A centennial salute to the first 100 years of the Illinois PGA

Johnsen wins PGA's national youth award

Memories of Willie Marshall • Jock Hutchison
Tommy Armour • Harry Cooper
Johnny Revolta • Tom Walsh
Lou Strong • Alex Pirie
Joe Jemsek • and more
Hardly the retiring types

Four guys with dream jobs are giving them up. Gary Groh, Bob Koschmann, Paul Colton and Tim O’Neal have been the head professionals at their clubs for a combined 134 years. All four are retiring, moving to a world that involves less time in a golf shop and more time on the course.

For Groh, at Bob O’Link since 1981, the transition will be less abrupt. He’s been fortunate in that he’s played more than the other three, with the private Highland Park club’s all-male membership more interested in playing with the former PGA Tour pro than asking his opinion on what color shirt to buy. (Groh was famous for wearing a pink shirt on the final day of a tournament, much like Arnold Palmer, whom he beat to win the 1975 Hawaiian Open.)

Groh won one Illinois Open and an Illinois PGA Match Play, but his most amazing local achievement in his 36-year run at Bob O’Link was the fourth of his Illinois PGA titles. He was 57 when he beat defending champion Mike Small in a three-hole playoff in 2002.

Koschmann was one of the countless assistants who was tutored by Bill Ogden at North Shore Country Club, but in 1979, returned to Lake Shore Country Club, where he had started his career, to take the head pro’s reins. This time, he stayed, for a 38-year run.

Koschmann came to North Shore when another Ogden assistant, Tim O’Neal, left for the Country Club of Peoria. O’Neal, a California native, would eventually return to North Shore, replacing the retiring Ogden in 1995. O’Neal would stay for 22 summers, during which time North Shore returned to the tournament spotlight, hosting the Western Amateur and the senior tour.

Colton’s tenure at Ridgemoor Country Club, hidden away on Gunnison Ave. on Chicago’s north side, tops them all. He, like Koschmann, was the head pro for 38 years, but Colton also spent 10 years as an assistant to Steve Blatnack. He arrived in 1969, the year the Cubs threatened to win the National League, and leaves only now, after the North Siders won it all.

**COG HILL EIGHTH IN PGA JUNIOR:** The group from Cog Hill Golf & Country Club pictured in our Autumn issue finished eighth in the PGA Junior League National, held at Grayhawk Golf Club’s Raptor Course in Scottsdale, Ariz., on Nov. 19-21. Cog’s crew, representing Illinois, was snuffed, dropping its four matches to Suzy Whaley Golf Academy of Connecticut (7.5-4.5), Las Positas Golf Course, Livermore, Calif. (8-4), Royce Brook Golf Club, N.J. (10-2) and, in the seventh-place match, Alabama (7-5).

**YES!** At release time, USGA and R&A agreed on a local rule for 2017: No penalty if ball moves on green accidentally, a la Dustin Johnson at Oakmont. Hooray!
A job not nearly as easy as it appears

Once upon a time, a golf professional did everything. He would have to give lessons, fit and sell clubs, arrange the pairings for the ladies league, find the right things to sell in his shop, and, if he was really skilled, find the time to play the big tour.

A pro who could do that was usually revered at his club. But there came a time, beginning when Walter Hagen came on the scene, that the golf professional and the professional golfer began to become two different people.

Hagen was the first, a gate attraction who could command an appearance fee for a tournament or for an exhibition at a club. (Harry Vardon and Ted Ray were the first great pros to tour, but they did so under the aegis of a manufacturer. Hagen did it himself, selling his personality.)

Soon, the better players were trying to emulate Hagen’s method, usually by hooking on with a club for a stipend that involved appearances but none of the dirty work. In so doing, the modern tour was born, and close readers of newspaper agate would see Texans like Ben Hogan and Byron Nelson registering from Hershey, Pa., and Ridgewood, N.J., respectively. They may have visited there twice a year. Otherwise, they were on the circuit battling for whatever cash was on offer in a given week.

This issue of ILLINOIS GOLFER is largely concerned with the golf professional. The PGA of America celebrated its centennial this season, and the Illinois Section of the PGA, one of seven founding sections – albeit under the name of Middle States, a swath of North America covering Ontario to the Gulf of Mexico, is doing the same.

One hundred years is not only a long time, but covers a great deal of change. Not only has the role of the professional changed. Society has changed as well. There are still many private clubs – most of those in the Chicago area in 1916 still exist in 2016, and remain private – but much more golf is played at public courses in this era, and on courses of as much or more quality, both in style and conditioning, as their private counterparts.

Equipment has gone through at least two revolutionary changes, first from hickory shafts to steel, and then from persimmon woods smacking balata balls to steel and far more exotic clubheads with graphite shafts hitting multi-piece balls that not only don’t cut, but fly distances unimagined when Hagen would tumble out of a Cadillac at the first tee a few minutes before his tee time at an exhibition soon after the Great War.

That change has led to seemingly-constant revisions of golf courses, and the longer the better. For most of us, that means little, for all the changes in the world lighten the pocketbook but don’t lengthen the distance the sphere intended.

The golf professional has adapted to all this, selling the latest, but no longer does someone at a private club offer woods under his name, as many did, sometimes designing them himself, as did Chuck Tanis at Olympia Fields for decades. Today, an affiliation with a manufacturer is to promote their products rather than offer something designed personally after long hours of toil under the lamp at midnight.

That’s understandable, given the use of space-age materials and computer technology. But one thing has never changed. The best professionals are people persons, able to connect with someone coming into a public course for his one round a year, or smile when a gruff member comes in from an 87 that he thinks should have been a 77 – but really might have been a 92 if every putt was holed out.

In the golf business as in any other profession, the best people get the best positions. Some are spotlighted in this issue, including the quartet who are retiring this month – as noted on page 2 – and those in the Illinois PGA Section who earned plaudits this year, beginning with national award winner Dennis Johnsen on page 4, and including Section Professional of the Year Casey Brozek, spotlighted on page 6.

The 13 stories presented in our Illinois PGA Centennial section were commissioned by the Section earlier this year, and ran first on the Illinois PGA website. We’re pleased to be able to present them in our pages so the tales of some of the more notable pros, their exploits during wartime, and the histories of the Illinois Open and Illinois PGA Championship, gain wider exposure. Enjoy!
Career visionary

Dennis Johnsen scores second national PGA honor, this time for developing youth interest in the game

By Tim Cronin

Reporting from Mundelein

One man can make a difference.

For Dennis Johnsen, that man was John Benzel.

For many others, that man is Dennis Johnsen.

Awarded the national PGA Youth Player Development Award this year – really, a career achievement for 42 years toil in the vineyard – Johnsen’s story begins at Pottawatamie Golf Course in his hometown of St. Charles, and Benzel, the pro at the nine-hole municipal course in the early 1960s.

“When I was 11, this man helped me out,” Johnsen said of Benzel. “And that was the first PGA golf professional I ever met. I grew up on that course.

“I’d been given a Kroydon 3-wood. They had a $2 barrel for clubs. I found another club, but I only had 50 cents. I said, ‘If I put 50 cents down, can I pay you off with my paper route money?’

“The next week I paid him off, and he said, ‘Dennis, you’re a nice honest kid.’ He started giving me odd-and-end jobs. For 53 years now, Illinois PGA members and staff have impacted my career and life, so it only seems fair that I try to impact other people’s.

“When I’ve asked for help I’ve never been turned down.”

Johnsen eventually took over at Pottawatamie, where in 1975 he began a junior golf program that commenced with lessons that led to playing in a league.

“Some of those kids are still playing golf,” Johnsen said in his resume. “Two became golf professionals.”

Johnsen eventually replaced Benzel at Pheasant Run Resort, and while
most of the clientele was transitory, he created the Illinois Pee-Wee Golf Championship, and helped the St. Charles High School girls team get off the ground.

When he arrived at Pine Meadow in 2005, it was back to the beginning again.

Mostly men played Pine Meadow when he arrived, and fewer women or children than would be expected. Johnsen changed that, and now Pine Meadow boasts some 100 kids on several PGA Junior League teams, plus a junior golf academy and Nike golf camps.

“The Jemseks, of courses, are terribly supportive of all this,” Johnsen said, referring to the famed golf family which leases the course from the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Johnsen believes the innovations, and his longtime involvement in Illinois Section affairs, give Pine Meadow a leg up on other suburban courses, plus give him an edge when it comes to attracting players. He’s beginning a second stint on the Illinois PGA board, having served as president at the end of his first run, in 2003-04.

“It’s what you find out about the industry, where it’s going,” Johnsen said. “It helps keep you in the forefront, so there are some definite advantages to the business.”

His programs wowed the committee, but Johnsen said what won them over was something else. He found out by calling and asking why he’d won.

“Their answer was the longevity that I’ve been involved with youth player development,” Johnsen explained.

“I was co-chairman of the Illinois PGA Junior Academies that we did back in the late 70s and early 80s. They were at Springbrook, and they kept the kids overnight at Wheaton College, which you don’t do anymore. So I’ve been doing this stuff since 1975. Then they said, the recent commitment to the Junior Golf League and the amount of influence I’ve had in growing that throughout the country. And the last thing, and this, I thought, was the neatest. I had given them the quote that we believe in here, by Grantland Rice:

‘For when the One Great Scorer comes
To mark against you name,
He writes – not that you won or lost –
But how you played the Game.’

“That’s what we stress in our program,” Johnsen said. “I was told the committee loved that that’s what our programs are based on. We’re not out trying to create the next Tiger Woods. We’re not pushing. Conduct to us is just as important as how they swing a golf ball.”

Johnsen has another distinction. He’s the first Illinois PGA professional to win national awards in different categories. Johnsen, who emphasizes hard-good sales and has a club-fitter on staff, captured the national merchandiser award for a public facility in 2009.
Casey Brozek sees every day as a different opportunity.

The 15-year head professional at Crystal Lake Country Club attacks his job that way, dealing with everything from the caddie program to women’s golf clinics to youth golf to custom orders of clubs for members eager to improve.

Much of what’s on his plate wasn’t even on the Crystal Lake men when he walked through the door in 2001. Caddies were few, women played nine holes and kids weren’t often on the course.

Brozek changed all that, and his dedication to growing the game is why fellow Illinois PGA Section members voted him their Professional of the Year. “There is no question that Casey’s best attribute is his dedication to promoting the game of golf,” longtime Crystal Lake member Jason Pero said. “He is seen regularly talking to people from the ages of 4 to 80 about their golf. Casey is always trying to find ways to make the game easier for you. He goes the extra mile to find you that “one” thing that helps us enhance our golf game and make it more enjoyable.”

Work for Brozek and you earn an informal masters in the game. Six assistants have become head pros, and seven interns are now assistants.

The winners of the other annual categories:

- Assistant professional: Bill McInerney, La Grange Country Club. Formerly a head pro, McInerney is an expert clubfitter, but also has experience in every corner of the shop, plus can run a tournament, organize a youth golf campaign and run a handicap program.
- Teacher: Bob Dickman, North Shore Elite Golf Academy. Dickman spends a thousand hours with students annually, and goes beyond the technical to “adult coaching” through what he calls the Growth Velocity Curve.
- Distinguished Service: Jamie Nieto, Pheasant Run Resort. A former caddie who was severely injured in a backyard explosion, Nieto has helped raise over $100,000 for the burn unit at Loyola Hospital and victims of similar injuries.
- Bill Heald Career Achievement: Rick Groessl, Park Ridge Country Club. Groessl has quadrupled the number of junior golf participants in his 26-year span at Park Ridge and is “a constant on the range,” club VP Kevin Buggy said.
- Horton Smith (professional education): Daniel Gray, Skokie Country Club. Gray, a fitness buff, has arranged several seminars on golf fitness for PGA members, and teaches at Wildcat Golf Academy.
- Bill Strausbaugh (professional development): Andrew Phelan, Wynstone Golf Club. In nine years at Wynstone, four of his assistants have gone on to head pro / director of golf jobs at other courses.
- Player Development: Mark Krizic, Ridge Country Club. Krizic has created a new mood at Ridge through programs that go beyond playing 18 holes on a weekend afternoon, including women’s and junior clinics.
- Youth Player Development: Doug Brazeau, Old Orchard Country Club. Brazeau’s move beyond traditional junior programs to classes and team-oriented leagues in various age groups anticipated the PGA Junior League.
- Merchandiser / Resort: Randy Bolstad, Willow Crest Golf Club. It’s the 13th time Bolstad has been honored for the variety of the offerings in his shop, which now includes a golf course simulator.
- Merchandiser / Private: Gabe Exiner, Crystal Tree Country Club. Exiner puts customer service first, keeping him ahead of off-course retailers.
Robert White isn’t exactly a household name in golf these days. In his time, he was an invaluable leader.

