

GOLF CLUBS OF EVANSVILLE
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In 1926, two small neighboring communities began to explore the possibility of developing golf courses. Brodhead and Evansville had a core group of men in their cities that wanted to play the game on local grounds. Brodhead planned to attract players from Orfordville, Albany and Juda and build a sizable club. Evansville hoped for the same enthusiasm from local golfers.

The Evansville group thought the land on the corner of County Highway C and Evansville-Brooklyn Road, northwest of the city, looked like an attractive site for the golf course. The land was owned by Harvey Knapp. Knapp was willing to sell 77 acres of land to the local group and the Evansville Country Club took an option on the land.

The small committee organizing the club had contacted state golf experts and were told that there were few golf courses in the country which would have the advantages of Evansville's proposal. The site was close to the city, had gravel roads on two sides and a footpath from Leota Park to the golf course that could be used by visitors at the city park. At that time the park had tourist cabins and camping facilities and was heavily used by people who did not live in the area.

By September 1926, Leonard P. Eager, local banker, and Lew Van Wart, local drug store owner, announced that they had fifty members interested in purchasing land for a golf course. At a meeting at City Hall on October 6, 1926, the members of the organizing group decided to form a corporation.

A committee of five men, C. J. Pearsall, Harry Roderick, Sr., Bert Holmes, Robert Collins and Lew Van Wart was put in charge of the site purchase. The membership committee, including Elzie Libby, Fred Brunzell, L. L. Thompson, Dr. Ernest Denison and Calvin B. Cain, was asked to solicit more members.

By December 1926, the incorporation of the club was complete, the by-laws were written, and the officers and the directors were named. The first officers elected were Dr. Ernest Denison, President; Robert M. Richmond, Vice-President; and Harley Smith, Secretary-Treasurer.

As each new committee or set of officers was named, new people appeared as participants. Philip Wackman, a banker from Brooklyn, Robert Richmond, Robert Collins, Robert Hartley, Dr. K. W. Shipman and E. J. Cook joined the board of directors. They purchased the property in December and promised they would build one of the finest golf courses in Southern Wisconsin.

In May 1927, the club began the construction of the golf course. They hired a Milwaukee firm, Branzhaf & Watson, who sent their forest engineer and golf course expert, John Barr to Evansville. Barr designed the nine hole course, mapped out the grounds and made proposals for other improvements that could be made as the club's finances became more secure.

The club hired Olin Seversen of Edgerton, who was an expert in the construction work required in building golf courses. The grounds

committee, A. C. Holmes, Lew Van Wart, Fred Brunsell, Dr. Calvert Cain and Harry Roderick, Sr., organized local workers to help with the construction.

The land had been used as pasture for Knapp's dairy cows. There was a hay field that needed to be plowed under, trees and stumps that needed to be removed before the links could be built. In the summer of 1927 the grounds committee was busy getting the site ready for the course. Dynamite was used to get out the stubborn tree stumps that could not be removed with a grubber and the hay was cut in the pasture. As soon as the hay was cut, the land was plowed and prepared for construction of the greens and fairways.

A grove of trees had been left standing at the entrance to the course. Eventually, the club house was to be built there and in the meantime, the grove provided a shady parking place for cars. On the north side of the grounds, large boulders were put in place to mark that border.

By August, the hard work seemed to be nearly complete. Fifty-five acres had been plowed, grubbed, and in some spots, dynamited. The nine-hole golf course was beginning to take on a "peculiar and artistic" shape, according to the Evansville Review. However, it had been a dry summer and the grounds crew waited for rain before they seeded the grounds.

John Barr designed a thirty-six par course. The first tee was close to the entrance of the course and the first hole was straight east 460 yards, with a par of five. The second tee was slightly east of the first green, with a drive of 420 yards directly south. This was a par four.

The third hole was a dog leg fairway of 360 yards, back towards the woods. This was a par three hole. Tee number four was set for a drive straight west into the woods, with a par four. The fifth tee was in the corner of the woods to a hole that was southeast 375 yards. Five was a par four.

The number six green was a horse-shoe shape on the crest of the hill, across the valley and south of number five. There was a drive of 190 yards with a par of three. South of green six and part-way up a hill was the seventh tee with a drive of 345 yards, with a par of four.

The eighth green was on the west side of the course and ran parallel with the Evansville-Brooklyn road. It was a heart shaped green with a 355 yard drive and a par of four. The heart-shape was Olin Severson's design. The last drive was northwest to the ninth green, which was a double dog-leg fairway of 465 yards with a par of five. The Evansville Review offered a free year's subscription to the first Evansville player to make the course in par.

