

Renovated Knollwood golf course harkens to Bobby Jones' era

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ELMSFORD There are connections to the golden age of golf around every corner at Knollwood Country Club.

Much of the history is well-documented.

Legendary A.W. Tillinghast, Seth Raynor and Charles Banks all had a hand in the design of the current golf course, which dates to 1927. Francis Ouimet and Bobby Jones were among the noteworthy guests to visit the club that became an outpost for the famed Turnesa brothers.

Some of the history is well-rehearsed.

There is a pretty good story about Jones meeting Knollwood member Clifford Roberts and one day having a conversation in the club's grill room in the late 1920s about the famed amateur's desire to develop an idea that became Augusta National Goff Club.

It certainly sounds plausible.

"There is no question," longtime Knollwood historian Frank Cali said. "It happens in every grill room after golf, this is where everyone spills their guts and talks about their plans for the future. ... It's part of club lore. It's a story that has been passed on for years and years."



A photo provided by Ian Andrew shows legendary golfer Bobby Jones at Knollwood Country Club in

Greenburgh. (Photo: Frank Becerra Jr/The Journal News)

Of course, there is no hard proof of that conversation.

A string of circumstances lend credibility to the legend. Jones was known to occasionally visit Knollwood and did at one time hold the course record. According to David Barrett, who authored "Making The Masters: Bobby Jones and the Birth of America's Greatest Golf Tournament," he was introduced to Roberts by a mutual friend and Knollwood member, Walton H. Marshall, who managed Vanderbilt hotels in New York City and Augusta, Ga.

"In the late 1920s, (Jones) began to dream of forming his own golf club and being involved in designing an 'ideal' course that would be the greatest in the South," Barrett wrote.

"He had shared that vision with his friend Clifford Roberts. No sooner had Jones retired than the eager Roberts approached him with a proposal to make that dream a reality."



Some of the old photos on the walls at Knollwood Country Club in Greenburgh. (Photo: Frank Becerra Jr./The Journal News)

There was no shortage of help with financial details as Knollwood was a home away from home for numerous members of the New York Stock Exchange.

Roberts secured an option to purchase more than 300 acres of property in Augusta that was once Fruitland Nurseries for a reported \$70,000. Jones agreed it was a perfect site and hired Alistair Mackenzie to help with the design. The exclusive club opened for play in 1933 and Roberts served as its chairman for 45 years.

"I've been around Knollwood for at least 50 years," said [Bob Miller Jr.](#), who's been the club's PGA head golf professional for the last 33 years. "So if you multiply that number by 50, that's how many times I've heard that story. If you read any book on the history of The Masters, you'll find Knollwood in the first chapter."

[PHOTOS: Opening day at Saxon Woods golf course \(/picture-gallery/sports/qoW2017/03/30/phot09-opening-4av-@t-Saxon-woods-qotf-gourse/998177700](#)

[ROCKLANP: Townhpu# community planned for Minisceongo Golf Course {Istorylnewnocand/ramapoj2017103101/townhouses-planned-minisceongo-golcourse/984914641}](#)

[WESTCHESTER: Rye sued over Rye Golf Club greens closed by fungicide damage \(Istory/nzws/local&ætchesterlrye-GIY/20in2/14/rye-gpIf-greens-lawsuitæ76\\$0009/.\)](#)

Mike and Joe Turnesa were in the field at the inaugural Masters in 1934.

In recent years, Knollwood's golf course began to show its age, so the membership enlisted architect Ian Andrew to restore some of the historic charm, dropping \$1.1 million on the restoration project.

The work began last October and was recently completed.

"Our bunkers were well past their life expectancy,' club president Nick Greto said. "We even had a local rule that said you could remove rocks in the bunkers. Ian is a restoration architect. He went through everything we could find. There is a lot of stuff up in our attic and he went through it all."



Knollwood Country Club president Nick Greto points out some of the work done at the club in Greenburgh
Knollwood County Club president Nick Greto points out some of the work done at the club in Greenburgh April 4, 2017. (Photo: Frank Becerra Jr/The Journal News)

A majority of the 60-plus bunkers on the course were restored according to the Raynor plan. Most of them are flat-bottomed with grass faces.

"There were a couple of bunkers we had to due to safety issues with adjacent roads," Andrew said. "Some of fairway bunkers were removed and moved up into current landing zones, but other than that we put everything back the way that Banks had them when he finished Raynor's plan."