Without White’s experience, much of it gained in a long stint in the Chicago area, the Professional Golfers’ Association of America – the PGA, this year celebrating its centennial – might not have been established until well after 1916. And without the PGA’s national formation, there is no Middle States Section, headquartered in Chicago and covering a swath of the continent from Key West to Toronto. Renamed the Illinois Section late in 1921, it celebrates its centennial concurrently with the national body. (The big bash is Thursday, Dec. 8 at Ruth Lake Country Club.)

White, the first president of the PGA, is mentioned in the history of the group, but generally only in passing. The same is true for Alex Pirie, another with Chicago ties who was the PGA’s fourth president. Rodman Wanamaker, whose prodding and offer of prize money and a trophy for an annual championship was a considerable motivator, rightly gets a nod. So do pros like Jack Hobens and Gil Nicholls, who were in on the formation meetings.

White and Pirie, there at the start, deserve a brighter spotlight.

They wanted on a national basis what had already been accomplished on a regional scale. White had previously been president of the Western Professional Golfers Association. The WPGA had been formed in 1899 and by 1905 was held in high enough regard that its championship was held at Chicago Golf Club. (Rockford’s Fred McLeod beat Cleveland’s Bertie Way in the 36-hole final match.)

The professional at Ravisloe from 1903 to...
1913, White wasn’t a great player, but he was an innovative businessman. Schooled in St. Andrews and apprenticed to Old Tom Morris for four years while also teaching school, White was the first to bring fellow pros together to sell clubs nationally, making them in the winter and selling in the spring.

When course management was often part of the portfolio, White was also an early leader in agronomy, the fine art of making courses playable in an era when the power lawn mower was new and chemicals to treat diseased turf in their infancy.

When White left for Shawnee, Pa. – he was at Wykagyl Country Club in New York when the first PGA meetings were held early in 1916 – he was regarded among America’s foremost professionals, and the logical first president of the PGA of America.

Alexander “Alec” Newton Pirie came from an equally golf-rich background. His father worked with Allan Robertson, the first recognized professional, at St. Andrews. Like White, he was deeply involved in the formation of the national PGA. After stays in the east and south, Alec arrived in Chicago and by 1921 was the head professional at Old Elm. By late in 1922, he was elected president of the renamed Illinois Section. Four years later, he was elected president of the national body.

Pirie, like White, was a businessman of the first order. That impressed club members and outsiders alike, many of whom had previously regarded the golf pro as an old Scot with a gruff façade who fancied a drink at 3 p.m., if not before.

Wrote the AP’s Basil Wyrick in 1930, when Pirie’s term was ending, “Now the professional has the same standing with his clients, golf pupils and purchasers of golf supplies, as has any other merchandiser of knowledge or of goods. His opinion is sought on virtually all subjects by officers of the club, and his social status is equal to that of any member.”

The PGA’s formation triggered similar organizational work in each section. Originally, there were to be 12, including three in Canada, but by the time the map was drawn in ink at the inaugural annual meeting, held in Minneapolis on June 26-27 during the 1916 U.S. Open, there were seven sections: Middle States, Metropolitan, New England, Central, Southeastern, Western and Pacific. Of the 41 sections today, the Metropolitan (a.k.a. New York and suburbs) is closest to its original boundaries, though even there, New Jersey broke away. Only the Met and New England sections retain their original names.

Middle States is not to be confused with the more common term Midwest. Middle States was already in use in tennis and sailing, so the PGA was moving on familiar ground in 1916. Midwest would have been a misnomer anyway, for along with Illinois and a large swath of Ontario, the Middle States Section included Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Louisiana and Florida.

Geographic diversity aside, the Middle States organizing committee was exclusively populated by prominent Chicago professionals:

- **Jack Croke**: head professional at Exmoor Country Club, who would later head Cook County’s Forest Preserve golf operations;
- **George Fotheringham**: in 1916 the new professional at Indian Hill Club, and the secretary of the national PGA;
- **Walter Fovargue**: for 10 years the head professional at Skokie Country Club;
- **Stewart Gardner**: head professional at Old Elm between stints before and after Croke at Exmoor.
- **William Marshall**: the esteemed head professional at Onwentsia Club, whose death in March of 1922 caused section officials to name the trophy for the reconstituted Illinois Section Championship after him;
- and **David McIntosh**: the professional at Glen Oak Country Club, previously at Westward Ho, and a course designer of some note, including the front nine at Ridgemoor and the first two original courses at Cog Hill.

The group selected Fovargue the Middle...
States Section secretary, the man in charge of section affairs. He would hold that post only until the end of the year, when he left to represent a manufacturer on the west coast and also consult for architect Donald Ross.

In 1916, the only section-sanctioned competition was the Middle States PGA Section Championship, which was held to determine the seven qualifiers for the 32-man field of the inaugural PGA Championship.

September 18 was the big day. The field, reported by the Chicago Tribune and other outlets as 22, mostly from the immediate Chicago area, teed it up across 36 holes at the Glen View Club. Oak Park Country Club’s George Simpson scored 3-under-par 71 in the morning to take a six-stroke lead on Robert McNulty and coasted to a victory of that margin over McNulty and Fotheringham with a total of 1-under-par 147.


The Middle States would not produce a PGA champion until 1920, when Jock Hutchison, in his third year as professional at Glen View and a last-minute entry as an alternate, captured the PGA held at Flossmoor Country Club. By the time Evanston standout Johnny Revolta won the 1935 PGA, the section was deep into the Illinois years.

The big realignment, late in 1921, turned the original seven sections into 25 smaller units to eliminate festering complaints of poor representation. The size of the sections may have accounted for the PGA’s decision to use that year’s U.S. Open, rather than section qualifying, to select the field which would challenge Hutchison for the 1921 PGA title. (With no PGA in 1917 and 1918, there was also no known section competition.)

The three known Middle States PGA Championships were all held in the Chicago area. The field in 1916 featured players from only four of 10 states, and nobody from Ontario or south of the Mason-Dixon Line. Similar area domination occurred in 1917, when Evanston’s Bob Mac-Donald won at Oak Park Country Club, and 1920, when Evanston’s Laurie Ayton won at Westmoreland Country Club.

The reorganization, which included six new sections from Middle States – itself renamed Illinois – would mean a more representative field in the PGA, and more tournaments in each section, including Illinois. Thus renamed in 1922 was the Illinois PGA Section Championship, played at Westmoreland – 36 holes in one day, the day after a best-ball pro-am. Eddie Loos, the head professional at Lake Shore Country Club, scored 73-72 for 1-over-par 145 to edge Hutchison, a four-time major champion, by a stroke. Ayton, effectively the defending champion, was third.

With that, the renamed and refocused Illinois PGA Section, seven years old, was on its way.
William Marshall came to America with a great pedigree, and proceeded to exceed it.

Born in St. Andrews, Scotland in 1878 and rooted in golf from his earliest days, Marshall appears to have arrived in the U.S. as a 19-year-old, and went to work at the Onwentsia Club in 1897. Specifics as to his position are vague, as his employ there was only mentioned in stories upon his return two years later, but he clearly made a good impression.

When, in the fall of 1897, he won the job of greenkeeper at Milwaukee Country Club – which also carried with it the job of professional at the young club, such double duty commonplace in the early years of American golf, as it was in Scotland – the golf writer for The Milwaukee Journal was effusive in his praise for the lad.

"Marshall is a fine golfer, playing a very strong game himself, an expert club maker, and probably the best teacher in America," the Journal reported when hiring was announced late in 1897. "Moreover, he has a singularly pleasing manner which makes him popular with all who associate with him, either as pupils or opponents. With the great advantage of a really first class professional always on the grounds, it may be expected that our club will occupy next year a much more prominent position in western golfing circles than heretofore."

By April of 1898, Marshall was being referred to as MCC’s “instructor,” and by July, the club’s professional. In August, he visited Onwentsia for a pro tournament, and while his 36-hole score of 179 placed him in a tie for sixth, 25 strokes behind winner – and host professional – James Anderson, it could have been this visit that began his return to Onwentsia to stay.

Marshall was back at the Lake Forest club in 1899, Anderson having gone back to Scotland. Marshall was joined by Peter Walker, the Scot who had been stationed at Lake Geneva. Marshall would teach and make clubs.

He quickly reestablished himself as a favorite of the membership, and when Walker left to return to his schoolteacher duties in Edinburgh at the end of the season, Marshall was named the head professional. The man so many called Willie clearly had made his mark as a clubmaker.

Previewing the 1900 season, Inter Ocean golf writer Joseph Ryan wrote, “His clubs made quite a hit with the participants in the amateur championship at Lake Forest last year, and a few of them returned without taking a sample of Marshall’s work along.”

Other professionals came and went at Onwentsia for the next two decades, including Tom Vardon, Harry’s brother, but Marshall was a fixture, running the shop, supervising and taking a hand in custom clubwork, and giving lesson upon lesson to the Onwentsia membership.

To that end, the club turned out crack player after crack player.

In the next two decades, 19 Onwentsia play-
ers qualified for match play in the Western Amateur, and two of them, David Forgan and William Waller, won it, capturing the first two playings.

What Marshall wasn’t was a great player. He was good, occasionally among the top 10, as evidenced by finishing sixth in the inaugural Western Open of 1899, but didn’t win any titles that made headlines.

Behind the scenes, Marshall was a champion. He was active in the affairs of the original Western Professional Golfers Association, which preceded the PGA of America, and influential informally as well.

When the Middle States Section of the PGA was renamed the Illinois Section late in 1921, a new slate of officers was needed, and Marshall was elected first vice president, working alongside president Joe Roseman and the other officers.

In the winter, Marshall did as so many pros did, holding down a winter job at Bisbee Country Club in Arizona for several seasons. But Onwentsia was his main job, and he did it unfailingly. Unlike many pros imported from Scotland, he was married, with two sons and two daughters, an indication of stability.

In the late winter of 1921-22, Marshall fell ill with pleurisy, an inflammation of the lung walls. On March 20, 1922, Marshall died, only 48.

Two days later, his funeral was held in the Lake Forest Presbyterian Church. Onwentsia members were in the pews, along with what the Chicago Tribune reported as “scores of Lake Forest citizens, many caddy boys, and about twenty-five of the local golf professionals” on hand.

The significance of the turnout of his peers was brought home several months later, when, after discussions following Eddie Loos’ victory in the first Illinois PGA Section championship played under that title, it was decided it was only fitting to name the trophy for the championship in his honor.

Thus, in 1923, the Willie Marshall Memorial Trophy was first played for.

A few years ago, the trophy was retired in favor of the Jim Kemper Cup, to honor the insurance magnate whose love of golf led to the creation of Kemper Lakes, for decades the host of the section championship. The original trophy, resting in the Illinois PGA office, still has Marshall’s name engraved upon it.

### Illinois PGA Championship Winners

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Go all the way back, and the first references to golf in print have to do with not playing it. The Scottish Parliament, then at odds with the English, banned the playing of “gowf” in 1457, in favor of archery practice. Arrows were more difficult to avoid than featheries.

Ever since, there has been a custom to abandon the sport, at least at the highest levels, when a nation, the United States included, is involved in a major war. Thus, in World Wars I and II, the United States Golf Association canceled its championships, feeling it improper to play while others fought.

It might be thought that professional golfers would be in a quandary, but, like the clubs they worked for, those who didn’t enlist – and many did, including 400 PGA of America members in World War II – found a way to contribute to the war effort through the game.

Members of the fledgling PGA and the Chicago-centric Middle States Section were at the forefront during the Great War, staging one-day exhibitions to raise funds for the American Red Cross. Everyone pitched in for what became known as the Red Cross Matches.

Every club of note held at least one in 1917 or 1918, and many held two. Amateurs and pros alike played in them – Chick Evans was a regular both in the Chicago area and elsewhere, often sharing the headliner role with the teenager from Atlanta, Bobby Jones – and the matches could raise money in five figures on a Sunday afternoon.

Two of the most popular professionals to play in them were Jock Hutchison of Glen View and Bob MacDonald of Evanston. MacDonald’s name is not well known today, but he was among the best-known teachers of his time. The indoor golf school he and Hutchison opened in 1918 was one of the most advanced in the era, eventually covering 20,000 square feet.