The Evansville Country Club had spent \$6,000 on labor and equipment and the grounds committee estimated that seeding the whole area would cost another \$1,400. The group had purchased a Ford truck with an attachment that would pull three thirty-inch mowers. The machine had six-inch tires so that it would not sink into the sod when there were heavy rains.

Olin Severson had introduced the concept of steaming each green to get rid of any weed seeds. It was the same technique that was used in preparing tobacco beds. He intended to plant South German Tent Grass on the greens, rice top and blue grass on the fairways and Sheep's fescue in the "rough".

The city had agreed to run water mains out to the southwest corner of the course. All of the greens had underground pipes to provide water when there was not sufficient rain. By the time the course was laid out, it was too late in the season to create the traps and bunkers for the course. The cold weather set in and the pipes were drained. Grounds work was halted until the following spring.

The improvements already in progress encouraged more golfers to join the club. By the end of 1927, there were 65 members. The year-end review of activities in Evansville for 1927 published in the Janesville Gazette reported that a new golf course would be ready for use in the spring of 1928.

In April 1928, the Evansville Country Club elected new officers for the year. Dr. E. E. Denison was named President and Leonard P. Eager, Secretary-Treasurer. Philip A. Wackman and W. P. Fleming became the new directors. The membership voted to arrange for a loan to complete the work which had begun in 1927.

When spring came, there was a drought and the greens were not ready for playing. The underground water system was not working effectively because the pressure from the standpipe was not sufficient for watering some of the golf course greens. The club had to install a booster pump to get the water to the greens.

There was great fear that some of the grass had died during the winter. The club hired Ben Williams as the greens keeper. Greens committee and volunteers reseeded the empty spots with red top, a fast growing grass that they hoped would put the course in shape quickly. In those areas where the grass had survived, the club opened some greens for practice, but could not open the entire course.

While the club members hoped to be playing golf on their new links by June 15, 1928, they realized that this was impossible. Because they could not get an early start and to encourage memberships, they allowed people to play free of charge on the few areas that were available.

In August, the club announced that the course would officially open August 22, 1928. Exhibitions by golf professionals would be held and the opening date would be the final free day, after that there would be a charge. All of the city businesses closed that day so that their employees could enjoy the new recreational facility.

A gallery of more than 100 people followed the professional players as they made the rounds of the course. According to the Review, there were "many Ah's and Oh's as the players would walk up and address their balls, sending them far down the fairway." Visitors declared it was one of the finest and "sportiest" courses they had seen.

One of the professionals who gave a demonstration, twenty-year-old Charles Severson, was hired as the club's first golf "pro". Severson gave lessons during the winter of 1928-29.

When the course opened the following spring, the local committee had already lined up several inter-city tournaments. Twenty-five Brodhead golfers competed with the local club in June 1929. One of the features of the tournament was an exhibition match between Severson, the professional golfer, and Rev. G. C. Saunderson, pastor of the local Methodist Church.

Severson was playing the course just one stroke above par. During the winter he had given instructions to "Saundy" and his star pupil was to be his challenger. Severson beat Saunderson 78 to 88 for 18 holes. The Brodhead team beat the local golfers.

Tournaments were also scheduled with Mt. Horeb, Edgerton, Cambridge, Monona and Monroe during the 1929 season. The inexperienced locals also lost to Edgerton and Monona.

In January 1930, golf pro Charles S. Severson, rented the hall above Baker's Hardware Store at 101 East Main. During the next two months, he gave golf lessons three evenings a week. For those who wanted to practice on their own, the equipment was available at other times for 25 cents a day.

On March 30, 1930, Severson got an offer from the River Dale golf course in Sheboygan to serve as their golf professional. River Dale was opening an 18-hole golf course and it was a golden opportunity for the young golf pro to advance. The local club did not replace their professional golfer.

In the summer of 1930, the golf course had competition from a miniature golf course that was built by William Antes on the northwest corner of Madison and Garfield Streets. Because Antes was also the managing editor of the Review, his operation received front page coverage and the local golf club's activities, which had been front page news, were placed on page 5 as "local news".

Despite the competition, the club seemed to remain strong. By 1931, the Ladies Golf Association had 35 members. Blanche Devine was elected president and succeeded Mrs. Warren Cain. Mrs. Harry Roderick, Sr. was elected Vice President and Mrs. William Schneider was secretary. Mrs. A. C. Holmes was elected treasurer. They were still trying to raise funds for a club house through bake sales at the Smith Meat Market. Other fundraisers included picnics, and bridge parties.