Even the architectural history of Knollwood is filled with twists and turns.

The club was established in 1894 and Lawrence Van Ethen designed the original course, which measured some 5,300 yards. Advancements in golf ball manufacturing eventually rendered the layout too short. A neighboring property was purchased at the urging of Tillinghast, who had been retained in 1925 to redesign the course.

Apparently, the prolific architect was a bit too demanding.



Some of the old photos on the walls at Knollwood Country Club in Greenburgh. (Photo: Frank Becerra Jr/The Journal News)

Tillinghast was replaced less than a year into the project by Raynor, who reworked the master plan. He died before the course was completed, so his protégé, Banks, finished up in 1927.

"So while Tillinghast routed five of the holes, there isn't a single Tillinghast green," said Andrew, who determined all three men deserve credit for the design.

Many of the previous alterations were easily undone.

"All we had to do was peel back the work that was done to the course over the years," Andrew said. "There's a bunker in the front of the second green somebody and all we did was scrape it out until we got to the original soil. It told us what the banks were supposed to be like. We didn't have to overthink that one. Sometimes you get lucky with that stuff."



Architect Ian Andrews lays out the plan at one of the holes at Knollwood Country Club in Greenburgh. (Photo: Frank Becerra Jr/The Journal News)

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Improvements also included expanding tee boxes on the 10th and 13th holes. Drainage problems were addressed. The course, which hosts some 20,000 rounds per season, now measures 6,500 yards.

Ambitious tree removal opened sightlines and vistas.

'You never even realized how amazing this property was until certain trees came down," Knollwood golf course superintendent Matt Neus said. "You also didn't realize how many specimen trees we do have out there that were being ravaged by trees that aren't indigenous to this area."



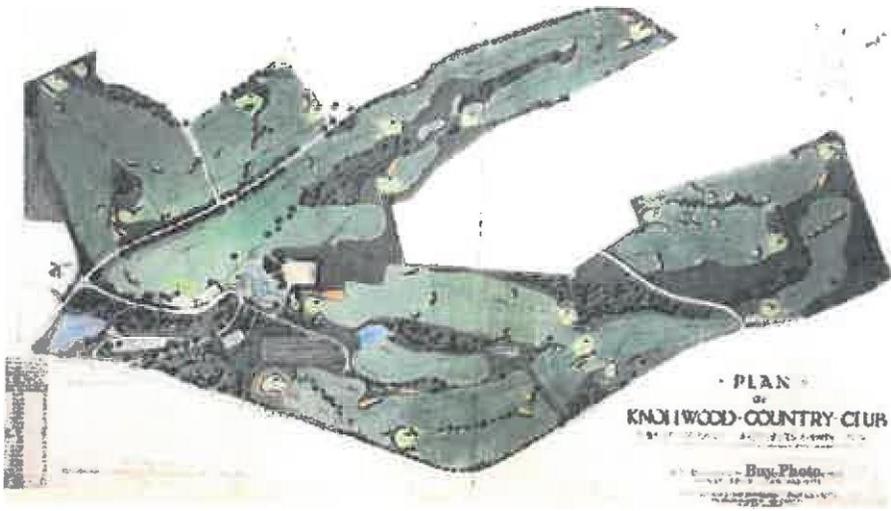
From left, Knollwood County Club president Nick Greto grounds superintendent Man Neus, and general manager Greg Kinney, standing in front of some of the most recent work at Knollwood Country Club in Greenburgh April 4, 2011. (Photo: Frank Becerra Jr-me Journal News)

The 12th green was restored to Raynor's original plan and the back of the eighth green was raised to make it more playable.

"Our membership is extremely excited," Greto said. "We were originally going to do this over a two-year period, but we were able to do it all in the fall. Ian was great to work with. He loves what he does and knows so much about the architects he is trying to emulate."

So is the course more difficult?

"I think some of the holes are going to be harder," Miller said. "The overall appearance of the course is going to be phenomenal. It's so nicer, but I don't know if, overall, it will be easier or harder. We're going to keep track of the scores and re-handicap each hole, so we'll know in another month or so."



A map of Knollwood Country Club in Greenburgh April 4, 2017. (Photo: Fmk Becerra Jr/The Journal News)