



Gaylord Golf Mecca Celebrates 20 Years

Photo: Otsego Club's The Tribute, hole no. 4.

By Art McCafferty

This year, the Gaylord Golf Mecca celebrates 20 years of doing business. It is a nice story to write about, as it shows what cooperation can do for an organization. The major players involved with putting this formidable group together, were Keith Gornick and Dick Weber of The Otsego Club, Larry Bowden of The Natural at Beaver Creek Resort, Bill Topham of Treetops Resort, Dan Webster of Gaylord CC, Dave Smith of Wilderness Valley, and Paul Beachnau representing the newly formed Gaylord Convention and Visitors Bureau.

From that start, the Gaylord Golf Mecca grew in size, visibility and prestige. They have increased their number of courses from eight to 21 and their lodging properties from four to 20. Gaylord has gone from a quiet northern Michigan town, to a major recreational area. While golf is king, there is also substantial skiing, snowmobiling, boating and fishing to round out their product line.

The Gaylord Golf Mecca's golf inventory is impressive. Golf course designers include, Robert Trent Jones, William Diddle, Tom Fazio, Rick Smith, Tom Doak, Jerry Matthews, Ron Otto and Mike Husby. Many of their courses

have appeared in Top 100 lists in *Golf Digest* and *Golf Magazine* and have dominated Michigan based lists for years.

Through the cooperation of the various properties they have achieved national recognition. The biggest star in this galaxy of stars is interestingly, Threetops, the par 3 course that was designed by Rick Smith. This course has been featured on ESPN for almost a decade. The Par-3 Shootout, invites members of the PGA and Champions tour to the resort to play for a half million dollars.

Golf professionals that have played the tournament include, Lee

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- Golf Magazine



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Trevino, Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, Fred Couples, Phil Mickelson, Chris DeMarco, Lee Janzen, Andy North, and Raymond Floyd, Lee Trevino, was the only member of the group to make a hole in one and share the top prize of one million dollars.

Treetops also was a star player in the making of the first Big Break television show on the Golf Channel. Rick Smith, who had been getting some serious face time as a teacher on the network, was a natural choice for the event's hosting duties. The first show highlighted the resort and its many courses. Smith might still be doing the show, but he became Phil Mickelson's teaching pro and the demands of his schedule would not allow Rick to continue his hosting duties, a situation he greatly regretted.

Photo by Art McCafferty



The Natural, hole no. 9

As the Gaylord Golf Mecca celebrates its accomplishments of the past and begins to re-tool itself for the next decade, it will do so under

different leadership. Harry Melling has passed and the resort is in the hands of Rick Smith and a number of silent partners. Osprey S.A., thus ending over five decades of Gornick ownership, purchased the Otsego Club as well as the Wilderness Valley courses, which includes, Black Forest. The Lakes Course has been sold and rebranded as the Mountain Lake GC.

They will be retooling under a different economic climate than they faced 20 years ago. The graph depicting rounds played, peaked in 2000 and has declined every since. Most of the properties are struggling due to the lost of rounds and other golf related revenues. Still, the Gaylord golf community is setting its course for better days. *MG*

Photo courtesy of Treetops



Treetops, Robert Trent Jones Course, hole no. 6



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