to the fifth hole. At sunset, I watched the course go to bed as a leash of foxes waited for me to return to the clubhouse. These scenes repeated for three days.

The quarry loop, holes four through eight, is oozing with character and variety. The itty-bitty fourth hole is one of my favorite one-shot holes in the state. The next hole runs toward the historic Elgin Mental Health Center. Its smoke stacks are your target line to the green. Another favorite one-shooter is hole



seven, which always seems to take more club than you swung. The risk/reward eighth hole is a cape-style hole that begs the brave to find the green with a driver, although a mid-iron and less hubris are the best route to par. [www.highlandsofelgin.com](http://www.highlandsofelgin.com)

Lost Marsh Golf Course in Hammond is another course that is unique and memorable. I met Lost Marsh with my camera. A special magic happens when you are on a course during the golden light hours. The intense sunrays reveal the humps and bumps. Those rays also beckon the wildlife to come out and play.

I have heard Lost Marsh described as a links course, but this label is misleading, if not entirely incorrect. While the course is owned and operated by the Port Authority, it is not a links course in nature; it is a course linked with nature. The lake holes are difficult, period. Holes four and five are humbly narrow and give no quarter to any bend in your tee shots. Each time I tee off on those holes, I feel like I am trying to land a golf ball on a cart path. The remaining front nine holes weave through a wooded park with smoke stacks peeking through the treetops. Lost Marsh has that special charm that creates golfing memories, even if a couple of holes feel like a root canal. [www.lostmarshgolf.com](http://www.lostmarshgolf.com)



## My First Love

By Todd Mrowice, Senior Writer

I am guessing that I am the only writer at GOLFChicago magazine who is going to pick a course that is no longer open. I could not help myself. My favorite course in Northern Illinois is Oak Meadows Golf Course in Addison. The course shut down in early July with a scheduled rebirth in 2017. I'll be waiting for Director of Golf, Ed Stevenson, to unlock the door to the highly anticipated new layout.

So why pick a course that nobody can play for a while? Simple. Oak Meadows was the first course I ever played, and I played it over a hundred times with the man that introduced me to the game of golf. That man is my dad, Brock Mrowice. He and seven of his closest friends held permanent times at Oak Meadows at 8:00 and 8:05 for just about 20 years. It is also safe to say that Oak Meadows is where I learned to swear and when to "press" in my match.



Oak Meadows, to me, embodied everything that is Chicago golf. The layout was somewhat simplistic, but every single hole was tree-lined with little margin for error. In fact, I would put the first three holes up against any others as far as difficulty goes. The course's rich history dates back to its days as Elmhurst Country Club where Ben Hogan won the Chicago Open in 1941. Oak Meadows will always hold a special place in my heart. My bucket list includes playing a round there one day with a foursome consisting of my dad, my son who is almost one, and my nephew (Jacob) who is five, and myself. [www.dupagegolf.com](http://www.dupagegolf.com)

Another favorite course is where I cut my teeth in the golf industry. I grew up about a mile away from Schaumburg Golf Club. When I was a kid I would strap on my Sunday bag, hop on my bike, and head over to SGC. I would hit balls, chip, and putt until after dark. I have always considered it my "home course." Former Director of Golf Preston "Pepi" Irwin hired me as a cart attendant when I was 15, and I climbed the ranks to the pro shop staff, where I took tee times (on paper, not online). The course is always in pristine condition, the greens are fast, and the staff keeps play moving. My favorite hole has to be #6 on the Player's Course, a 440-yard, par 4 that makes or breaks my round.

## Thanks for the Memories

By Bill Daniels, Founder

My golf life began in 1959 at Sunset Valley Golf Club, the municipal course in Highland Park. I was twelve and had just started caddying at a private club, Briarwood Country Club in Deerfield. I would ride my bicycle to Briarwood, caddie one or two loops, and then ride home so that my mom could drive me to Sunset Valley. I would practice and play until dark.

In those days, the course was affectionately called "The Bumps." The course did not have watered fairways, so by August the fairways played like airport runways. The greens were not much softer. A drive would run forever. Flying a wedge to the green resulted in one big bounce on and over the green. Therefore, I learned to hit the bump and run. That shot became a staple for me. When I travelled to Scotland in 1992, I thanked The Bumps for teaching me that shot.

In recent decades, the city leaders recognized the value in daily fee golf and upgraded the entire facility. They started to water fairways too. The Bumps may be history at Sunset Valley GC, but my bump-and-run short game still saves quite a few pars



for me. The Bumps also has its own version of the Swilcan Burn, but that is another story. [www.sunsetvalleygolfcourse.org](http://www.sunsetvalleygolfcourse.org)

## City Golf

By Dave Lockhart, GOLFChicago TV Videographer

Growing up in the city, my golf experiences were limited in selection, yet full of character and characters! Sydney Marovitz Golf Course is one of the few courses that are actually in the city of Chicago. Formerly known as Waveland, this somewhat links design was modeled after famous holes in Scotland—which holes they replicate I never figured out. "Waveland" is a bustling 9-holer right next to Lake Michigan. It has fabulous views and is known to some of my friends as The Poor Man's Pebble Beach.

Back in the day, there were entrepreneurs who would sell cans of beer to you from the other side of the fence on the fifth tee, and sometimes another guy doing the same at the seventh. With the big blue lake to the east, high-rise dwellings on the west, and stunning views of the skyline to the south, it is hard to match this location for a comprehensive Chicago experience.

The strategy at Sydney Marovitz is not length; it is solid shot making over and around deep bunkers and elevated greens. While Pebble is at least \$500 a round, you can play a fine nine at Marovitz for a mere \$25 bucks!

Another favorite course is Canal Shores in Evanston. It was once known as Peter Jans Golf Course and Bill Murray worked here during his teenage years when it had another name. More importantly, this is where I hit my first golf shot on a real course. Getting there is half the fun; you can take the EL right from the city, and it literally drops you off at the first tee. This 18-hole layout plays to a length of about 4,000 yards and par is 60. The course has always been geared for beginners and the casual player, but I think it is a model for faster play. Its length also encourages walking. Canal Shores was renamed because of the unique water hazard known as the Sanitary Canal that



bisects the course. Canal Shores is really a fun track that shows off a lot of Evanston and Wilmette from the impressive Baha'i Temple on the front side, to Ryan Field, which is just a block away. The greens are small, some may even call a few of them peanut-sized, but it is a piece of the charm of a community course that has a special place in my heart.