

A truly private golf club

A challenging course on spectacular terrain

By Marilyn de Lang

In 1991, 270 acres of prime land in Port Carling (known as the 'Hub of the Muskoka Lakes') became the setting for a magnificent 18-hole golf course designed by the renowned architectural firm, Thomas McBroom and Associates. Muskoka's rugged topography affords an ideal environment, with captivating scenery and elevations that facilitate challenging shot values and distinctive identities for each hole. Tom McBroom has won numerous awards for ingenious golf course designs. His creative panache and innovative instincts

are enhanced by his deep understanding of the traditions and intricacies of the game.

In 2007, Michael DeGroote became the new owner and president of the Port Carling Golf and Country Club, and contracted McBroom to enhance his original design and return the course to championship standards. As well as new styling and engineering, the sand traps were renovated, and every putting

surface was re-sodded with A-4 premium bentgrass. Irrigation and aesthetics were improved with new ponds, fountains, and pumps. The natural beauty of the Port Carling site, together with McBroom's experience and talent, has created one of the most scenic, but toughest, par 70 courses in the country.

Centuries of debate

The origins of golf have often been hotly debated. There is some conjecture about very early Dutch and French influences, but most scholars give credit to the Scots, dating back to the mid-15th century. Historical records indicate that golf was banned by decree in 1457 by Scotland's King James II because it distracted his archers from their practice, and the first rules of golf were transcribed in 1774 in Edinburgh. Today's discussions generally focus on its chief categorization: is golf a sport or a hobby; a

passion or an obsession; a business tool or recreation; exercise for the brain or for the body? (Mark Twain dismissed it as 'a good walk wasted', but perhaps his swing just wasn't up to par!) There is no doubt that many corporate business deals are launched or strengthened on the course; and the fresh air, strategic thinking, and physical exercise are undeniably beneficial.

Exclusivity and privacy

Port Carling's General Manager and CGPA Executive Professional, Wayne Middaugh, explains that they are one of the last true private clubs. While some may call themselves 'private', there are often too many golfers scrambling for tee times, and their facilities are rented out for weddings or conferences. "Our number one priority is catering to our 300 members,"

says Wayne. "They can book the clubhouse for special functions, but only on the specific weekday evenings that the dining room would not normally be open." Port Carling's club guarantees easy access to the course and regulates the pace of play, with just two bookable times for every thirty minutes of tee-off. Justin Heptinstall, the CGSA Superintendent, ensures that the conditions and surroundings are kept perfectly pristine. Golf instruction may be arranged through CPGA Head Professional, Doug Reid, with clinics and private or packaged lessons.

Members may use the course to entertain business clients, socialize and network, or introduce family members to a game that can be enjoyed for a lifetime. Club policy allows up to

three guests at any time, and a maximum of seven guests if the tee times are booked in advance. Play is regulated by the RCGA Rules of Golf, but always within a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.

Beyond the golf course

President Michael DeGroote is a gourmet aficionado, and a five-star restaurant was an

essential component in his new vision. With a stone fireplace, patio, and views that overlook the course, the dining room is supervised by the husband-and-wife team of Vaso Tassoulis, Food and Beverage Manager, and Executive Chef, John Tassoulis. Fine cuisine must be accompanied by exceptional service, and staff members are fully trained in every aspect, including how to recommend a great wine that complements each item on the menu. "None of the employees ever misses the annual wine-tasting orientation," laughs Wayne.

Superior golf and country clubs provide full amenities for relaxation and reinvigoration, and Port Carling's Health Club and Spa includes a pool, steam room, hot tub, tennis courts,

and fitness centre. Memberships may be purchased separately for dining and/or spa facilities, but there is a waiting list for the dining option. Members who want to arrange accommodation for their guests may rent one of the villas, with four bedrooms, HD flat-screen televisions, wireless high-speed Internet, contemporary kitchens, and enclosed patios.

With over sixty employees, the Port Carling Club is well positioned to give full attention to its members' needs, including regular dock pick-up. Its world-class course accommodates both recreational and competitive play, with a spectacular design borne of innovative engineering and a profound respect for Muskoka's distinctive landscape.

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