Perhaps their most famous match came at Lake Shore Country Club in 1918, thanks to a shot by one of their competitors. They were
As Tom Walsh, founder of Westgate Valley Country Club in Worth and a former PGA of America president, told the Chicago Tribune’s Charles Bartlett in May of 1943, “There are no doubts about the benefits of golf for civilians. I look forward, however, to see another value in the game this year – recreation for service men on furlough. Many of them will be given their first extended leaves this summer, and I expect to see five times more service men on courses than last year. The USO is doing a grand job of supplying them with equipment and arranging playing privileges.”

The latter was in conjunction with the donation of sets of clubs and nine dozen golf balls to the USO’s downtown office, added to a large collection already donated for first-come, first-served use by servicemen on leave.

As always, the Illinois Section was leading the way. While it was difficult for him personally, Medinah’s Tommy Armour would visit wounded servicemen in hospitals, reminding them that he had been wounded in World War I – blinded in one eye and with shrapnel in a shoulder – improving his game so much after the war he became a champion.

With virtually everything rationed – Joe Jemsek treasured a letter from Bobby Jones, asking if he could buy a dozen balls from Jemsek, who had cornered the market in the fall of 1941 for patrons of his St. Andrews courses in West Chicago – greater exposure for the game came through continuation of the tournament schedule, at least in this area. While hindered nationally by travel restrictions and by sponsoring groups often devoting their energies elsewhere, with the nadir reached in 1943, when even the PGA decided not to hold its championship, Chicago persevered.

After the USGA canceled the 1942 U.S. Open, the national group combined with the CDGA and the PGA of America to hold the Hale America National Open at at centrally-located Ridgemoor Country Club. The PGA cleared its schedule to assure that every name player not in the service could attend, and Ben Hogan scored the victory, firing a third-round 62.

Of the handful of tournaments played nationally in 1943, three of them were played in Chicago. Two were held at George S. May’s Tam O’Shanter, with Harold “Jug” McSpaden winning the All-American Open, and $2,000, in July, and McSpaden collecting another $1,000 for knocking off Sam Byrd in October in the first World Championship, a 36-hole showdown.

Byrd had won a spot by finishing first in the Chicago Victory Open, the Chicago District Golf Association’s tournament, at Beverly Country Club in August. For that, Byrd won a $1,000 war bond.

That was May’s point in continuing his tournament schedule. At the halfway point of his eight-day All-American tournament schedule, which included an amateur tournament and a women’s division, May, thanks to the popularity of the professionals, had raised $400,000 for Victory Bonds, as they were known, through admission fees.

With the war tide turning, there were more tournaments in 1944, and aside from the U.S. Open, Masters and Western Open, there was something close to a full schedule in 1945, when Byron Nelson won 11 straight starts, including twice in the area, at the Chicago Victory at Calumet and May’s carnival at Tam O’Shanter.

The latter was scant days before V-J Day. By the spring of 1946, the world, and the world of golf, was back to normal.
And then there was Jock

Hutchison set a standard for Glen View and the Section

The world of golf a century ago was one steeped in formality. Men wore ties and often donned jackets while playing. Women wore long flowing skirts that surely impeded their swing.

Everyone was “Mr.” or “Mrs.”

Then there was Jock.

The full name was either John Waters Hutchison, John Fowler Hutchison or Jack Falls Hutchison, depending on the source. The last name was often incorrectly spelled Hutchinson.

Call the head professional at the Glen View Club from 1918 through 1953 “Jock,” and you couldn’t go wrong.

In 1921, Jock Hutchison became the first American to win the British Open – it was rarely called the Open Championship outside of Scotland in those days – but there’s a catch. Hutchison was born in St. Andrews, Scotland in 1884. He emigrated to the United States in his teens and became a U.S. citizen in 1920.

That was a big year for Jock in several ways. He’d arrived at Glen View from the Allegheny Country Club in Pittsburgh with the playing resume of someone about to break through. He’d advanced to the final match of the first PGA Championship in 1916, only to fall to Jim Barnes.

Three years later, citizenship papers in hand, within the space of three weeks, Jock won the Western Open and PGA Championship at clubs within a mile of each other. Hutchison won the Western at Olympia Fields, beating a trio including Barnes by a stroke, and then won the PGA at Flossmoor, knocking off J. Douglas Edgar, one of golf’s great forgotten players, 1 up in the championship match.

“Surprise? It was a complete upset,” The New York Times sniffed.

Hardly. Between the Western and the PGA, he nearly won the U.S. Open, breaking the course record at Inverness twice en route to finishing a stroke in arrears of Ted Ray.

In truth, it was one of the great runs in golf, and the final piece of it – the PGA – came about only because Jock was in the right place at the right time. He hadn’t qualified for the PGA, finishing 11th in the Middle States Section championship at Westmoreland when only the top eight advanced.

“His only chance of appearing in the big show at Flossmoor next month is that several of the players who qualified in the eastern section may not come,” Joe Davis wrote in the Chicago Tribune.

That’s what happened. Both Hutchison and Joe Roseman replaced others, and Hutchison made the most of it, knocking off Eddie Loos of Ravisloe, Lawrence Ayton of Evanston, Louis Tellier of Boston and Harry Hampton of Richmond, Va., en route to the championship match.

The match with Edgar came down to one brilliant shot on the 34th hole, Flossmoor’s famed
16th. Hutchison, his lead whittled from 4 up to 1 up, hooked his drive to the edge of a bunker and had a downhill lie to an uphill green with the sand a threat if the shot was topped.

Hutchison went from spoon to mashie to spoon as he pondered the shot. Finally, he would wield the spoon, and hit a brilliant shot that found the green 200 yards away, and stayed on it, so unnerving Edgar that he barely found the green with a comparatively easy approach shot, then missed a par putt for a halve. Hutchison, dormie 2, closed out the match with a halve at the last to capture the 3rd PGA Championship.

Curiously, his triumph at St. Andrews in 1921 was tinged with controversy. Hutchison used a set of irons that were grooved more deeply than the R&A thought proper. The year before, they ruled the irons would be illegal beginning July 1, 1921. But the Open was played in the last week of June, the irons were legal, and Hutchison, after 72 holes at 8-over 296, met and defeated amateur Roger Wethered in a 36-hole playoff, 150 to 159. Further controversy came when Wethered penalized himself for stepping on his ball in the third round, costing him a chance to win outright.

The numbers didn’t show it, but The Glasgow Herald called the final 36 holes of regulation “the most remarkable day of golf that any of us can remember.” So was the playoff, at least for Jock.

His win at St. Andrews was followed by a second Western Open in 1923 – his fourth major title in as many years, and a record that earned him World Golf Hall of Fame induction in 2001 to go with his induction into the Illinois Golf Hall of Fame in 1990 – but all those championships didn’t bring Hutchison riches as much as it brought him acclaim, and, at Glen View, security. Clubs then were thrilled to have a champion to teach their members. And Hutchison was a brilliant teacher whose game never left him. His 67 at Glen View in 1951, when he was 68, brought headlines. (He held the course record at 63.)

In the 1928, the man nicknamed the Gray Eagle wrote a series of articles entitled “Better Golf,” and the introduction dispelled the idea that the lessons would be merely on paper.

As Jock wrote, “no real golfer ever has been developed except on the course. Their worth to the golfer will be just how much of them he puts into practice. ... If the reader will study and digest the suggestions and then use them when he’s swinging a club at a ball to such purpose that he plays a better game, their purpose will have been served.”

Hutchison retired from Glen View in 1953, but hardly left the game. He spent his winters at the Plantation club in Fort Lauderdale, but received greater attention from his annual visit to Augusta National Golf Club, where he and Fred McLeod became the first honorary starters of the Masters in 1963.

Jock did so for 11 years, until ill health forced him to the sideline before the 1974 Masters. He was 90. He died three years later in Evanston.

“I would rather do this than win a tournament,” Hutchison once said. “Leading off the Masters is the greatest honor we can ever have.”

Yet, for both Hutchison and McLeod, their winning was what got them to that honorary position. But for both, it wasn’t winning their majors. It was because Jock, in 1937, and Fred, in 1938, had won the first two Senior PGA Championships.

They were played at Augusta National.
Tempestuous Tommy Armour

Silver Scot helped put Medinah in the national spotlight

Tommy Armour was one of a kind. Courtesy of the horrors of war, he was blind in his left eye, with a steel plate in his left shoulder. That would have sidelined many a lesser man, but Armour only became one of the greatest ball-strikers in golf history.

He was a legendary player even before he arrived at Medinah Country Club in 1933. On the resume of “The Silver Scot” – before that, “The Black Scot” – were the following major titles:

- U.S. Open champion, 1927.
- Western Open champion, 1929.
- PGA champion, 1930.
- British Open champion, 1931.

On top of that, Armour had also won a pair of Canadian Opens. He would win a third while during his 11-year residence at Medinah.

His setting up shop there – a summer stop that replaced his residence at Detroit’s Tam O’Shanter Golf Club, and one that complemented his winter home at the Boca Raton Club – put the big west side club on the national map.

Chick Evans wrote that Armour was “not only a great player, but he possesses also a striking personality, and from the moment he steps upon a course he appears to dominate it. Everyone else dwarfs into insignificance. Add that to his record, and one has a masterful combination.”

Only Walter Hagen, the only player whose personality might have been larger, could match his achievements. But Armour accomplished winning the Big Five, as the quintet of championships conducted by the world’s major golf associations were known, more quickly than the Haig, and while holding down a club job, something Hagen had long before given up in favor of exhibitions and endorsements.

Armour was just as likely to be in the shop at Medinah or on the practice tee – and the latter location is where he really gained his reputation. Armour, who rebuilt his swing as he rebuilt his life after mustard gas and shrapnel dealt him a one-two punch in World War I, was a great teacher.

Two brilliant instructionals, “How To Play Your Best Golf All The Time” and “A Round of Golf with Tommy Armour,” along with a syndicated newspaper column, brought his ideas to the masses. But individual lessons to his club members and to their guests made his reputation because he made them better.

His secret was in how he learned to play again after months in rehabilitation, after regaining sight in one eye, after the surgeries.

“When I came out I wasn’t so good,” he said after winning the 1927 U.S. Open at Oakmont. “I couldn’t focus my sight on the ball. It would be one place when I hit at it and at another when I hit again. It was a long time until I could break 90. This made me realize I had dropped 20 strokes off my game in the way. This was the difference between one eye and two eyes.

“But gradually my game came back to me. It came back through practice. Playing day after
day I got accustomed to looking at the ball with one eye, to hitting it with one eye and to judging distances with one eye. “I imagine you can get used to anything.”

Armour insisted this was no big deal. “There was nothing unusual about this,” he told syndicated columnist Joe Williams. “I had nothing to do with it. What I lost in vision in one eye, I gained in strength in the other. Except for the faltering start I made after the war, I have suffered no handicaps.”

One who learned how to do that would have no trouble fixing the swing of a 20-handicapper. So Armour would spend hours on the practice tee at Medinah or Boca Raton, comfortable chair at the ready, big umbrella providing shade, scotch-and-water near, and point out to the member or his guest what he or she was doing wrong, and how to make it right.

Most of the time. Once in a while, he’d bring along a rifle and pick off chipmunks just to keep his sharpshooting skills up. The story goes that a member, disturbed that Armour was paying him no mind, said, “When are you gonna stop that and take care of me?”

Said Armour as he reloaded, “Don’t tempt me, you S.O.B.”

John Andersen, a fixture at Medinah for decades, recalled in 2001 that not only did Armour’s lessons stick with the subject, but the old pro remembered as well.

“Tom had a way of teaching that, when he knew who you were, you were his student forever,” Andersen explained. “I remember one day I was teeing off on No. 3 and he was just finishing a round on the 18th green. He saw he, walked over, and said, ‘Didn’t I tell you to take the clubhead back farther?’ ”

More than just members sang his teaching praises.

“As a teacher, he is the greatest,” said Babe Didrikson, who would win three U.S. Women’s Open titles under his wing. “He is able to explain clearly so the pupil understands easily – and if the pupil does what he says, he can start playing good golf right away.”

For Lawson Little, a small adjustment in stance to open the clubface and a few tips on course management allowed Little to repeat as champion of both the U.S. Amateur and British Amateur.

