

Club History

During the fall of 1957, a group consisting largely of Bob Johnson, Willard Houle, Bill Jeans, Malcolm Morley, George Thurnbeck, Henry Lynch, Arnie Carlquist, Fran LaBelle, T. M. Houle, Wally Houle, Frank Thurnbeck, Larry Thurnbeck, Jack Erickson, and Ty Jeans began discussions regarding the possible purchase of Forest Lake Country Club or construction of a new course.

The decision to build Forest Hills became an easy one when negotiations with Forest Lake Country Club indicated that the price would be \$135,000.00. At a meeting in Vogel's Inn in October, 1957, a decision was made to secure an option for 120 acres of land owned by Delbert Hoekstra, known as the old Aim Farm. The option taken in October, 1957, was executed on May 1, 1958, when the 120 acres were purchased for the sum of \$13,000.

With land and financing available the first Forest Hills Golf Club (FHGC) Board of Directors was formed in early 1958. At a meeting of this group consisting of Willard Houle, Bob Johnson, George Thurnbeck, Henry Lynch, Arnie Carlquist, Fran LaBelle, Jack Erickson, Larry Thurnbeck, Bill Jeans as President, and non-voting member Dean McGowan as Secretary/Treasurer, a decision was made to issue 300 shares with a par value of \$250.00. The first 32 shares were sold that night. The goal of 100 shares was reached by April 1, 1958, and construction plans formulated. The FHGC original Articles of Incorporation were recorded April 18, 1958.

Of the original 120 acres of land there were about 60 acres under cultivation and cleared so that grading, ditching for drainage, and preparation for seeding could begin. Equipment was provided mostly by Jeans Implement Company, and anyone familiar with the operation of a tractor started working evenings and Saturdays and Sundays under the guided supervision of George and Larry Thurnbeck. Bill Jeans secured the services of an earthmover, and several of the existing hills were cut down to size.

Several meetings were held involving Board members and other golf course superintendents and golf course architects. As a result of these meetings several members of the Board submitted plans for the original 9 holes. The final plan was drawn by George Thurnbeck. In 1958 the final layout of the first nine consisting of the present holes 1 through 5 along with 9,10,11, and 18 was drawn on the back of a Hamms Beer table napkin at the Bay View Inn, Forest Lake, by the Board of Directors. Jack Belland, constructor of golf courses at that time, was hired to form the greens, and 2, 6, and 9 were completed in 1958.

Much of the construction work was accomplished through volunteer rock-picking, seeding and sod-laying parties, and hard labor became fun as the course began to take shape. Earth-moving and well-digging were undertaken in earnest, followed by the laying of irrigation pipes to the fairways and greens.

As the course took shape, and practically all the seeding was completed, a few trees were planted in strategic spots throughout the terrain. An old metal tool shed was bought and moved out to

house the equipment, and a pump house was added. As share sales were progressing extremely well (a total of 121 sales were reported at the Annual Meeting March, 1959), plans for a clubhouse became the prominent subject. At the following annual meeting, October 1, 1959, plans for the clubhouse were approved and construction started.

At the annual meeting of May 11, 1960 the first FHGC membership fee schedule was presented for approval. Memberships included a husband-wife \$45.00 per year, plus \$5.00 for each child, and a single membership of \$35.00. All memberships included social membership and daily green fees of \$1.00 for nine holes and \$1.50 for 18. Non-shareholders husband and wife paid \$70.00 per year, and single non-shareholders paid \$65.00 per year. The fee schedule was accepted by the shareholders in attendance.

Limited play began late in the spring of 1960, and it was agreed that a full-time manager and greenskeeper were needed. Bill Lundquist was hired as greens keeper, and Ray and Rose Kasma were hired to manage the club and run the restaurant. The demand for shares was increasing, and the January 1, 1961 record shows 285 shares issued of which 38 had been issued for work performed.

Between 1960 and 1964 the club continued as a nine hole course. The first motion for a back nine was made on September 23, 1960. On May 1, 1962, a committee of Bob Johnson, Bill Jeans, and Larry and George Thurnbeck was appointed to “come up with plans to integrate land purchase for the back nine holes by July, 1962.” By May 17, 1962, the Board had a proposal to purchase lots 4, 6 and 7 and a three year option to purchase lot 5 of Green Valley Estates. Total price of the option and purchase was \$6,995.00.

