

WOMEN'S GOLF AT SPRINGDALE 1940 - 2012

FORE ! THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Back in the beginning, perhaps it was just the quirky gods of golf who decided that Springdale should be different: That the limitations governing female participation, typically prevalent at most golf clubs at that time, would *not* be part of our DNA. By incorporating this free lift -- a go-ahead that it was okay for women to inhabit the fairways -- our founders laid the groundwork and set the stage for women's golf to flourish. An early vanguard of distaff players were thus allowed to swing away on those beguiling fairways because Springdale's official stance did not encode gender bias.

By the mid '40s, a small band of women enjoying rounds on the greensward never seemed to mind that if they wanted to have lunch afterwards, they had to bring their own. So be it; nary a complaint was voiced from such forerunners as Frances Stevens, Dorothy Howe, Velma Stokes, Pam Hagenbuckle, Helen Woodward, Erica Bauer, and Wirth Strachan. Apparently following the dictum "to play the course as you find it" and just savoring a favorite pastime with friends was pleasure enough.

And no, it wasn't the nascent feminist movement that next sparked a growing stream of women wanting to tippy toe their way to the tee. The attraction was Springdale itself: its cozy atmosphere of *hospitality* and *informality*. Without those defining and firmly established hallmarks, the wave of interest would surely have stalled. Because Springdale's *raison d'être* was golf, members not only took pride in its cutting-edge spirit of non-stodge diversity but also its deep respect for the game's rich traditions. Golf was seen here as a sport relished for challenge and chuckles ... and yes, sometimes more exhilarating if players wanted to hone their skills and develop a faintly competitive nature.

Such a balanced, relaxed approach appealed to many women who, from earlier experiences, had reason to perceive the world of golf as a male domain, often unwelcoming and intimidating. But once encouraged by Club leadership to fully participate in activities and committees, and later to serve on its governing Board, former notions of sexism went the way of the niblick-- except

for one lapse: Although in 1972 the U.S. Department of Education's "Title 9" was passed requiring colleges and universities to comply with/ enforce non-discriminatory policies, the Senior Men Only sign prominently displayed outside the entry to the former Grill Room remained in place until 1991, prolonging for some a sorry reminder of exclusionary practices.

However, in the 1950's all *other* Clubhouse and Pro Shop doors were opened wide for female aficionados and novices alike, all keen to improve or learn a new sport, to experience fresh challenges, and to form lasting friendships. But **how** in the world would this amorphous core of Springdale women ever succeed in becoming a self-generating critical mass that balanced golf's concepts of competition and companionship? How would they ever find their groove and a firm enough grip to form a thriving flock of enthusiastic, accomplished nine and eighteen-hole players? In culinary parlance, "What was the missing ingredient needed to make the aspic bind"?

Serendipity (maybe those quirky golf gods again at play?) provided the perfect response: Springdale *must* add a major game-changer to the mix. Bring on an unwitting but stellar role model whose star quality would touch everyone lucky enough to share time or tee; whose modest demeanor, cool composure, consummate sportsmanship and quiet nurture of other golfers would inspire decades of future players. Springdale could then claim its very own '**Living Legend**'. *Poof and Voilà !* Enter the incomparable Betty Whelan Donovan.

Not only a fabulous golfer but a luminous person, Betty so exemplifies the qualities basic to the game she came to learn and love that those around her were drawn to aspire to the same high values. By modeling the lofty goals of sportsmanship, fairness, humor, and pride in accomplishment, she set a standard for the new normal. At last the aspic would jell... as would the generous spirit of play that continues to bind our women golfers.

Winner of the Women's Club Champion from 1951-1961 and again from 1963-1966 when she retired from contention after 15 victories, Betty still treasures and keeps close at hand the first silver Championship bowl awarded to her after her first three wins.

Always a season highlight for nine-hole and eighteen-hole players is the annual Betty Whelan Donovan Tournament (gross scores) played at the same time as the Chairman's Tournament (net scores). Both are two-day ringer events. The winners' prizes for her tournament are yet another vibrant legacy coveted by all: beautifully crafted framed watercolors painted by 'Betty the Artist', her other renowned persona.

In 1953, together with ten other notable amateur golfers upset by prejudice in the existing statewide women's golf association, Betty became a founder of the Garden State Women's Golf Association, with aims "to provide keen competition for skilled, low handicap women amateur golfers..... to stimulate sportsmanship and friendship among its members; and to promote an incentive toward better amateur golf."

