

Tillinghast group honors golf architect

A.W. Tillinghast was probably the most colorful figure in the history of golf course architecture. A notorious drinker, he often enjoyed a "liquid lunch" while designing some of his classic golf courses.

Those who have unsuccessfully tried to conquer some of Tillinghast's diabolical greens and deep bunkers over the years probably wondered if Tillinghast had a little too much to drink while he was putting the finishing touches on some of his torture tests.

But there's no doubt that the eccentric Tillinghast was one of the greatest golf architects ever. His designs in the New York metropolitan area include such championship layouts as Winged Foot (West and East courses), Quaker Ridge, Baltusrol (Upper and Lower), Somerset Hills, Bethpage Black, Ridgewood and Old Oaks.

For some strange reason, Tillinghast hasn't been voted into golf's hall of fame. "Tillie the Terror" is every bit as good as Donald Ross and Robert Trent Jones, two famous golf architects who have gotten more respect.



RICK REMSNYDER

Some of Tillinghast's biggest fans will be at Old Oaks Country Club in Purchase to honor their favorite golf architect on Tuesday. Golfers from nine Tillinghast courses will gather at Old Oaks to participate in a one-day competition that is known as the Tillinghast Cup. The nine clubs have formed the Tillinghast Association.

In addition to Old Oaks, the participating clubs are Sunningdale Country Club and Scarsdale Golf Club from Westchester County, North Shore Country Club on Long Island and New Jersey's Somerset Hills Country Club, Suburban Golf Club, Forest Hill Field Club, Alpine Country Club and Shackamaxon

Golf and Country Club.

The Tillinghast Association was formed five years ago to bring more attention to the great architect and his many works of art. Ben Kirschenbaum, the sports chairman at Old Oaks, is hoping that more clubs that were designed by Tillinghast will eventually join the association.

"The purpose of the association is to recognize and promote Tillinghast as a great golf course architect," he said. "He certainly was in the forefront this year with the PGA Championship at Winged Foot and the Walker Cup at Quaker Ridge. But he's designed many other great golf courses and not all of them are known nearly as well."

Kirschenbaum is hoping that some of Tillinghast's lesser-known classics will become more familiar with the public with a little more publicity.

The one-day tournament at Old Oaks also gives members from other Tillinghast courses the opportunity to play and experience the Purchase course, which opened in 1926.

Though Tillinghast drew up the original plans for the course, Charles Alison completed the work in 1926. Tillinghast's influence is seen particularly on the greens. The greens are small targets and they're usually firm and swift.

"Tillinghast did the layout and design of this golf course, but he did not actually supervise the construction," Kirschenbaum said. "But I understand that was a familiar scenario under Tillinghast."

Kirschenbaum thinks Tillinghast's traditional designs "are much more user-friendly" than many of the modern layouts, which severely penalize missed shots with huge water hazards and waste areas.

"All levels of player can play most Tillinghast and Ross courses," Kirschenbaum said. "On some of these modern courses, you're not going to finish the round if you don't bring a lot of golf balls."

Although Old Oaks measures a modest 6,515 yards from the championship tees, it has never given up many low

scores. When the U.S. Open qualifier attracted some of the world's best players to Old Oaks and nearby Century Country Club in recent years, Old Oaks has always held its own.

"The scores say the pros have had a little more difficulty at Old Oaks than at Century," Old Oaks pro Bobby Heins said. "I think it's really the difference in the greens. It sets Old Oaks apart from Century. Century certainly is a little bit longer and has some very difficult holes. But as we all know, a lot of scoring is done around the greens and I think that's what defends this course from scoring."

Of course, those who will be competing at Old Oaks on Tuesday know all about Tillinghast courses. They all love his layouts, but that doesn't necessarily mean they'll all love their scores when the final putt is holed.

That's the beauty of courses designed by "Tillie the Terror."

Rick Remsnyder covers golf for Gannett Newspapers.