Along with his other outlets, Armour was also a frequent participant in the Chicago Tribune Golf School, a series of early-evening group lessons promoted by the paper and organized by the Illinois Section. Armour would either work with students, or give a ball-striking exhibition, or both.

Armour knew how good he was, but tried not to make a big deal of it. As Chicago golf writer Herb Graffis once wrote, “he never gave himself sunstroke from the light of his own radiance.”

For example, in 1927, during the final round of the U.S. Open, Armour began to piece together a speech. Not a victory speech, but one of congratulations for Harry Cooper, who held the lead as the back nine began, and still held it while watching from the clubhouse balcony as Armour stood in the 18th fairway, a stroke behind and 180 yards from the cup.

“I kept talking it over and over,” he said a few weeks later. “I started it at the 11th green. I wanted to show him I was a good sport. I kept fighting to win, though. Somehow at the finish I felt honestly sorry that Harry lost.”

The finish? A long iron to 10 feet below the hole as on-target as the machine gun he manned during the war, and a birdie putt so pure he turned to his caddie after striking it to say, “You’ll have to work tomorrow, kid.”

Armour won the 18-hole playoff 76-79, and ironically, six years later, Armour and Cooper were tied again, this time with what was called the Illinois Professional Championship – though not the Illinois PGA’s Section title – on the line, and at Medinah, no less. Armour had already scored a 69 on No. 3, but on this occasion, it was Cooper winning the playoff with a 69 to Tommy’s 75.

Decades later, he was approached by the producers of a new golf show to be the lead narrator. He said he’d not be the right man for that, and recommended one of his contemporaries. Gene Sarazen suddenly had a second career as the voice of “Shell’s Wonderful World of Golf.”

Along with a stellar playing and teaching career, Thomas Dickson Armour also contributed something to the lexicon of the game. Vexed by his putting one day, and not for the first time, he said, “I had the yips.” He called it “a brain spasm that impairs the short game.”

He didn’t have them often, but the phrase caught on. It, like Armour’s legend, will live as long as golf is played.
Illinois Open: the crown jewel

Annual battle for state title has a storied history

“The Illinois Open is one event that should be a fixture in this part of the country.”
Charles Bartlett, Chicago Tribune, Aug. 26, 1951

The above comment by Bartlett, the Tribune’s golf writer since the mid-1930s, pointed out something unfathomable today. The Illinois Open was not an annual happening until 1950, and for the first few years of what is now considered the modern era, was something of an afterthought.

No longer. It’s the biggest week in state golf, mixing top professionals and amateurs together in pursuit of the championship of Illinois.

Amazing things happen when the old trophy is on offer, including this year, when Carlos Sainz Jr. of Elgin ran through the field at Royal Fox and Royal Hawk country clubs in St. Charles, setting records for low aggregate – 197 – and score in relation to par – a sprightly 17-under – en route to a five-stroke victory over Christian Heavens of downstate Fairview Heights.

Sainz thus became the 49th champion in the modern era across 67 playings, adding his name to a list that includes a half-dozen Illinois Golf Hall of Fame members.

In the beginning of the current run, it was played in early October. The purse came from entry fees. The Illinois PGA and the Chicago District Golf Association ran the Open jointly.

The resumption in 1950 wasn’t announced until barely 10 days before 105 players teed it up at the Onwentsia Club for a small purse. Felice Torza, the “Toy Tiger” from Aurora Country Club, scored 5-under-par 139 and won it by two strokes over Johnny Revolta of Evanston Golf Club.

Over the years, credit for reviving the Illinois Open, which had been played sporadically in the 1920s and 1930s, and won by such luminaries as Leo Diegel and Harry Cooper, has generally been assigned to a pair of notable golf executives. Neither professional Harry Pezzullo nor amateur Chuck Eckstein were in charge of their particular associations in 1950 – their presidencies would come later – but longtime CDGA executive director Carol McCue recalled that Pezzullo and Eckstein, who remembered the old version fondly, wanting to bring it back in more modern form.

Unlike the old Illinois Open, which was part of the informal summer tour and sometimes played between regular stops on the circuit, this would be open to Illinois residents only.

Club professionals dominated until the late 1970s, even though a number of esteemed amateurs, including Harold Foreman and Martin Stanovich, often lurked on the leader board. Notables such as Bill Ogden and Bob Harris piled up wins. Torza captured a second title. Jack Bell and Dick Hart had their moments. But touring pros were, for reasons unclear, persona non grata.

The CDGA-IPGA collaboration continued through 1970, when the tournament was waylaid by a series of downpours that flooded Prestwick Country Club in Frankfort. Six weeks later,
Al Bailey beat amateur Joel Hirsch by a stroke. While the purse of $6,000 and the first prize of $1,200 were records, the CDGA no longer wanted to sponsor it, and the Illinois PGA took over exclusive operation of the Illinois Open.

Eventually, the doors opened, regional qualifying added, resident tour pros could play if they so desired, and the purse slowly began to climb upward. It didn’t always go to the winner, because the amateurs, led by young Gary Hallberg and Gary Pinns in 1977 and 1978, crashed the party. Pinns and fellow amateur Jim Joseph finished 1-2 in 1978, and from 1977 through 1983, only Jim Urban (1979) and Hallberg (in 1982, after turning pro) were able to win and cash in.

Hallberg’s victory in 1982 earned $8,000 from the record purse of $50,000. That bounty arrived when Bon Vivant Country Club owner Merlin Karlock, the baron of Kankakee, offered to double what the Illinois PGA coaxed from sponsors.

A new era had begun. The purse dipped to $30,000 two years later, but after that was almost always $40,000 or more, climbed steadily and by 1998, hit $100,000 for the first time.

The era of big purses and open qualifying with hundreds of entries brought forth a thrilling collection of championships. Pinns was involved in many of them. He won in 1985 and 1986, the latter on his home course, Village Links of Glen Ellyn, to become the first back-to-back winner since Bob Harris in 1955-56. Then, after a runner-up finish in 1987, he added a fourth title in 1988 and a fifth in 1990, establishing a mark yet to be equaled.

Along the way, Rick Ten Broeck won twice, doing so first as a pro in 1973 — in a playoff over Don Stickney — and as an amateur in 1981, the reverse of the usual amateur-professional progression.

Stickney was runner-up three times, more than any other non-winner, and lost twice in playoffs — the other time was to Emil Esposito in 1966 — and also lose to Lance Ten Broeck, in regulation, in 1983. And the Ten Broecks are the only brothers to claim the title of state champion of Illinois.

The 1990s saw Marty Schiene win three times, including a dramatic six-hole playoff with Gary Groh at Royal Fox in 1992, and the first challenge laid down by Mike Small, who tied for second behind Dino Lucchesi in 1993. Small finally found the winner’s circle in 2003, then won three in a row beginning in 2005.

Standout performances are splashed across the decades. Among them: Errie Ball’s opening 66 at Ravisloe in 1953, missing only one green to set up his title. Bob Harris taking first or a share of second six times in seven years through 1960. Gary Hallberg making the amateur breakthrough in style with a five-stroke victory in 1977. Gary Pinns’ final-round 65 to win and break the course record at Village Links in win No. 3.

More recently, Roy Biancalana beating Pinns and pro and part-time publisher Kevin Klier by seven strokes at Midlane in 1987. Mark Hensby steamrolling the field by eight strokes in 1996 en route to the PGA Tour. Mike Small’s 13-under-par mark in 2003, a record until amateur David Cooke powered through the field at 16-under 199, the first player under 200, last year, including 128 for the final 36 holes at Royal Melbourne.

That mark was thought untouchable, but lasted only 12 months, until Sainz’s rousing 67-65-65 concoction for the aforementioned 17-under 197 at Royal Hawk and Royal Fox.

Bartlett, who reveled in covering the breaking of records, would be pleased to find out that the Illinois Open has become not only a fixture on the state golf scene, but annually one of the bright spots.
He was called the greatest player never to win a major championship.

Except he was a major champion. Cooper won the 1934 Western Open, recognized from here to St. Andrews as a major in those days, and it took him 108 holes to get the job done. He and Ky Laffoon tied for first at the Country Club of Peoria, and came back the next morning for an 18-hole playoff, the first extra session in the Western since the 1899 inaugural.

Cooper and Laffoon were unable to decide anything shooting matching 67s. After a quick lunch, they stood on the first tee again. This time, Cooper’s 66 overcame Laffoon’s 69, bringing him the Western Open title, and a whopping $500.

He was just short of 30, but had been competing with the big boys for 15 years by then, his impressive game developed in his youth. Born in England and raised in Dallas, Cooper won the Galveston Open at age 19 and was on his way.

Three years later, in 1926, he captured the inaugural Los Angeles Open and, along with $3,500, won a nickname: “Light Horse,” hung on him by legendary sportswriter Damon Runyon.

“Light Horse Harry Cooper ... who plays this game of golf like a wild eyed cavalryman riding to a charge – a slashing, dashing, crashing hip-hurray young blade,” Runyon wrote. “You can see from his manner of playing that he thinks golf is a cinch. His style is to take everything head-on – no dilly-dallying, or theorizing, or fooling around.”

Cooper beat amateur George Von Elm by
three strokes with a closing 67 on Los Angeles Country Club’s North Course for a total of 279. This, and Cooper’s finishing the round in 2 1/2 hours, moved Runyon to heights of hyperbole.

“I doubt that there was ever a more spectacular finish in golf, or a more spectacular figure than this blazing young fellow from Texas, who throbs with youth and joy of living, and who is firmly convinced that the only thing to golf is to haul off and bust the ball into the hole in the smallest number of strokes possible,” Runyon gushed. “It’s a great idea, at that.”

With an endorsement like that, it’s no wonder the nickname stuck.

Cooper arrived at Glen Oak Country Club in 1930, and his eight years there – plus three more at Northmoor Country Club – cemented his reputation as a top club professionals of the era. He captured 21 of his 31 Tour triumphs while ensconced in the Glen Oak golf shop, including the 1932 Canadian Open and the Western of 1934. Two of those victories, in 1934 and 1935, came in the Tour-era Illinois Open. Harry also won the Illinois PGA title in 1932 and 1934, the first by beating Bryn Mawr professional Frank Walsh in an 18-hole playoff at Glen Oak.

The course is only eight miles from Medinah Country Club as the Titleist flies, but Cooper, rather than Tommy Armour, might as well have been the professional there in the early 1930s. Cooper won the first three big tournaments there. He scored victories in the 1930 Medinah Open, the 1933 Illinois pro title – beating Armour in a playoff, 69-75, and putting money in the pockets of his many Glen Club backers – and the 1935 Medinah Open. But the old legend that his closing 63 on No. 3 in 1930 caused club officials to bring back Tom Bendelow for a redesign is not true. The plan was already made and awaiting financing when Harry plundered par.

Cooper’s win in the Western Open is his career highlight, but he came tantalizingly close in the other majors he played in, beginning with a semifinal loss to Walter Hagen in the 1925 PGA at Olympia Fields and a second to longtime rival Tommy Armour in the 1927 U.S. Open at Oakmont, losing in a playoff after Armour birdied the last to tie.

Add seconds in both the Masters and U.S. Open in 1936, a tie for second in the 1938 Masters, and quarterfinal losses in the 1937 and 1942 PGAs, and it’s clear Cooper was always a threat – he had seven top-seven finishes in the U.S. Open in a 12-year span – but couldn’t win one of the three American tournaments recognized as majors today.

His biggest year was 1937, with eight wins and the Vardon Trophy for low scoring average.

Cooper was also a brilliant teacher. His member-students at Glen Oak swore by him, and so did a few others. Ben Hogan, for example. The Hawk was still struggling with a chronic hook that was keeping him out of the money in 1938 when he and Cooper were playing in the inaugural Crescent City Open in New Orleans.

“He couldn’t get the ball off the ground, and he asked me for some help,” Cooper told author John Coyne in 1990 for his book “Playing With the Pros: Golf Tips From the Senior Tour.”

“He was letting go of the club at the top of his swing and then regripping it. It’s a little thing, but the minute you let go and then regrip, it shuts the face of the club. Can’t help but shut the face, and that was what Ben was doing. I finally got him hitting the ball, getting it up in the air and keeping it flying and hitting it straight.”

The key to a solid swing, Cooper said, was the left hip.