With 120 members from 50 affiliated private clubs across the state, and with New Jersey's most challenging courses hosting monthly tournaments (Springdale held the GSWGA's 3-day Better Ball outing in August 2013), the association has surpassed all expectations as it celebrates its 60th anniversary. A special point of pride for Springdale is its representation of GSWGA members is usually outnumbered only by far larger clubs such as Baltusrol, Crestmont , Somerset Hills, Montclair. Betty served the GSWGA as President in 1960-1961, and holds the singular distinction of being its only member to *ever* win both its match play championship (1959) *and* its stroke play title (in 1967).

Betty's many years as the first coach of Princeton University's fledgling Women's Golf Team are detailed in a separate entry to these *annals*. ***

How did these extraordinary achievements come about ? How improbable is it for someone -- from a non-golfing family, whose only past encounter with golf was to swing a five-iron while tagging along behind her father and brother during their occasional rounds -- to suddenly morph and emerge as a full-blown paragon of the game?

The story begins in 1947, when as newlyweds Betty and Jim Whelan moved to Princeton from her hometown of Haddonfield. With few contacts and little to occupy her during the day, her New York- commuting husband came

home one evening to find her yawning over a magazine. Recognizing loneliness and boredom, he chided her to please find something interesting that she'd like to do. "But what?" Betty asked. "Well, why not start off trying to learn to play golf", Jim replied, adding that he'd gladly introduce her to Springdale's outstanding Scottish teaching pro and University coach, the venerable Harry Kinnell.

A perfect golf trifecta was formed on the practice tee that July. Building on Betty's naturally supple, easy old 5-iron swing, Harry would not allow his prize pupil out on the course... just lesson, practice, practice, lesson, practice and more practice. When finally she got the green light to play, Betty and her friend Helen Woodward headed out but soon realized they had no idea where to go. "Don't worry", the understated Scot reassured her. "If you get lost, somehow we'll find you." Well, Betty never did need a search party and Springdale was soon to find and uncover its future 'living legend'.

Almost as unlikely is the back story of how Betty and Jim Whelan became Club members earlier that same year. Pure happenstance had brought them to Springdale for a pre-dinner cocktail with other guests, including Tom ("Doc") and Mary James. When Jim mentioned to Doc James (then a Board member and future Club President) that he really enjoyed the ambiance and might be interested in joining, Doc didn't miss a beat: "Just give me \$35.00 and you're in". The cold cash was pressed into Doc's open hand and the deal was done. No applications, no seconding letters, no reviews, no postings. So simple!

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In the mid-'50's another force of nature embellished the women's sporting scene. Jean McLean's contagious enthusiasm for *everything* golf labeled her our unofficial greeter-in-chief as she induced newcomers and strangers to 'come on, let's grab our clubs and go out and play'. Jean's petite build, cobalt-blue eyes and irrepressible *joie de vivre* combined to convey a clear conviction: if you couldn't be out there playing -- even if it was only on the miniature golf facility on Route 27 near New Brunswick-- then you were being absolutely deprived of one of life's major joys.

A fine player herself, Jean's priorities and sunny personality were publicly tested at the end of one golfing season, to the vast amusement of

several friends standing around watching: While excavating endless articles from her over-stuffed golf bag, what should surface from the very bottom but an old PB&J sandwich together with her carefully wrapped wedding ring gone missing since May!

Sadly, Jean's young life was cut short by illness, yet her radiant legacy continues to shine on the hugely popular Jean McLean Memorial Tournament. Established in 1964 as an annual Board event, it is played as a two-day Better Ball of Partners, an appropriate format that absolutely mirrors what Jean loved most about golf: Genial groupings out there having a wonderful time together as they compete to prevail. When her tournament time rolls around each July, It's not hard to imagine those blue eyes sparkling with satisfaction.

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Over the years, Springdale golfers have taken full advantage of the abundant opportunities available throughout New Jersey, among them the *Women's Metropolitan Golf Association*. "The Met" sponsors frequent individual competitions as well as the popular Interclub Team Matches. While the number of 'series' can vary -- in the '80's, '90's and more recently, there are 12 series around the state -- each series comprising six teams of five players each.

