



**Rob Tanner has been a member at Windermere Golf and Country Club for 60 years and is very involved in supporting the junior program.**

**Article by Dawn Huddlestone/Photographs by Don MacTavish**

**W**indermere Golf and Country Club turns 95 years old this year. It is believed to be one of the oldest golf club in Muskoka – it started with a bang and has been going strong ever since.

“The club was incorporated in 1919,” says Rob Tanner, longtime member of the club who has been playing the course for sixty years. Tanner believes its one of the oldest in Canada and Muskoka.

At that time, a group of summer residents on Lake Rosseau decided that a golf club would be an attractive addition to Windermere. Comprised of Toronto based bankers, lawyers and merchants, the group purchased 124 acres of land and selected a young Toronto firm of golf architects to design the course: Thompson, Cumming and Thompson. The latter Thompson was Stanley Thompson, who later became one of the greatest golf course designers in Canadian history, going on to design dozens of other courses including Canadian gems like the Banff Springs. The firm was paid just \$335 for their efforts.

“The ceremonial opening round was played in August 1920,” says Tanner. “The foursome was followed by a crowd of 300 people. Obviously it

was a pretty big deal and it had a huge impact on the area.” That first foursome was comprised of four prominent golfers of the time, two of whom were also the course designers: George Cumming, Stanley Thompson, George Lyons, and E.P. Freeman.



**This original Windermere Golf and Country Club trophy has plaques dated as early as 1927.**

When it opened in 1920, dues for a member – then shareholders – were just \$10 per season while a single game cost one dollar. It was a popular destination for guests from the big local resorts. The first greenskeeper, Mr. Borrows, was also the course’s first golf pro, giving lessons and selling clubs and balls to members. He received an annual salary of \$60.

Improvements to the course began almost immediately. In 1920 a portable clubhouse was purchased and sat in the same general area as the club’s current clubhouse. While enough land had been purchased for an 18-hole course, only nine were originally in play. Three more holes were added between 1920 and 1923; the final six were added between 1925 and 1926 to make Windermere a championship-length course.

There were no further changes until the 1970s, under the tenure of general manager and pro, Jim MacLeod. Formerly a pro in Scotland and a competitor in two British Open Championships, MacLeod recognized changes were needed to improve course conditions. Spongy, wet sections on the back nine were relieved by drainage lines leading to a series of 14 ponds. Greens and tees were repositioned or enlarged to improve



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play. Hundreds of trees were planted. All of the improvements had the benefit of making the course more playable, more beautiful and making it more attractive to golfers.

MacLeod also made Windermere a true country club with the addition of mixed events, inter-club matches with nearby Muskoka Lakes Golf and Country Club and Beaumaris Golf Club, and tennis courts. MacLeod retired in 1993. That same year, a new clubhouse was built by Upper Canada Log Homes to replace the first permanent clubhouse, which had been built in 1954.

In recent years, the irrigation system has been improved and five greens have been rebuilt. Under the direction of greens superintendent Jason Eberle, the natural beauty of the course has been enhanced with new gardens and ponds, new traps, cleared brush and exposure of Muskoka's signature granite.

The position of pro was later assumed by current co-general manager and director of golf Mark DeActis. His 2004 appointment made him the youngest head professional at a golf



Windermere Golf and Country Club has some of its history on display. These clubs were made by Hugh Logan when he was the club professional.



club in Canada. He moved into his current position in 2009.

"The club has always been based on family and we've never wavered from that," says DeActis. "We want to continue to have families active in the club and will continue to reinvest in course improvements so that they can enjoy it for years to come."

Family and community were what got Tanner into the game six decades ago. His dad, other family members and neighbours were all avid golfers. At age nine, a neighbour – Ruth Pryce – took Tanner under her wing. "She wanted to see me get into golf so I learned to hit drives in the back pasture," laughs Rob. "There were quite a few kids in our cottage community who played, so if we didn't go out on the course with our moms and dads, we would play rounds with each other."

He has continued to enjoy the course, adding that it has changed over the years. "There have been lots of improvements. Every once in a while, there would be something new and it was like a whole new golf course. That keeps it interesting and even though I now play almost every day, I don't get bored. But golf is like that – you never hit the ball to the same place twice so it's always a different game."

Tanner has won almost every Windermere award that he's eligible to win – except one. He's a two-time Junior Boys Club Champion and has also won the Hoffman Net Club Championship, the Harraby Senior Net Club Championship and



Rob Tanner has been a golfer at Windermere Golf and County Club for 60 years and is a regular on the course today. A neighbour first introduced him to golf. After that he played with the other kids in his cottage community.

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An early photo shows the course in 1927 with the tree of the Windermere course emblem (above). A new photo taken at the same spot shows how the pine tree, centre right, has grown a bit and been joined by a few others.



the Arthur Treble Club Championship, a mixed alternate shot award won with his wife. "Only the Llanllar Men's Club Championship has eluded me, but I've been to the final a few times."

Windermere also invests in the development of junior golfers, something that has been close to Tanner's heart. For fifteen years he organized the Muskoka Junior Golf Championship, a well-recognized event on junior golf schedules. Several players from past tournaments have gone on to

have distinguished golf careers, including Stephanie Sherlock, who played in the LPGA.

"It's a very active club," says Tanner. "There are men's and ladies' divisions and many competitive and social events. It's a great place to be and it just keeps getting better."

Celebrations for its 95th year will be low-key, but DeActis says everyone is looking forward to celebrating in five years, when Muskoka's oldest club becomes a centenarian. 