

EXCLUSIVE and CONSISTENT

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDRE CARRIERE & CHRIS THWAITES

The golf course is a refuge, a place to unwind and recharge. After all, there's a reason it's called "playing" golf, not "working."

But making sure that happens – every time, for every player – takes commitment and attention to detail, says Wayne Middaugh, general manager

of the Port Carling Golf and Country Club.

And, he adds, it takes consistency of effort.

It's been ten years since Michael DeGroot purchased the Port Carling Golf and Country Club; ten years since he set about transforming the club, hiring a team of

professionals who would drive forward his vision for what golf and a membership at a true private club could be.

That team is still there: in ten years, there has been no turnover in the five senior positions. "That's almost unheard of in any business, and particularly in a seasonal field like golf,"

says Wayne. He is joined by course superintendent Justin Heptinstall, head pro Doug Reid, executive chef John Tasoulis, food and beverage manager VasoTasoulis, and office manager Jori Jones.

Staying on-mission

Having no turnover at the top allows tremendous consistency of vision. "We set out with a mission to create the pre-eminent private golf club, and we haven't wavered from that," Wayne explains.

It also ensures consistency for the almost 300 club members. If a member likes a particular wine, it will be available every time they eat at the club. If they like to drive a particular number of golf cart, it will be ready for them every time. If there's a dish they enjoyed five years ago, the chef can prepare it again.

"There are things you can do with a private club that you just couldn't achieve if your team is also trying to run tournaments or host weddings," says Wayne. The Port Carling Golf and Country Club doesn't offer either. "We get asked all the time, and the answer is always the same: very sorry, but no," he says. The reason is simply that the club is there for the members to use when they want to use it, to play a round without lining up, to enjoy a meal when they wish, to use the fitness centre or the pool at their convenience.

Reinvestment

For all the consistency, though, the club has also seen significant change in the past ten years. "Mr. DeGroot has invested millions in the property and buildings," says

Wayne, adding that it's been done without any additional assessment to the members.

The course itself has undergone some dramatic changes. The entire fourth hole was rebuilt to improve its playability. All of the greens have been totally redone – removing material almost a foot deep in some places; so have all the bunkers, with all the work completed in the off-season to ensure that members were not impacted.

Some facilities have been updated – the practice area is dramatically improved over what existed ten years ago. So are the fitness centre and the dining room.

Some changes are highly visible. New cutlery and glassware every few years may

seem like a small thing, but it's a detail that matters every time a member sits down to dine. The club has also finished two villas adjacent to the property, for the use of members and their guests.

Other changes are all but invisible, but have a significant impact. "Justin Heptinstall, our course superintendent, has implemented new cultural practices to ensure turf health," Wayne says. "That keeps the turf in great condition for a longer period of time, and affects membership satisfaction in such a positive way."

Environmental management

The most visible feature of the property is the pond adjacent to Highway 118, its manicured edges and jetting

fountains visible to all who drive by. But even it has its hidden features.

"That pond is the lowest point, not just on our property but on the surrounding land as well," Wayne explains. "All the water from this area flows into it."

What isn't apparent is that the pond is equipped with sensors and underground pumps: when the level gets high enough, the water is pumped uphill to holding ponds higher on the property, which are used for irrigation. The result is a course that uses much less added water – the winter snow melt and the spring rains are simply recycled through the season. "For that, the club won an environmental award," Wayne says proudly.

Now welcoming members
One of the biggest changes this year is that the club is accepting new golf members. There are now a handful of openings for full membership. (*There is still a waiting list for health and dining memberships, Wayne notes.*)

Prospective members can even try it out for a year, paying just the regular dues of \$6,510 before having to commit. The

initiation fee is \$50,000, and is payable over ten years.

"Once people try it, they almost always become members. For golfers, there really is nothing quite like a private club," says Wayne. "It truly is the best experience, the best way to enjoy the game." **DS**

BY ANDREW WAGNER-CHAZALON



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