In late April and early May, when interclub matches are in full swing two times a week at various member clubs, carpooling players often leave home by 6 AM traveling afar to make 8:30 starting times. If stuck in Interstate traffic, they often find consolation in realizing that approximately 870 other sleep-deprived, golf-addicted women in New Jersey, Long Island and Westchester are probably experiencing the same anxiety of getting to the tee on time.

Springdale has a long history of participating in Met team matches, except for an almost 25-year hiatus in the early 1960's, caused by a travel incident: After years of progressing through several series to earn its way to a challenge match scheduled to take place on Long Island, the NJ Turnpike remained closed in the aftermath of a severe storm. The SGC team was stymied in its attempt to arrive by its designated starting time and when the penalty for 'no show' was to demote Springdale all the way back down to start again in the bottom series, our team members determined the decision unfair and opted to

resign. Time healed the rift and by 1986 enthusiasm once again had geared up for another go at team play.

Club teams consist of a revolving roster of five players ranked according to handicaps. Played at scratch, matches pair opponents with their ranked counterparts listed by each club's team captain. Following the 3-point Nassau scoring system, and after each team has played all the others in the same series, the team with the most points can challenge the team in the series above that has the fewest points. If the challenging team is successful, it advances to the next series and the loser drops back to the series below. If the challengers lose, both teams remain in their same former series.

In 1986, when Springdale started over again in the bottom #12 Series, it took almost twenty years of working and winning its way up the WMGA series ladder to finally gain the top rung. In 2005, after sweeping its Series #2 matches, then winning its challenge match against Plainfield, the SGC team at long last attained the Met's # 1 Series, competing against the likes of Baltusrol, Montclair, Spring Lake, Somerset Hills and Canoe Brook. And except for a brief slip back to Series #2, Springdale in 2014 is *still* competing in the top group!

Because so many different women from our much smaller club have participated in Met matches over the decades, this prestigious attainment is a tribute to their loyalty, prowess, and commitment. However, it should come as no surprise that in recent years, backed by her own awesome talent and steady dedication, Donna Young, as chief cheerleader and team captain, led the way to Springdale's overall success story. Arriving fresh off the red-eye back from Los Angeles, who else could have arrived energized enough to play and win a crucial match vs. Plainfield's # 1 player to finally put our team into the Met's # 1 Series ?

Yes, once again Springdale was gifted with yet another true golfing phenom. A member since 1981, Donna's incredible achievements both at home and away can only be described as stunning. She quickly made her indelible mark at home, taking *twenty-one* turns as Springdale Women's Champion between 1983 - 2012 ("feeling very proud of each and every one") while going farther afield to register many other record-shattering top finishes.

Donna says her most nostalgic victory came in 2006 at the New Jersey Women's State Amateur Championship. Having been medalist five times and finalist twice (losing each time), she had begun to doubt if she would ever win the title. In 2006, however, the tournament was played at Somerset Hills, a favorite course in Bernardsville, and "my game just shifted into high gear. After thirty years of trying, I finally won." She then went on to win again the next year when the State Amateur was held at Hollywood -- a back-to-back feat not attained before or since.

Persistence may have played a part in her victory, but Donna attributes it to feeling the close presence that whole week of her dear departed friend Emily Frelinghuysen. Fondly known and widely admired as Somerset Hills grand lady and guiding light of all things golf, Emily had been Donna's long-time mentor and tower of strength. They had first met thirty years earlier at the 1975 NJ Women's State Amateur played that year at Greenacres. Emily was responsible for running the tournament, it was Donna's first time playing in it as the youngest contestant, and "Emily took great care of me". Her parents were very supportive as always, but it was Emily who was able to help launch her into the next level.

Unaware that the Garden State Women's Golf Association even existed, Emily told Donna about the group and arranged everything needed for her to become a member. "The GSWGA has made a tremendous difference in my competitive golf life, and I will forever be grateful to Emily and the organization", Donna says. "The women were wonderful, they didn't treat me as if I were a child but as an equal. Prior experiences playing with women were not always positive, so to be part of an organization with great players that exhibited good sportsmanship was like hitting the jackpot. Emily was the start of it, but as with Betty (Whelan Donovan), there were so many who were so kind to me early on".