Cooper realized this in 1933, when a Glen Oak member took high-speed movies of Cooper swinging. Wrote Charles Bartlett in the Chicago Tribune, “There was a barely perceptible pause at the top of the backswing. He ... finally traced this to a ‘hitch’ or ‘kick’ growing out a slight lateral motion of the left hip. It was this kick with the point of the left him, he realized, which was enabling him to gain the necessary power and even more important, keep the ball on the line he desired. It also produced more yardage and helped him to avoid quick hooking.”

Armed with that knowledge, Cooper went on his great run, and taught his members the same thing for decades, from Glen Oak to Northmoor to Metropolis Country Club near New York, N.Y.
Revolta: the sage of Evanston

Few have mastered every club as well as the winner of the 1935 PGA

Imagine a player so skilled that he could look at a green 140 yards distant, pull out any club in his bag – even the putter – and put the ball on the green.

Johnny Revolta could do that.

One of the most precise ball-strikers in the history of the game, Revolta hung his shingle at Evanston Golf Club for 31 years, and more than two decades longer as pro emeritus, while both serving a marveling membership and scoring 15 of his 18 victories on the tour.

Revolta arrived in Evanston in 1936, following his best year on the circuit, the club outbidding Milwaukee’s Tripoli Country Club for his services. Among his five victories were the Western Open and the PGA Championship. The former, Revolta won by beating Willie Goggin by four strokes at South Bend Country Club. The latter, Revolta annexed through a 5 and 4 victory over Medinah’s Tommy Armour at Twin Hills Country Club in Oklahoma, which also gained him the first of two Ryder Cup berths.

Between those and his other winnings, Revolta led the tour money list – collecting a whopping $9,543.

Johnny, 25 when he arrived at Evanston, was, a few times removed, from the caddie yard, a common origin for great players until the last generation. He had started with hand-me-down clubs that replaced an iron head he swing with a whittled-down brookstick.

Did this kid want to play? After winning the Wisconsin caddie championship in 1925, he wanted to live in the game.

“That Wisconsin caddie title was all that I needed to convince myself that golf was THE game,” Revolta wrote in the Chicago Tribune in 1936. “Nobody ever had heard of me when I won the Wisconsin open in 1930, but I made sure they’d remember me by repeating in 1931.”

He was head professional at the Portage Country Club in Wisconsin when he was 18 – no apprenticeship for this lad – and began to draw attention when he was at Menominee soon after. He scored 66 against the best ball 68 of tour pros Armour and Gene Sarazen.

With a feat like that, it was time to try the tour, which he had dabbled in previously with little success. Off Revolta went to Miami for the 1932 Miami-Biltmore Open, a big-money weekend that netted him $1,250 for finishing second to Denny Shute by a stroke after squandering a substantial lead.

A month later, as 1933 dawned, Revolta got his revenge by winning the slightly less lucrative Miami Open. Still, collecting another $650 in the middle of the Great Depression was real money. Plus, he opened strongly – 66-68 grabbed headlines back then – to beat Shute by four strokes.

Quickly, a legend grew. Revolta had to have his caddie, Lee Schneider, pay his entry fee to the Biltmore tournament. He’d been in a car accident that injured his wife on his honeymoon. He’d hitchhiked from Wisconsin.
This was rapidly becoming Bunyanesque, and none of it was fact.

“The truth is that I drove to Miami in a new car of my own, that I gave Schneider $500 of the prize money after the tournament, that my wife was not injured seriously and is well and strong today, and that I did not cry when I received the money,” Revolta explained.

The rest of his legend was true. His control of each club, especially the short irons, was fact, not fiction. He became known as the “iron master,” and proved his mastery of bunker shots by getting up-and-down from the sand seven times en route to a 1-up victory over Walter Hagen in the opening match of the 1935 PGA Championship. In the 36-hole final against Armour, Johnny one-putted 13 of the 32 greens before the Silver Scot was vanquished.

Revolta didn’t keep the secrets of his game to himself. Soon after arriving in Chicago, he penned a series of instructional articles for the Tribune. In 1949, he authored “Johnny Revolta’s Short Cuts to Better Golf,” which was reprinted a few years ago, and concentrates on the short game.

Wrote Revolta, “Always bear in mind in putting never to let the clubhead travel ahead of the hands at impact at the ball. As for chip shots, I feel that the fundamentals in these are the same, at impact, as in putting – the clubhead should not travel ahead of the hands. If you don’t concentrate on this latter statement repeatedly, you will not meet the ball squarely, you will not meet the ball squarely, probably topping it or pulling it.”

There, in a nutshell, is Revolta’s approach to the game. The clubhead follows the hands to the ball, simple as that.

Hundreds of Evanston members benefitted from his approach and hands-on teaching, and the handicap board for years was speckled with single digits.

Revolta wintered in Mission Hills Country Club in Palm Springs, Calif., and as at Evanston, the lesson tee was often populated by notables. In either locale, it wasn’t unusual to see Bob Goalby or Kathy Whitworth stopping by for a lesson. Even old foe Ben Hogan, whose legend has working out his “secret” himself, went to Revolta.

In particular, Revolta became popular with the players of the LPGA, the circuit stopping at Mission Hills annually for the Dinah Shore, the major championship today known as the ANA Inspiration.

Johnny also wanted kids to play well. Evanston was among the first clubs to have a thriving junior program, which continued when he retired and Hal Miller replaced him in the shop.

But it was his reputation as a player and shoemaker that still resonates today.

“You go back to the best in the game – Hogan, Snead, Armour and the rest, and John Revolta was right there with them,” Miller said when Revolta died at 79 in 1991 after a short illness.

Locally, Revolta won the Illinois PGA Championship six times from 1936 to 1947, and was runner-up on two other occasions. His mark of half-dozen titles was considered unbeatable until Mike Small came along.

Revolta also helped his fellow pros in the shop. Assistant Bill Rose learned to teach under Revolta, ended up at the Wakonda Club in Des Moines, Iowa, and then took Chicagoan Bob Kletcke, whom Revolta sent his way, under his wing to impart the same teaching skills Rose had learned from Johnny. (Kletcke’s sharp work in the shop during the 1962 U.S. Amateur caught the eye of Billy Joe Patton and Charlie Coe, who were searching for a new pro for their club. Quickly, Kletcke was on his way to Augusta National.)

John Revolta, whose influence is still felt, was a charter inductee into the Illinois Golf Hall of Fame in 1989.
Tom Walsh: national influence
Public course pioneer from golfing family was longtime leader

Of all the professionals who have worked in the Illinois Section over the years, the one who did the most and saw the least attention paid him may well have been Tom Walsh.

And, probably, that was fine with him.

Walsh was a worker bee of the first order, but he was also an innovator, a builder and a dreamer.

Unlike others profiled here, he never won a major championship, never hit it big on the winter circuit that grew into the modern PGA Tour, never cashed in with endorsements.

But when he died at 75 in December of 1972, erstwhile Chicago Tribune golf writer Robert Cromie wrote, “It was almost as difficult finding a parking place at Sheehy’s the evening they waked Tom Walsh as it is to get a teeoff time Sundays at Westgate Valley, the course Tom built in 1929 and ran until his death. Because Tom, oldest of the five golfing Walsh brothers, was one of the best-liked people in town.”

True. And he was among the best-known. Walsh seemed to be everywhere at once. He was at Westgate Valley, which would double in size to 36 holes after World War II. He was at countless meetings of the PGA of America, which was headquartered in Chicago for decades and for which Walsh served as president for two years.

He was the co-founder and for 30-plus years a key man in the Chicago Tribune golf schools, which attracted thousands to park district courses for twilight lessons each summer.

He was Joe Jemsek before Joe Jemsek – then alongside him – promoting the game with a zeal few could muster. Brother Marty Walsh also owned courses, notably Hickory Hills, while Packey would follow Tom at the Chicago Park District for a time, Frank made it to the 1932 PGA final match, and John was the professional at Omaha Country Club. But Tom was busier than any of them.

Westgate Valley, which was sold for upscale housing by Walsh’s heirs in 1997 following a couple of difficult summers, wasn’t going to host a U.S. Open.

Tom Walsh had no interest in building a difficult course. He wanted a course people could have fun playing and would come back to play again. By the 1970s, what sand bunkers there had been were grassed over. A sign on one tee suggested what club to use. Westgate Valley was a user-friendly course long before the phrase was coined.
It paid off to such a degree, Walsh at the time of his death was finishing another 18 to the southwest. Green Garden Golf Course opened in 1973 as an 18-hole layout, and today boasts 45 holes.

Walsh started his career as a starter at Olympia Fields Country Club when that sprawling south suburban plant had four courses. He went up Western Avenue to run Dixmoor Golf Course – across 175th Street from Calumet – in the mid-1920s, then hooked up with the Chicago Park District to organize their golf operation.

Soon, with a $500 loan from his parents, he was buying prairie land near Worth to create Westgate Valley, complete with a clubhouse restaurant that became an attraction on its own. In 1931, soon after it opened, he attracted wide attention by pitting his brother Frank and Jock Hutchison against Harry Cooper and Al Espinosa in a best-ball match where Frank and Jock played the new golf ball and Harry and Al played the old one. The new ball won the match, both the old ball, slightly smaller, was driven farther in a long-drive test.

That put Westgate in the news, and was only the beginning of Walsh’s promotional ventures. He and Julian Lambert, who also owned a public course, approached Tribune sports editor Arch Ward and golf writer Charles Bartlett with the idea of a golf school in 1933. Ward was a big thinker – baseball’s All-Star Game was his idea, conceived that very year – and Bartlett was gung-ho for growing the game, but a golf school? “Neither Arch nor I were interested at first, but Walsh’s Irish persistence and his enthusiasm for inoculating would-be golfers with the bug finally sold us,” Bartlett wrote.

They were an instant hit. Thousands would turn out at Marquette Park, Jackson Park, and so on to get free lessons from virtually every golf pro in the area. Usually, a big-name pro such as Tommy Armour would give a talk and demonstrate a shot. Then the “classmates” would go to the tee and be supervised by the cadre of pros on hand.

Walsh was thrilled with the turnouts, and the acceptance of the concept. “Best proof of the school’s value as an annual spring tonic for golf is the way it has been copied all over the country,” Walsh said. “Most of the large cities hold similar schools each year. The extensive junior teaching programs in many of these cities owe their inspiration to the Tribune idea.”

Not every idea flew. His concept of a screen around the first tee so nervous golfers had privacy starting their game didn’t go far past Westgate, though it did generate national headlines.

His work in the Illinois Section led to a spot on the PGA’s national board, and by 1939, following a controversial PGA Championship in which he lobbied against the reinstatement of Denny Shute and lost, Walsh won election to the PGA of America presidency.

Shute had missed the deadline for paying his annual dues by two days. Walsh, the national secretary, was among the majority on the executive committee who thought the rule barring participation in the PGA Championship unless dues had been paid on time should be followed. Threats of a player strike forced the committee to let Shute play in qualifying rounds. It reversed the decision for match play, but PGA president George Jacobs overruled the committee and let Shute play. (He advanced to the Sweet Sixteen.) The ensuing uproar was enough to convince Jacobus to resign after six years, and Walsh scored a 45-32 victory over Ed Dudley to move into the top spot.

Among his biggest moves was his quest to bar calcuttas and other big-time gambling from PGA-sanctioned tournament sites. The last straw was the 1941 Chicago Open at Elmhurst Country Club, where someone set up a betting stand by the ninth green, complete with a board listing odds – Ben Hogan fell from 4-1 to 2-1 after an opening 66 – and a sign saying “Place Bets Here.”

“We of the PGA will not allow the gambling element to take a foothold on golf,” Walsh said. “We’ve built a reputation that our tournaments can be enjoyed by the public without ‘mutuels’ or ‘books’ and we don’t intend to see that reputation damaged.”

Before many others, he saw the fledgling tour as the pathway for greater popularity for the game, saying daily galleries of 50,000 were on the way. “With more thought given to fans, our sport soon will be matching and surpassing baseball and football crowds,” Walsh said when he left office in October of 1941. “I think all players should be numbered to help the spectators spot their favorites. Courses should increase the number of entrances to their grounds, enlarge parking facilities and build more bleacher seats. If they do pro golf will double and triple its drawing power.”

Caddie bibs with names replaced the numbers on players that George S. May also championed, but everything else came to pass.

During and after the war, he championed free golf for servicemen. Always, he championed the public golfer. He would send his regulars a free pass to play when they retired.

That turnout at Sheehy’s when he was waked was out the door. Even Mayor Daley – the original, Richard J. – paid his respects, and did so again the next day at the funeral.