The men's organization joined the South Central Wisconsin Golf Association with clubs from Portage, Stoughton, Watertown, Fort Atkinson, Jefferson, Prairie du Sac, Lake Mills and Cambridge. The annual tournament was held at the Lake Ripley Country Club in Cambridge. Seven men from Evansville qualified to play in the finals. Two of the men, Bob Cain and Dr. C. B. Cain brought home prizes from the tournament.

The local men hoped that the next Association tournament could be held in Evansville. The club members were still anticipating that a club

house would be built and the sporty Evansville course would be a challenge to the visitors.

Tournaments against favorite opponents turned in favor of Evansville in 1931. The local golfers defeated Monona golfers in an interclub match held in June. Glenn Magee, a retired mailman, became a champion player on the course, along with Bob Cain, E. H. Libby, Dr. E. E. Denison and Dr. J. W. Ames.

Ben Williams continued as grounds keeper. In the spring of 1932, the entire course was rolled with a large cement roller, making it smooth for play. Early spring rains had put the course in excellent condition.

Glen Magee set a record on the course in August 1932 by scores of 36 and 37 during games with Mayor E. H. Libby and Robert Cain. That same month, Charles Severson, the former golf professional at the club broke the course record at the Riverdale links in Sheboygan.

The Evansville Golf Association announced that the green fees were \$1 for week days and \$1.50 on weekends. The season fee for non-members was \$35. Local businessmen began to carry golf supplies. Robert Collins sold golf clubs and bags in his drug store.

In 1935, the Evansville Country Club opened the course in April with Ben Williams as greens keeper. One of his first spring duties was to roll the links. By 1935, the club house was built and opened daily in the summer. The refreshment stand served snacks.

The club announced its fees for the year. Green fees were 25 cents per round and families could buy special season tickets for \$15. The family ticket gave any man and his wife and any child under 18 the privilege of playing the entire season. People who didn't golf were invited to use the grove at the west end of the golf course for picnics.

Interclub golf matches were planned with other area cities. Those who purchased season tickets were given preferences when teams were chosen for the tournaments. The club united with the East Central Golf Association to hold golf tournaments. Local dentist, Dr. J. W. Ames was chairman of the association included six clubs, Evansville, Watertown, Jefferson, Cambridge, Stoughton, and Portage.

The local club was successful in getting the 1935 tournament for the East Central Golf Association in Evansville. Golfers from Whitewater, Brodhead and Monroe were also asked to take part in the tournaments. Each club was allowed eight players. All of the entry fees were used to purchase prizes.

In May 1936, Don Miller was in charge of the grounds and Lloyd Heffel announced the fees for the year. Membership remained at \$15. Non-members could use the links for 75 cents a day or 25 cents per round. The clubhouse was operated by Eunice Mattakat. She served lunch and also furnished club breakfasts and special bridge lunches. The club house was also open in the evenings and began to serve beer to members of the organization and their guests.

Club members were expected to help with the spring clean-up of the course. In early April the group helped the grounds keeper to top dress the greens and fertilize the grounds. Opening day depended on the weather and the condition of the course. In April 1938, the club members held a clean-up day and burned the entire course before continuing with their regular maintenance.

Dr. J. W. Ames was re-elected president in 1938; L. P. Eager, vice president; Ed Butts, secretary and treasurer and Lloyd Heffel was the overseer of the course. Directors of the club, besides the officers were Phil Wackman, William Benson, Arthur Devine, A. C. Holmes, William Fleming and Lewis Clafin.

The club had decided that the members would act as grounds keepers in 1938, under the supervision of Lloyd Heffel. They hired high school students, Richard Eager and Jack McKenna, to assist in the day-to-day work of keeping the course in shape for play.

1938 was the last year the course was operated by the Evansville Country Club. In 1939, the course was rented to Margie Ware and her son, Bill. They opened the course in late May and operated the club house.

The club house associated with the golf course remained opened as a tavern. In September 1948 the Country Club Tavern was purchased by Jim Johnson.

By 1940, the Milbrandt Brothers purchased the golf course property that had once been owned by the Evansville Country Club. The land was once again used for crops. The underground watering system was removed in the 1940s so that the land could be plowed. Evansville would not have another golf course until the 1960s and then it was moved to a location north of the city.