

History, beauty and challenge

Woodlands has it all



by Sharon Aron Baron

ClubLink's Florida Region has expanded again with the acquisition of the 36-hole Woodlands Country Club in Tamarac, just 20 minutes from Heron Bay Golf Club in Coral Springs near Fort Lauderdale. Heron Bay joined the ClubLink family in October 2010, shortly after the addition of six courses in Sun City Center south of Tampa.

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“The acquisition of Woodlands Country Club further solidifies southeast Florida for us,” said ClubLink President and CEO Rai Sahi. “ClubLink Members now have convenient reciprocal play opportunities in two major centres in South Florida.” Woodlands will be a hybrid Club, offering Gold-level membership and premium daily-fee access.

Woodlands is a full-service country club, featuring a striking and recently renovated clubhouse overlooking two 18-hole golf courses designed by Robert Von Hagge and Bruce Devlin, a practice facility, swimming pool, and tennis courts.

Larry Torn, president of the Club, has been a Member for 16 years and plays golf four times a week. “We’re very excited about Woodlands being affiliated with ClubLink because of its great reputation,” said Torn.

Torn says the Woodlands courses provide an excellent challenge for any type of player. “ClubLink Members are going to love our two courses because they are designed so well. Not only are the courses different, but every hole varies from one another.” But, he says, playing golf is just part of the equation that makes Woodlands so enjoyable. “The food, staff and friendliness are what make this Club unique and you can’t beat the beauty of the golf course and clubhouse.”

Richard Gelman has been living full-time in the Woodlands community since 1999. Although he has played many courses, he says the Woodlands experience remains one of his favourites. The location is ideal, he says, one which will appeal to ClubLink Members from the Ontario/Quebec Region. “We are so centrally located. We’re close to Boca [Raton], Aventura, and the beaches. We are within 20 minutes of everything.”

Woodlands is no stranger to its neighbours to the north. A Canadian flag is always displayed in front of the country club along with the American flag. Many Canadians live here or visit the Woodlands every winter. “Some of our [Woodlands] Members from Canada are already Members of ClubLink and some were so excited about the ClubLink purchase that they immediately bought homes here,” said Gelman.

Woodlands Country Club was created in 1968 when developer Ken Behring wanted to build a golf community resembling Palm Springs, Calif. He purchased more than 5,000 acres and built homes surrounded by fairways, beautiful wooded areas, and winding streams.

The golf course was carved out of 640 acres of verdant, virgin woodlands. Legendary entertainer Jackie Gleason wanted a PGA Tour event that would bear his name, one to outdo those headlined by his friends and Hollywood rivals Bob Hope and Bing Crosby. Behring and Gleason entered into a contract under which a “Jackie Gleason” championship course would be built for that purpose. But Gleason’s demands became excessive and the deal was called off. Von Hagge, a second-generation course architect whose father had apprenticed under Donald Ross, and Devlin, an Australian touring pro who would go on to design more than 140 courses worldwide, laid out the two courses.



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From its inception, the roster at Woodlands Country Club read like a “who’s who” of the rich and famous from the northeast United States. Notable members included Leonard Pines, owner of Hebrew National Hotdogs; Herbert Gallen, owner of fashion house Ellen Tracy (until it was sold to Liz Claiborne in 2002), and American comic-book artist Will Eisner. Most of the homes in the Woodlands were winter homes for the elite until retirement, when they became their permanent residences. On Saturday evenings, dinner dances were held where women dressed in their finest gowns. There was so much expensive jewelry on display at those evenings that the Club hired off-duty policemen to guard the premises.

ClubLink Members will enjoy the clubhouse complex which provides recreation for the entire family, including tournament tennis on four clay courts and a swimming pool. The clubhouse is a contemporary tri-level design overlooking a two-acre lake with outdoor patios and lounge decks. The formal dining room is perfect for dances and other events. The clubhouse also features a cocktail lounge, conference rooms, and men’s and women’s card rooms with bar service.

The fully stocked golf shop overlooks the large driving range as well as a practice area for chipping and sand shots. There are two 18-hole courses: the East Course and the West Course. Just five years ago, the East Course went through a \$500,000 renovation. It measures 6,472 yards from the back. Measuring 6,825 yards from the back tees, the West Course features five sets of tees for different skill levels.

Fifteen years ago, Woodlands resident Mike Sahr was invited by a friend to play a round and loved it so much that, within one week, he purchased a home. He loves living in the Woodlands community, and he especially appreciates how Members can drive their carts from their homes to the course.

Sahr loves both of the courses, but his favourite is the East Course. “It has a lot of sand traps and can be a difficult course. You really have to hit the greens and miss the traps. The West Course is more challenging and some of the holes are really tough. It’s a little more open than the East.”

After golfing at the Woodlands several days a week for many years, Torn, Sahr and Gelman all agree that each Woodlands course has its own unique and ever-changing personality. Sahr says that no matter which you choose, when you have a good round at the Woodlands, you know you’ve really accomplished something.

Sharon Aron Baron is a Woodlands Country Club Member and writer/photographer for www.thewoodlandstamarac.com.