“He was dedicated to people and the moral side of things,” Packey Walsh told Cromie. And to golf. Especially to golf.
Small the ruler of section’s lair

*Illinois men’s coach has dominated Illinois PGA like no player before*

The Illinois PGA Championship, the annual battle for the Illinois Section crown, is older than it appears.

Look at the Willie Marshall Trophy, the original bauble that sits proudly in the Section’s office at the Glen Club, and the first winner on it is no less than Jock Hutchison, the champion in 1923.

He was the first winner of the trophy, but he wasn’t the first Illinois PGA winner.

That honor is held by Eddie Loos, the professional at Lake Shore Country Club, who scored 1-over-par 145 and beat Hutchison, the sage of Glen View Club, by a stroke at Westmoreland Country Club on Sept. 15, 1922.

Eddie’s name isn’t on the trophy because there was no trophy in 1922. It wasn’t around yet.

That means this year’s championship, which Mike Small captured for a record-extending 12th time on the devilish South Course of Olympia Fields Country Club, was the 95th in an unbroken line going back to 1922 under the Illinois PGA name.

An argument could be made that the three-day imbroglio was really the 98th for the section’s pros, for as we have previously detailed, the original name of the section was the Middle States PGA Section, one of the seven original chapters of the PGA of America, headquartered in Chicago and covering a swath of land from Ontario to the Gulf Coast. In late 1921, the boundaries were reworked, with the others splitting off. Middle States was renamed Illinois.

**THE MAN** Mike Small unleashes a tee shot to start the final round of this year’s Illinois PGA Championship at Olympia Fields Country Club. He’s won the last three playings of the Section scrap there, and 12 overall.

The original reason for section championships was to send the leaders to the PGA Championship. They were held three times in the Middle States era – 1916, when George Simpson won at Glen View Club, 1919, when Bob MacDonald won at Oak Park Country Club, and 1920, when Laurie Ayton won at Westmoreland, and Loos was the runner-up. With no PGA in 1917 and 1918, there was no need for the sections to tee it up, and in 1921, curiously, the PGA decided that defending champion Hutchison would be joined by the top 31 finishers in the U.S. Open.
Because of the travel involved, few professionals outside of Illinois, and especially the Chicago area, played in the three Middle States Section Championships. Most all the usual suspects from 1920 were back at Westmoreland in 1922, when the Illinois appellation was first applied.

All of this was ignored in June of 1923, when the Section decided at the annual meeting that Willie Marshall, the longtime Onwentsia Club professional who had died the previous spring, should be remembered with a trophy for the section championship. It was bought, Hutchison’s name was the first engraved on it, and nobody looked back, not even Loos, who took the title in 1924, giving him two wins and two runner-up spots when 1920 is included.

(There was another odd complication. Hutchison and Loos didn’t actually win the tournaments they played in in 1923 and 1924. The IPGA Championship was played as a subset of the Illinois Open, which was won by Joe Kirkwood in 1923 and Leo Diegel in 1924. Hutchison and Loos were second in each case.)

In 1925, the championship was again conducted separately, and has been since. Hutchison won that one, the second of his three titles, that trio of crowns beginning a trend. Of the first 94 playings – 97 including the Middle States years – 12 players have dominated, winning three or more times, for a total of 51 championships.

Hutchison was the first three-time winner, followed quickly by Al Espinosa (1926-27-30). In 1929, James Foulis Jr. won the first of his four, and was the first player to capture the championship in three different decades when he beat Johnny Revolta in a playoff at Glen Flora Country Club in 1943.

Revolta, the raven-haired stylist from Evanston Golf Club, took dominance to a different realm. He would win the section title six times, beginning with a run of three straight in 1936. He’d capture his last title in 1947, beating Ky Laffoon, who was a runner-up four times before grabbing his single victory in 1950.

The next multiple winners to come along were fast friends. Errie Ball (1949-55-65) and Bill Ogden (1953-57-60-71-72) also combined for five runner-up placings. You could count on one or the other to be in the hunt though the mid-1960s, with Ogden’s 1970s surge the stuff of legends.

By then Tony Holguin (1954-62-70) had also won three, and Bob Zender would be the next, controversially. He won three straight starting in 1976 while playing the PGA Tour, and won his last two starts by a combined 14 strokes. Some club pros wanted him banned from section play, but that storm blew over, only to return when Rick Dalpos won in 1990 and 1991 while a tourist. Since that, touring pros have been barred from the IPGA Championship.

Gary Groh was a Tour veteran comfortably settled at Bob O’Link when he won the first of his four titles in 1983. The most impressive might have been his last, in 2002, when he beat defending champion Small in a three-hole playoff at Kemper Lakes Golf Course. Groh was 57 at the time.

Jim Sobb and Steve Benson are also three-time winners – and twice runners-up – but Small, head coach of Illinois’ men’s team, trumped everyone when he came back from that playoff defeat to win eight straight titles from 2003 to 2010, doing so by anywhere from one to 11 strokes. He added titles in 2013 and 2014 along with this year for a total of 12, winning by a total of 47 strokes while playing the 36 rounds at 94-under-par. His low round in 2010, a 63 on Olympia Fields’ South Course featuring six birdies and an eagle, set the competitive course record.

Small’s total of 13-under 200 at Olympia South that year, and his 16-under 200 at Stonewall Orchard Golf Course in 2014, are the low aggregates for the Illinois PGA Championship. But the low round in championship history is owned by Bob Harris. The meteor from Sunset Ridge Country Club scalded Arlington Country Club with a 9-under 62 in the second round of the 1959 contest to beat Tony Holguin by two strokes.

Close calls abound in the Illinois PGA Championship, and some have been heartbreakers. Mike Harrigan, who finished solo second or shared it five times, might have the topper. In 1979, the first year the tournament was played at Kemper Lakes, he stood on the 18th tee in the final round as the leader, even after bogeys on the 15th, 16th and 17th holes. He made a 9 on the par-4 finishing hole and finished in a tie for third, four strokes behind winner Emil Esposito. Kemper impresario Jim Kemper was so impressed by Esposito’s steady play, he hired him as Kemper Lakes’ head pro.

Great shots have also figured in the outcome. Perhaps the greatest was Steve Benson’s timely 6-iron ace on the 171-yard 17th at Kemper Lakes in 1994. It lifted him to a one-stroke victory over Jim Estes and the last of his three titles.

Nobody’s won by more than the 11-stroke margin Small crafted in 2010, but more than half the time, the margin of victory is two strokes or less, including 11 playoffs – the one way Small hasn’t won.

There’s always something new in the Illinois PGA Championship. For an old staple, it’s looking quite young.
Lou Strong refereed many disputes
Longtime pro learned the ropes in Urbana, graduated to PGA presidency

It didn’t hurt that Lou Strong, when he was working as the assistant professional at Urbana Country Club, put a few extra dollars in his pocket in the winter by refereeing high school basketball games. His career as a PGA of America officer included plenty of opportunities to adjudicate disputes.

Strong, born in Champaign in 1916, was working in the game as a caddie before he was in fourth grade, and quickly found a way to work for Urbana Country Club professional Parker Nall in his pro shop each summer. That inoculation to golf became a lifelong connection when he returned to the area after high school to work for Ralph Johnson at UCC. Three years later, he was named head professional.

That 14-year stint was effectively Strong’s masters class in the inner workings of a club. While off the beaten path, his reputation grew, and in 1944 he took over at Park Ridge Country Club. Strong was at Park Ridge for 11 years, becoming the Illinois Section’s secretary-treasurer during that tenure. He proved an able officer and quickly involved himself on the national PGA scene as well. By late 1955, just after he jumped from quiet Park Ridge to raucous Tam O’Shanter Country Club, he was nominated for the PGA of America’s vice presidency.

The timing was absolutely amazing. Tam hosted the pro circuit’s biggest payday, the annual fortnight of the All-American Open and World Championship of Golf, created by business-efficiency expert and master promoter George S. May.

It was late in 1959, during Strong’s time at Tam that May and the PGA went head-to-head on what might have been a small matter, except for the principle: Whether the PGA or May’s Tam O’Shanter received the player entry fees for the tournaments. Each insisted the fees – $5 a player – belonged to them.

May’s argument was simple: He was putting on the tournaments, putting up the purse and taking the risk. The PGA’s argument was equally simple: It awarded the dates and, in its view, provided the players. After much stamping of feet, with Strong, by this time both the Illinois Section president and the national VP, unable to effect a compromise, May took his tournaments off the circuit and closed Tam’s door to the tour, “I’m just tired of fighting the whole thing,” May told Strong.

That imbroglio was nothing compared to the one Strong found himself in the middle of late in 1960. Strong had just left Tam O’Shanter for Oak Hill Country Club in Rochester, N.Y., and become the PGA’s 13th national president when California attorney general Stanley Mosk, eying the “Caucasian race” clause that had been in the PGA constitution since 1943, found it an easy target for his newly-established civil rights division.

Mosk was no golf neophyte. A member of Riviera Country Club who could score in the 70s, he also knew the law, and found the Caucasian-only clause discriminatory.

Said Mosk just after the PGA’s November 1960 annual meeting, where a vote to delete the clause was voted down 64-17, “We consider the refusal of the national PGA body to eliminate its racial restrictive policy to be tantamount to open opposition to California law and policies. We
intend to take every step available to us, both in and out of the courts, to force the PGA either to eliminate this obnoxious restriction or to cease all activity of any kind within our state.”

This was pertinent because the PGA had scheduled the 1962 PGA Championship for California, at Brentwood Country Club in Los Angeles. The L.A. Junior Chamber of Commerce, sponsor of the Los Angeles Open, which was open to minorities, was the local sponsor.

Strong was caught in the middle. He’d worked at Tam O’Shanter and annually welcomed black golfers, including Ted Rhodes and Charles Sifford, to the All-American Open.

Now he represented an organization that restricted membership, with Mosk saying public courses in California couldn’t extend special benefits to the PGA or PGA members. Brentwood was a private club, but the Junior Chamber, also caught in between, immediately felt the heat.

“I don’t know what he can do,” Strong said. “We have a private association. It has no bearing on employment,” adding that “there are no restrictive clauses in our tournament program.”

The fact the clause was in effect was only one barrier to employment, but Strong neglected to note that courses barring blacks and other minorities from playing in tournaments hosted PGA-sanctioned tournaments, and the PGA did nothing to open the doors wider.

By May of 1961, the Junior Chamber asked out of the contract to host the PGA and planned to play the Los Angeles Open in January 1962 instead. Within days, Southern California Section president Guy Bellitt said, “There’s not much the national body can do except strike out that restrictive clause. Many other sections in the PGA feel the same as we do about the ‘Caucasian only’ thing. There’s no doubt in my mind it will be eliminated.”

By the end of the week, Strong announced that the 1962 PGA would not be played in California and that the executive committee would recommend eliminating the Caucasian-only clause from the constitution at the annual meeting in November.

That 1-2 punch would solve the immediate problem and then eliminate the cause of it, but the stain of the argument, reported nationwide, lasted. The redeeming factors were a unanimous vote to drop the barrier, which Strong had to have had a part in, and that the resolution for the change was co-sponsored by the Georgia-Alabama Section.

Strong called the vote “a realization of changing conditions in the world situation and a constructive measure coinciding with the decisions set forth by the United States government.”

If the PGA was not going to be ahead on the issue, Strong and his cohorts in the PGA hierarchy at least made sure it didn’t far behind. The 1962 PGA was played at Aronimink Country Club near Philadelphia, where, ironically, Gary Player of then-apartheid South Africa was the winner.

Indeed, the move to open the PGA membership to all qualified comers is the highlight of Strong’s four-year tenure as PGA president. It marked the division between the closed-door past and the open-door present and future.

Later in the 1960s, and through his death in 1976, he ran the original PGA National Golf Club, a complex in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., a site he had helped select while president, but getting the 85-0 vote on a contentious issue from a group that had dragged its feet for years puts Lou Strong in the rarest of classes. It must have been that referee training from decades past.
Alexander Newton Pirie had to become a golfer. Born in Midlothian, Scotland, not far from St. Andrews, in 1876, golf was all around him. His father had worked for Allan Robertson, the esteemed professional who was said to have never lost a match, before Robertson’s death in 1859.

Indeed, decades before Robertson’s ascendance, it was the Piries, Sandy and David, who were the best players in the old gray town. Upon David Pirie’s death in 1854, it was written that he “was, we believe, the first who made the name famous in a generation now past or passing away. He and his brothers were the ‘crack’ men of our Links before Allan Robertson and the modern race of notables were known, or at least had acquired repute.”

