

Stroker's Club on the links for 15 years

Infirmities can't keep members off the course

BY LANCE-MICHAEL CORREIA
Record-Eagle staff writer

TRAVERSE CITY — A group of area golfers are giving new meaning to the phrase "stroke play."

The Stroker's Club, a collection of golfers who have suffered strokes or other infirmities, is in its 15th year on the links.

Birdies and bogeys take a back seat to a pure enjoyment of the game, one member says.

"It's a way for us to just get out and play the game of golf," said Stanley Sudol, Jr., 85, of Traverse City. "It's nice being outside and getting some exercise. Just being with the guys and hitting the ball — it's a lot of fun."

Sudol, a 20-year resident of northwestern Lower Michigan, suffered from cancer and a heart ailment, and had a major operation in the summer of 2001 that kept him off the golf course until last summer.

"I used to play a lot with a group called the Old-Timers," he explained. "Then last summer my daughter saw something about the club in the newspaper and told me, 'Get out there.'"

Traverse City's Vic Pickard, another member of the Stroker's Club, which plays Cedar Hills Golf Course each Wednesday during the season, suffered a stroke in 1982 which left him without the use of his right arm. Undaunted, Pickard now plays the game solely left-handed.

"I've been a golfer since I was 5 years old," said

Pickard, who leaves his oxygen tank behind when he steps on the tee box. "It took me about five years after the stroke before I played again, and I've been playing with the guys ever since. It's nice to get out and be able to play."

Pickard, 70, is also known as the "Can Man," because over the course of 10 years he collected some 100,000 returnables and donated the proceeds to the Alzheimer's Foundation.

The Stroker's Club was started by Mary Alice Galton Keillor, who claims that golf has healing powers.

"My first husband had four strokes and was totally paralyzed on his right side," she said. "We were down in Florida at the time and they had a club for them to golf. I could just see improvement in strength and socializing. Just being with the guys, laughing and joking was so good for them."

Philip Leonard, 76, is one of the "rangers" who roams the golf course with the club members, helping their game in any way he can.

"It's a great bunch of guys," said Leonard, who has been with the club for nine years. "I go along and make sure everybody's safe and set up tees if they can't get down there. If I tried half as hard as these guys do, I'd be a good golfer."

Leonard says the unsung heroes of the club are the player's spouses.

"The wives make sure they get out here," he explained. "We have one guy who'd get up at 4 or 5 in the morning to get ready, but the wives always tell the (guys) not to forget about golf day. They're the saints of this club."

For more information, call 946-1695.



Record-Eagle file photo

Dr David Lint adjusts his argyle socks while Dr. Denton Nelson tees off during the four-some's first hole at the Walter Haiggen Golf Tournament at Elmbrook Golf Course.

Area golf courses

ANTRIM

A-Ga-Ming Overlooking Torch Lake, this is one of the most picturesque courses in the state. A new 18-hole course, The Torch, is slated to open in 2004. Located 10 miles north of Elk Rapids off U.S. 31. 264-5081.

Antrim Dells This 18-hole championship course was designed by Jerry Matthews. Plays to 6,670 yards from championship tees. Located 35 miles north of Traverse City on U.S. 31. 599-2679.

Bellaire Golf Club This 18-hole course has been face-lifted over the last few years. It's slightly

rolling with a new back nine. Located two miles south of Bellaire on M-88. 533-8942.

Elk Rapids Golf Club The course offers a view of Elk Lake, and some of the holes have been re-designed over the past few years. 264-8891.

Centennial Farm Golf Club The front nine features rolling hills, and the back nine plays through hardwoods. Located near Bellaire and close to several other Antrim County courses. 533-6886.

Hawk's Eye The first nine holes opened last summer, the second nine will open in July.

Lakes of the North An 18-hole layout with a 71 par. From championship tees, the course plays to 6,922 yards. Located on County Rd. 38, 10 miles west of Old 27. 585-6800.

Shanty Creek: Schuss Mountain

The 18-hole course has sand traps and five water hazards to add to the difficulty. Four miles west of Mancelona on M-88. (800) 678-4111.

Shanty Creek: Cedar River The course plays to 6,989 yards from the back tees, 6,528 from the blue, 5,963 from the white and 5,315 from the red. (800) 678-4111.

Shanty Creek: Summit This hilly, 18-hole course of 6,559 yards features sand traps on each hole. The greens are lightning fast. Located off M-88 near Bellaire. (800) 678-4111.

Shanty Creek: The Legend Designed by Arnold Palmer and plays to 6,764 yards. Three ponds

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