The outings Donna enjoys most are the annual Garden State's 3-day Round Robin always played at Somerset Hills. She has won the top Robin six times in four different decades, a record that so far stands alone. She has also posted four GSWGA Stroke Play Championships (three in a row in 1990,91,92); three GSWGA Better Ball Championships (two played at Springdale), and competed as finalists in six.

In partner events of the Women's Metropolitan Golf Association, Donna won two Better Balls and Pinehursts and in 1998 was named WMGA Player of

the Year. She also played on multiple Met Griscom Cup teams, annual inter-city matches with Boston and Philadelphia, serving as team captain for four years. Spreading her wings even wider, Donna competed in a total of eighteen of USGA events, including a U.S. Women's Amateur; eleven U.S. Mid Amateurs; two U.S. Women's Senior Amateurs; and six USGA State Team Championships.

This partial listing of Donna's career highlights make it even more intriguing to scroll back and try to picture a small girl's golfing beginnings that led to such a superb end game: When she was very young, about five years old, her Mom went back to teaching, which left Donna and her Dad some leisure time to take turns hitting balls at Tony Midiri's Driving Range on Rte. 31 in Pennington. Being very left-handed, she used two cut-down left-handed clubs (a wood and an iron). But when she hit the ripe old age of eight, Tony advised that if she wanted to golf as an adult, it would be difficult to find lefty equipment. So he cut down two right-handed clubs for her and within two weeks she was hitting equally, left or right-handed, and could no longer imagine playing as a lefty -- except for putting (on the theory shared by many teachers that the line is better seen with the dominant eye). She next started caddying for her Dad, pulling his cart when he played Saturday mornings with buddies at Mountain View. Afterwards, her caddy fee was happily paid in the form of a burger at Freddie's, and occasionally she and her Dad would go back out to play nine holes late in the afternoon.

At age eleven or so, Donna entered her first tournament, The Mercer County Pee Wee at Princeton Country Club. As the only girl playing, she still won her division but was disappointed when the trophy she received displayed a male golfing figure. She won the Pee Wee division again the next year and was especially pleased to see that the trophy now showed a girl. In high school, she joined the boys' golf team as the only girl playing in Mercer Country.

As her game and interest in golf progressed, her parents would take Donna to LPGA tournaments in the area. One particular player had caught her attention and was to become her idol: Amy Alcott. Turning pro right after high school, Amy had become the bright new star with glowing publicity, so when she came to Forsgate on the 1975 LPGA tour, Donna was right there. Following Amy every step of the tournament for three days, she was rewarded and inspired to watch her idol go on to win a second career victory at age 19. After signing her card and exiting the scoring tent, Amy walked right over to her young fan to

give her a big hug and thank her for being such a good luck shadow. They have been good friends ever since, and in 2008 Amy graciously accepted Donna's invitation to be the guest speaker at the WMGA's Annual Meeting, where an appreciative audience heard the re-telling of their first encounter story.

It's no small wonder that we unabashedly stake out bragging rights as a response to the huge accolades Donna so deservedly has earned, claims that only reflect the pride we feel she has bequeathed to her Springdale home.

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Closer to home -- and rewarding getaways for many Springdalers -- are the fine courses and tournament events sponsored by the Women's Trenton District Golf Association. Founded in 1936 "to promote interest and improvement in women's golf, and to bring them together socially and competitively for the betterment of the game in the vicinity of Trenton", the WTDGA began with seven area private clubs staging two-four events each year. Now in 2013, its 77th year, the area membership has doubled to fourteen clubs and offers a myriad of challenging and sociable events open to everyone.

We can also brag about our own home-grown frosting on the cake, the abundant variety of Tuesday events masterminded by Springdale's inventive golf pros and tournament committees. From April's Opening Day Scramble to the ABCD Scramble in late October, the plate overflows with special sporting treats.

Yes, women's golf at Springdale, strengthened by powerful legacies, continues to prosper because of its people: its leaders, players, its pros. And also because the game itself contains infinite ways and levels to enjoy. For many, the best times are right here at home on familiar terrain; others follow their bliss to sample other courses and competitions; some do some of both.

Yet anyone who glances at Springdale's scoreboard will uncover an amazing reality: Its final tally shows that **we have All been declared winners** because we have **All** been awarded golf's most enduring prize -- the opportunity to play a wonderful game in the manner and place we choose. With such a win/win choice, it's a gimme that Springdale has given us **The Best of Both Worlds**.

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