Following in the path of his grandfather and grand-uncles, Alec Pirie would be a third-generation golf professional, and, while never known as a great player, have a larger and more lasting impact than any of his ancestors.

That impact came in the United States. Pirie was one of the hundreds of Scottish professionals who emigrated here during the first great golf boom, which began in the 1880s and went on until the outset of the Great War.

Alec – or Alex, in most later references – arrived as a 19-year-old in 1896, with one of his early postings as the professional at the Somerset Inn in Bernardsville, N.J. He bounced around the east and south for a time, then, after a stop at Siwanoy Country Club, settled at North Shore Country Club in Glen Head, N.Y.

On January 16, 1916, he was among about three dozen professionals who gathered at the Taplow Club in the Hotel Martinique in New York, at the invitation of fellow professional Tom McNamara and his boss, department store baron Rodman Wanamaker. In that meeting the foundation of the PGA of America was laid.

Pirie was not one to lounge about in the back of the room. While he largely remained behind the scenes, he was a doer. He became involved in the activities of the Metropolitan PGA, the section centered in New York City, and was active as secretary until leaving for the Old Elm Club in Lake Forest in the winter of 1920-21. His fellow members presented him with a clock.

His experience in administration and his good fellowship quickly endeared him to his peers in the Chicago area, so his selection as third vice president of the renamed Illinois Section in the fall of 1921, and the end of his first season at Old Elm, was a perfect choice. The following fall, he was moved right up to the president’s seat, replacing Joe Roseman of Westmoreland.

“Pirie has been a big power in the national body, and his selection as leader of the state organization should help to solidify it,” Joe Davis wrote in the Chicago Tribune.

Pirie, whose prodding brought about the creation in 1920 of the house organ Professional Golfer, now known as PGA Magazine, remained influential nationally.

He also had a way with words, no doubt one reason he rose to the top of the PGA pyramid as the group’s fourth national president from 1927 through 1930.

In 1912, in an essay on the game’s benefits, Pirie opened with this well-woven thought: “There are so many advantages to be derived from the game of golf that it is somewhat of a difficult matter to define them in any order, as they are all interwoven together making one glorious whole in which are combined fresh air, exercise, sociability, amiability, concentration of mind and absolute rest from any other mental subject while you are playing it. There is no other game which takes the individual out of doors into God’s fresh air and gives him all these advantages.”

Among the topics Pirie addressed when he became Illinois PGA president was starting a benevolent fund for aiding those who had fallen ill.
This was decades before group health insurance became a common practice.

Pirie’s term as national PGA president, coming as it did at the end of the Roaring ‘20s, was as the leader of a growing organization, and capped by presiding over the 1931 Ryder Cup. One of the tasks given him by his lodge during that term was to find a “PGA commissioner” to oversee the growing professional game along the lines of Judge Kenesaw M. Landis, who ran baseball. The effort initially proved futile.

Said Pirie at the 1928 annual meeting, “It would cost us probably $25,000 a year to hire a man of the Landis type, and you couldn’t put that kind of a man in the dump of the office we have in New York.” (Eventually, Pirie and his peers hired former WGA president Albert Gates, a Chicago lawyer, as business administrator, and the office was moved to Chicago as well.)

A decent player, Pirie was a business-first professional, running a first-class shop. At Old Elm, then and now a private club with a small membership, he wasn’t overburdened with a crowded tee sheet, and outings were unheard of, so he could devote time to PGA matters.

His opinion was often sought, and invariably worth hearing. At the Western Golf Association’s annual meeting held late in 1923, Pirie, calling himself “a plain, ordinary, unvarnished, devoted attendant upon the game of golf,” spoke at length as the attraction the game had for him.

“The game of golf always has been, gentlemen, and always will be greater, absolutely greater than the individual who plays it,” Pirie said. “That grand old game has gone along from the days way back when the Scottish parliament outlawed it and made it a misdemeanor for such men as us to play it. It outgrew that. Way back in 1642, I think it was, the King was challenged to play a match, a good old-fashioned four-ball Scotch match, and they played it at Leith, in Scotland, and he chose for his partner a man that made shoes.

“Gentlemen, a shoemaker and a king. Democracy. The fellowship of understanding, the infinite greatness, the infinite appeal to human nature in the individual is not greater than it is today. We can meet on that common greensward, gentlemen, and when we have passed over it and been buried under one little poce of its green sod, this grand old game, and this grand old understanding shall go on and its interpretations shall be more broad.

“Isn’t it a grand game?”

Pirie’s term as PGA of America president was met with acclaim, raising the status of professionals in the eyes of club members. When he left office, Associated Press golf writer Basil Wyrick penned this salute: “Now the professional has the same standing with his clients, golf pupils and purchasers of golf supplies, as has any other merchandiser of knowledge or of goods. His opinion is sought on virtually all subjects by officers of the club, and his social status is equal to that of any member.”

Along with everything he did behind the scenes, Pirie made one foray into golf architecture. He designed the original nine holes of Lake Forest’s Deerpath Golf Course, the municipal layout that opened in 1926. Nine more holes were added when more land became available, but some original Pirie exists within the 18. It is his only design.

Pirie died in 1962 in Waukegan, 15 days shy of his 86th birthday. Neither his death notice in the Chicago Tribune nor the one short newspaper obituary found, from the Wisconsin State Journal, made no mention of his PGA presidency.
Joe Jemsek didn’t come from the wrong side of the tracks. He arrived via the tracks.

His first job in the game, at the old Laramie Golf Club on the northwest corner of where Midway Airport now sits, was as a caddie. Young Joe hopped a freight rumbling through his home town of Argo-Summit on the Indiana Harbor Belt Line, rode through the onion fields, and jumped off when it passed the golf course. He knew it was there, though knew nothing about golf, because he’d passed it en route to his first job as a kid: shoveling snow in the city streets in the winter.

This golf looked infinitely more appealing. It was not only outdoors, but warm.

He was about 12 when Laramie opened. The age is a guess because Joe had to guess as well. He had no birth certificate, so listed his birthday as Dec. 24, 1912 after his mother told him he was born on a cold winter night.

A first-generation American – his parents, original last name Demchuk, had fled Czarist Russia – Joe Jemsek’s caddie roots and hardscrabble upbringing informed his entire life in the game, a game he fell hard for.

“I enjoyed the game, always,” he said in 1991. “We had the railroad running through Argo and Summit and I used to hit balls over the track. I thought it was great. And being the only one in the Argo-Summit area playing golf, they thought I was great.”

It turned out he was. He caddied at Laramie, and then Acacia Country Club south of La Grange, again within an easy freight ride of home. Jemsek was 14 when Cog-Hill Golf Club opened in the summer of 1927. This was a streetcar ride from home rather than a hopped freight, but, as a rare privately-owned public course, offered more play during the week, and a place to work on his rapidly-improving game.

The owners, the Coghill brothers, took to this kid, and put him to work as a parking lot attendant, with steady pay compared to caddie work. Jemsek worked his way through Argo High School with this summer job and winter work as a pinsetter at the Argo Bowl.

You never knew who you would meet in that parking lot. Jemsek was 16 in the late winter of 1929, when, so he would tell confidants decades later, he got a call at Cog-Hill from someone he’d met the year before, who needed four sets of golf clubs, bags and all, delivered to him at the Illinois Central’s Kankakee station for he and his pals, who were en route from Chicago to Florida. After hammering out the details — $110 a set, which the recipient paid after he informed there would be a dozen balls plus a golf glove and tees in each bag — Jemsek motored to Kankakee and made the delivery. He came back with $440 — and a $100 tip.

That transaction gave the traveler, Al Capone, an alibi for the events of Feb. 14, a scant few days later, when seven members of a rival gang were gunned down in a garage on N. Clark St. By then, Capone was at Palm Island, Fla., playing golf.
ing his own breaks. He wasn’t yet well known – Chicago was the leader in well-known club professionals, starting with Jock Hutchison – but he soon would be. A golf driving exhibition in 1934 at the Century of Progress, the Chicago World’s Fair, would be the catalyst.

The gimmick was that a coterie of pros would drive from a platform set at the top of one of the sky ride towers. Survey crews would zero in on the splash each ball made and calculate the distance. But let Joe tell the story.

“It was a matter of strategy. There was a crosswind coming, and most of the pros were Scots. They hit everything with a hook, and they hit it into the wind. We’re 630 feet up. The wind took it and it went like this, right down. I was the first one on the course, and I could hit a straight ball. I’d driven it this far. I knew they were coming. I’d studied the wind. I wasn’t the first one, but I was the first one to hit a straight ball. The crowd was electrified.”

By now, Joe Jemsek was well known as a driving exhibition player. But it was the first time that he had done it in front of a crowd of 20,000 people, and the excitement was electric. The crowd roared as Joe’s ball soared through the air and landed on the green, and the sound of the crowd was deafening as they cheered him on.

The following day, Joe was invited to a dinner at the Century of Progress, and he was introduced to the likes of Jock Hutchison and Gene Sarazen. The next day, Joe was invited to a private dinner at the hotel, and he was introduced to the likes of Al Espen, the head pro at Forest Park, and Jock Hutchison, the head pro at Oak Park.

Joe Jemsek had made a name for himself as a driving exhibition player, and he was now ready to take on the world. He was ready to take on the Chicago skyline, and he was ready to take on the world of golf.
The one stipulation: Keep the family name on the facility. Minus the hyphen, it’s always been Cog Hill and always will be.

Jemsek now owned four courses, and would lease Fresh Meadow and Glenwoodie from the Archdiocese of Chicago. His was among the privately-owned largest public course operations in the country, but something was missing. He knew what it was.

“When I went to the 1949 U.S. Open, I saw some of my customers, and they said they could never play a course like this,” Jemsek recalled.

So, 15 years later, he built one. Dick Wilson and Joe Lee were already at work on Cog Hill No. 3 in the early 1960s, and he added No. 4 to their portfolio. The result was a course as broad-shouldered as Medinah or Olympia Fields or just about any other course you could think of, and available to anyone for a few bucks.

“Right away, I thought it was as good a course as there was in the country,” Jemsek said in 1991.

Few disagreed. The USGA brought the Public Links Championship to Dubsdread in 1970, others clamored for access, and by the mid-1980s, Dubsdread was on Golf Digest’s American top 100 list.

That was also about the time Jemsek, after 21 years of asking, was finally allowed to lease the old St. Mary of the Lake course by the Mundelein seminary. After $3 million in improvements, it reopened as Pine Meadow Golf Course, and was named the best new public course of 1986 by Golf Digest.

“He’s like a bulldog,” Frank Jemsek said of
his father’s quest for the lease. “His personality trait is that he never gives up. Any sensible man would have given up long before. My dad didn’t believe that you failed until you’ve given up.”

Awards were showered on Jemsek – including membership in the charter class of the Illinois Golf Hall of Fame in 1989, when he was serving as the first public course operator on the USGA’s executive committee, and his long-overdue selection in 1991 as the PGA of America’s national professional of the year. Insiders whispered that he had been selected in the past, but turned the honor down so other pros could receive it.

In 1995, the members of the Golf Writers Association of America voted Jemsek the William Richardson Award, which annually goes to “an individual who has consistently made an outstanding contribution to golf.”

Unique in his portfolio as a public-course operator was his inclusion as one of Golf’s 100 Heroes by *Golf Magazine* in 1988, in celebration of the game’s first century in the U.S. He shared a dais with Nicklaus, Hogan, Snead, Nelson and Palmer, to name a few.

He knew them all. He knew everybody, remembered names from decades past, and often said, “Know why I’m happy to see you fellows?” “It’s because it means I’m still here.”

He was big on publicity but not on boasting. However, located in the St. Andrews clubhouse, you could find a framed letter from Bobby Jones during World War II, asking to buy a dozen golf balls.

In the fall of 1941, believing the U.S. would be drawn into the war and a rubber shortage would result, Jemsek bought $12,000 of Spalding Top-Flite balls from the factory. He effectively cornered the market for the war. When everyone else ran out, Joe was still selling new golf balls, including the dozen to Bobby.

It was typical Jemsek. He knew the game, knew the business, and had a sense of timing that was uncanny. And he taught his family and staff well. Soon after he died on April 2, 2002 at 89, give or take a year, funeral arrangements were made. It would be the following Monday. A few days before, a caller asked someone on the Cog Hill front desk if the courses would be closed on the day of the funeral.