This purchase, along with the original 120 acres, and the additional two acres acquired on the east side in 1965 for \$1,500.00 comprise FHGC as we know it today. Total land investment was \$21,495.00. In February 1975, the Board voted to purchase the Lundquist property (10 acres) for \$60,200.00. With this acquisition, FHGC now owns most of the available adjacent land. On November 2, 1964, during the annual meeting, a motion was made and passed to “begin construction of the back nine.” On January 18, 1965, the back nine layout as submitted by George Thurnbeck was approved. In the fall of 1964 construction was begun on the new nine.

During the building of the back nine Jack Mobeck became the first Club Pro in 1964 and served until 1967 when Gary Peterson became the Professional. 1967 also saw the completion of the storage building.

Between 1967 and 1971 the club expanded its membership, continued to develop the course, and increased play and program. Dick Theno assumed the Pro duties in 1969 and was replaced by Ed Lipp in March 1970, and Ed served until his tragic death in 1971. Mike Retica then became the FHGC Pro for nine years from 1973 through 1981. Doug Gustafson joined us in 1982.

In the early 1970's a complete watering system was installed by Toro Manufacturing Company. In 1971 air conditioning was installed in the club house. 1972 marked the completion of the new Pro Shop. The financial condition of FHGC had so improved that in 1976 a second mortgage was secured from Central Northwestern Bank without any cosigning members. The early 1980's

saw the installation of a complete drainage system, greatly improving both the quality and availability of the course.

During the winter of 1991-1992, an 82-foot bridge was installed over the small arm of Shields Lake to the right of the 14th green, in order to carry cart traffic away from the green. In the process of driving pilings to support the abutments, we drove through more than 70 feet of peat without reaching bedrock. We also installed a C-loc retaining wall around the perimeter of the bay and around the small pond to the left of the green to control erosion. Finally, we replaced the culvert connecting the pond and the lake. We considered leaving the connection open, but rejected that since it would have given control of the pond to the DNR.

In 1992-1993, we undertook the complete reconstruction of the 15th hole. Fifteen curls around the northern shore of Shields Lake. Over the years, the hole sank slowly, as the peat soil underlying it squeezed into the lake. In addition, we were steadily losing ground to erosion. The reclamation project included installation of a retaining wall along the shore from tee to green, installation of a fabric barrier beneath the entire fairway, covering the fabric with up to three feet of soil, and complete replacement of tees and green. Subsequently, we took additional actions to protect the hole from recent high water in the lake.

By 2004, our old single-line irrigation system was showing signs of age. In addition, a single line of sprinkler heads in the middle of the fairways provided uneven watering, particularly in such areas as the sixteenth fairway below the green. Construction of a new irrigation system was started in the Fall of 2004 and completed in the Spring of 2005. Features of the new system included double rows of sprinkler heads for the fairways and five dual-head sprinklers for each green. The ponds near the tenth and thirteenth greens were enlarged to serve as a reservoir to supply the larger irrigation pump, which was housed in a new masonry building.

The first and second fairways were raised and graded to shed water more effectively prior to installing the irrigation system. Soil used to raise the fairways was obtained by excavating and enlarging the pond between the two fairways.

Finally, new golf cart paths were constructed adjacent to holes 10, 13, and 2.

A practice chipping/putting green was constructed in the Fall of 2007 and opened for use late Summer of 2008. The green, bunker and fairway were built and supervised by our golf course staff. Doug Jeans donated the use of his construction equipment for grading and filling. Total cost was just under \$50,000 and was funded as part of the green committee budget.

In the fall of 2008, the Board decided that Forest Hills should modernize our management structure. As a result, we bid farewell to our long-time pro, Doug Gustafson, and welcomed our new General Manager/Head Professional, Brian Steinke. Brian began his tenure in November, 2008. Along with that transition, we also upgraded our computer systems, both hardware and software. New systems included laptops for the GM/Pro and the secretary, a new central file server, and a new point-of-sale system in the golf shop.

In 2013, the Club landscaped the front of the Clubhouse by taking out the old timbers and added a retaining wall. The drive way and parking lot were completely redone as well as the addition of an outdoor patio with fireplace. In 2015 – 2016, a remodel of the restaurant and bar area was completed including new tongue and groove ceiling and a tear down of the old wall paneling and adding drywall.