The response: “Are you kidding? Joe would come back and haunt us if we closed. When do you want to play?”
**The Directory**

**About the Directory**

Included are all public courses and practice ranges in the nine-county Chicago area, plus selected courses elsewhere in Illinois and in Indiana, Wisconsin and southwest lower Michigan. Course detail (yardage, rating, slope from back tees) supplied by courses and the CDGA. Select summer weekday, weekend non-resident peak and twilight rates listed. Rates are walking unless cart is mandatory, and provided by courses, subject to change at a course's discretion. Head pro or GM listed if known. Please e-mail changes to illinoisgolfer@earthlink.net. Expanded listings are available; please e-mail or call (708) 638-1164.

**Cook County / North**

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<td>10: 71 / 6,463 / 71.7 / 130</td>
<td>800 W. Oridea, Bartlett</td>
<td>(630) 837-2471</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bartlethills.com">www.bartlethills.com</a></td>
<td>Phil Lenz</td>
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<td>Bridges of Poplar Creek</td>
<td>10: 70 / 6,500 / 71.2 / 136</td>
<td>1400 Poplar Creek Dr., Hoffman Estates</td>
<td>(847) 884-0219</td>
<td><a href="http://www.poplarcreekcc.com">www.poplarcreekcc.com</a></td>
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<td>Canal Shores (Peter Jans)</td>
<td>10: 60 / 3,904 / 57.9 / 86</td>
<td>1031 Central St., Evanston</td>
<td>(847) 475-9173</td>
<td><a href="http://www.canalshores.org">www.canalshores.org</a></td>
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<td>Fox Run</td>
<td>10: 70 / 2,687 / 70.1 / 119</td>
<td>333 Plum Grove Rd., Elk Grove Village</td>
<td>(847) 228-3544</td>
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<td>The Glen Club</td>
<td>10: 72 / 7,149 / 74.8 / 140</td>
<td>3001 W. Lake Ave., Glenview</td>
<td>(847) 724-7272</td>
<td><a href="http://www.theglenclub.com">www.theglenclub.com</a></td>
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<td>Golf Center Des Plaines</td>
<td>9: 27 / 1,050 / 70.0 / 113</td>
<td>353 River Rd., Des Plaines</td>
<td>(847) 803-4655</td>
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<td>Grayslake</td>
<td>9: 27 / 1,137 / unrated</td>
<td>2150 Dray Ln., Grayslake</td>
<td>(847) 548-4713</td>
<td><a href="http://www.glcd.com">www.glcd.com</a></td>
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<td>Hilldale</td>
<td>10: 71 / 6,432 / 71.6 / 135</td>
<td>1625 Ardwick Dr., Hoffman Estates</td>
<td>(847) 310-1100</td>
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<td>Indian Boundary</td>
<td>10: 72 / 6,068 / 69.0 / 116</td>
<td>8600 W. Forest Preserve Ave., Chicago</td>
<td>(773) 625-9630</td>
<td><a href="http://www.forestpreservegolf.com">www.forestpreservegolf.com</a></td>
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<td>Lake Park</td>
<td>9: 27 / 1,515 / unrated</td>
<td>1015 Howard St., Des Plaines</td>
<td>(847) 391-5730</td>
<td><a href="http://www.dpparks.org">www.dpparks.org</a></td>
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When you check in tell them you saw the listing in Illinois Golfer.

**Cook County / South**

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<td>9: 29 / 1,460 / 50.0 / 113</td>
<td>1200 E. Lake Dr., Palatine</td>
<td>(847) 834-9000</td>
<td>saltcreek.multisportsystems.com</td>
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<td>Walnut Greens</td>
<td>9: 27 / 1,078 / unrated</td>
<td>1190 N. Walnut Ln., Schaumburg</td>
<td>(847) 490-7870</td>
<td><a href="http://www.walnutgreensgolf.com">www.walnutgreensgolf.com</a></td>
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<td>Weber Park</td>
<td>9: 27 / 1,095 / 35.5 / 113</td>
<td>8320 Weber Park Pl., Skokie</td>
<td>(847) 674-1400</td>
<td><a href="http://www.skokieparkdistrict.org">www.skokieparkdistrict.org</a></td>
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<td>Willow Hill</td>
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<td>1380 Willow Rd., Northbrook</td>
<td>(847) 490-7895</td>
<td><a href="http://www.willowhillgolfcourse.com">www.willowhillgolfcourse.com</a></td>
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<td>Wilmette</td>
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<td>3800 Fairway Dr., Wilmette</td>
<td>(847) 256-9777</td>
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<td>1300 Oak St., Winnetka</td>
<td>(847) 501-2550</td>
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<td>Coyote Run</td>
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<td>800 Edgewater Ave., Flossmoor</td>
<td>(708) 957-8700</td>
<td><a href="http://www.coyotefun.com">www.coyotefun.com</a></td>
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<td>25055 S. Western Ave., University Park</td>
<td>(708) 672-6667</td>
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<td>Dunne National</td>
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<td>16310 S. Central Ave., Oak Forest</td>
<td>(708) 429-6850</td>
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<td>(708) 246-3336</td>
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<td>(630) 257-6466</td>
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Don't see your favorite public course listed? Call us at (708) 638-1164.
KANE COUNTY

Bliss Creek
9: 69 / 5,592 / 67.0 / 115
1 Golfview Rd., Sugar Grove • (630) 406-4177 • www.blisscreekgolf.com Gordon Pike (GM)

Bonnie Dundee
18: 69 / 6,015 / 68.1 / 112
270 Kennedy Dr., Carol Stream • (630) 425-5511 • www.bonniedundeegc.com Jim Opp

Bower Creek
18: 71 / 6,917 / 73.2 / 142
3250 Bower Creek Blvd., Elgin • (847) 214-5880 • www.bowercreekcc.com Mike Lehman

Deer Valley
9: 29 / 1,358 / unrated
46W994 Jericho Rd., Big Rock • (630) 596-3333 • www.deervalleyncc.com

Highlands of Elgin
18: 72 / 6,961 / 73.8 / 136
675 Sports AVE, Elgin • (847) 931-5950 • www.highlandsgefingen.com Jim Vogt

Hughes Creek
18: 72 / 5,606 / 71.6 / 127
1748 Brookfield Valley Dr., Elburn • (630) 365-9200 • www.hughescreek.com Sam Bradberry

Mill Creek
18: 71 / 4,620 / 71.4 / 135
39W225 Harrington Dr., Geneva • (630) 547-1772 • www.millcreekgolfcourse.com Craig Kight

Orchard Valley
18: 72 / 6,745 / 72.4 / 134
2411 W. 109th St., Plainfield • (630) 979-0350 • www.orchardvalleygolf.com Jim Touloukian (GM)

Phillips Park
18: 71 / 5,168 / 70.8 / 121
1001 Hill Ave., Aurora • (630) 595-2760 • www.phillipsparkaurora.com Jeff Schmidt

Pottawatomie Park
9: 35 / 3,007 / 69.8 / 122
845 N. Second Ave., St. Charles • (630) 594-9356 • www.stcparks.org James Wheeler

Randall Oaks
18: 71 / 5,376 / 71.9 / 133
3: 9 / 300 apx.
410 Binne Blvd., West Dundee • (847) 428-5687 • www.randalloaksgc.com Steve Gillie

Settlers Hill
18: 72 / 6,630 / 72.1 / 130
919 E. Fabyan Pkwy., Batavia • (630) 232-1636 • www.settlershill.com John O'Connor

Tanna Farms
18: 71 / 5,610 / 72.0 / 131
39W808 Hughes Rd., Geneva • (630) 232-4300 • www.tannafarms.com Chad Zipse

Valley Green
18: 69 / 3,841 / 70.0 / 113
314 Kingswood Dr., North Aurora • (630) 897-3000 • www.valleygreencc.com

Wing Park
9: 36 / 3,077 / 70.0 / 115
1000 Wing St., Elgin • (847) 931-9562 • www.cityoffelin.org Bill Eubanks

Wolf Run
9: 64 / 4,229 / 70.0 / 113
1700 Jericho Rd., Aurora • (630) 906-1402 • www.wolfungolfcourse.net Roger Wolf (GM)

Lake County / Indiana

Cedar Creek
9: 9 / 1,207 / 66.7 / 120
10751 East Ave., Cedar Lake • (219) 365-2002 • www.lakecountyparks.com Tom Zimmerman

Centennial Park
18: 73 / 6,217 / 69.1 / 110
6363 Grand Blvd., Hobart • (219) 942-6850 • www.hegangan.com Chuck Hagan (GM)

Indian Ridge
18: 72 / 6,217 / 69.1 / 110
31750 W. 109th St., Crown Point • (219) 936-6931 • www.munster.org Matt Meneghetti

Indian Ridge
9: 35 / 3,029 / 69.4 / 127
1429 S. Hale St., Plainfield • (630) 552-5242 • www.cedarridgegolfclub.com Terry Donahue

Fenwick Bend
18: 72 / 6,890 / 73.1 / 130
3516 U.S. Hwy 34, Oswego • (630) 554-9399 • www.fenwickbendgolfcourse.com Brad Doyle (GM)

Whitetail Ridge
18: 71 / 5,624 / 71.0 / 128
7711 Clubhouse Dr., Yorkville • (630) 922-8998 • www.whitetailridge.us Patrick MacDonald

Kendall County

Blackberry Oaks
18: 72 / 6,404 / 71.3 / 134
2245 Kennedy Rd., Bristol • (630) 553-1170 • www.blackberryoaksgc.com

Cedar Dell
9: 35 / 3,029 / 69.4 / 127
1429 S. Hale St., Plainfield • (630) 552-5242 • www.cedarridgegolfclub.com Terry Donahue

Fenwick Bend
18: 72 / 6,890 / 73.1 / 130
3516 U.S. Hwy 34, Oswego • (630) 554-9399 • www.fenwickbendgolfcourse.com Brad Doyle (GM)

Whitetail Ridge
18: 71 / 5,624 / 71.0 / 128
7711 Clubhouse Dr., Yorkville • (630) 922-8998 • www.whitetailridge.us Patrick MacDonald

Kane County

Pottawatomie Park
9: 35 / 3,007 / 69.8 / 122
845 N. Second Ave., St. Charles • (630) 594-9356 • www.stcparks.org James Wheeler

Kane County

Blackberry Oaks
18: 72 / 6,404 / 71.3 / 134
2245 Kennedy Rd., Bristol • (630) 553-1170 • www.blackberryoaksgc.com

Cedar Dell
9: 35 / 3,029 / 69.4 / 127
1429 S. Hale St., Plainfield • (630) 552-5242 • www.cedarridgegolfclub.com Terry Donahue

Fenwick Bend
18: 72 / 6,890 / 73.1 / 130
3516 U.S. Hwy 34, Oswego • (630) 554-9399 • www.fenwickbendgolfcourse.com Brad Doyle (GM)

Whitetail Ridge
18: 71 / 5,624 / 71.0 / 128
7711 Clubhouse Dr., Yorkville • (630) 922-8998 • www.whitetailridge.us Patrick MacDonald

Lake County / Indiana

Cedar Creek
9: 31 / 1,741 / 66.5 / 104
10453 W. 109th Ave., Cedar Lake • (219) 365-2002 • www.lakecountyparks.com

Centennial Park
18: 73 / 6,217 / 69.1 / 110
6363 Grand Blvd., Hobart • (219) 942-6850 • www.hegangan.com Chuck Hagan (GM)

Indian Ridge
18: 72 / 6,217 / 69.1 / 110
6363 Grand Blvd., Hobart • (219) 942-6850 • www.hegangan.com Chuck Hagan (GM)

Lost Marsh
18: 72 / 6,872 / 72.0 / 128
9: 27 / 2,600 / unrated
1001 E. 129th St., Hammond • (219) 322-4046 • www.lostmarshgolf.com Niko Sullivan

MacArthur
9: 27 / 1,390 / unrated
4000 Indianapolis Blvd. (at 140th St.), East Chicago • (219) 391-8362 • no website

Oakhill
18: 70 / 5,703 / 67.3 / 107
11200 Whitcomb St., Crown Point • (219) 936-3499 • www.hegangan.com Dave Steuer (GM)

Palmridge
18: 72 / 6,921 / 72.7 / 122
12111 W. 109th St., St. John • (219) 365-4331 • www.palmridgegolf.com Rich Nicpon (GM)
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From Carbondale to Zion, Illinois Golfer covers it all.