

Pennsylvania's friendliest golf club

Instead of a housing development, a rural property was reborn as a golf course.

Situated between Philadelphia and Harrisburg in the countryside of eastern Pennsylvania lies Honeybrook Golf Club, a lush picturesque golf course that was carved into gently rolling farmland more than 20 years ago. This semi-private golf club boasts 18 challenging yet playable holes that are equally enjoyable for different skill levels.

The wide-open links and tree-lined fairways along with protected wetlands combine to form a beautiful rural escape away from ever-creeping suburbia. But perhaps what this young golf course is best known for is its friendly and laid-back atmosphere. In fact, so many golf guests called it "Pennsylvania's Friendliest Golf Club" that it became Honeybrook's tagline.

Honeybrook's friendly reputation can be traced to its owners, twins Tom and Ted Piersol, and their sister, Donna Horvath. They bring a warm, family feel to the business that extends through the whole staff and is felt by all players.

These days, Tom serves as club house manager, running the day-to-day operations of the clubhouse as well as the Greenside Grill, a casual fine dining restaurant with a stone patio overlooking green vistas. Ted is Course Superintendent, ensuring the course is well-maintained and enjoyable for their golfers. And Donna takes care of the business side as business manager while also overseeing marketing activities.



The family business

The family's ownership of the land dates back to 1939 when their grandfather purchased a 165-acre dairy farm in historic Chester County, home to an Old Order Amish settlement since 1752. Both their grandfather and father were veterinarians, but did not farm the land themselves. Rather, at times they rented out the land or hired help to farm it for them.

Then in the early 1980s, the farmer who was running the farm decided to leave. The twins, who had recently graduated from Lycoming College with biology degrees, thought it would be a good idea to farm the land themselves even though they had no knowledge or experience. But Ted says, "We had some farmer friends who helped us along, and we chugged along and did well."

Then around 1998 change was in the air. Farming was no longer profitable enough to support both brothers and too much work for one, yet the family was loath to sell the land for suburban housing as so many other farmers had in rapidly developing Chester County. Donna had been working as office manager for their father who was ready to retire. Now all three were looking for something new that they could do together.

So, they decided to develop a golf course the same way they ran their farm: starting with no knowledge and no experience. They didn't even golf but they knew how to ask questions and how to hire experts.

A farm transformed

The first step was to determine if the land held enough water to meet the needs of a golf course. The family hired a well driller who drilled six wells. The first five were duds, but the sixth produced 300 gallons per minute, the equivalent of liquid gold. In Ted's words, that "sealed the deal."

Next, they needed a landscape architect to design a routing plan for the holes. After several interviews, they clicked with Jim Blaukovitch, known for his adaptability to work within the confines of the existing landscape, like property boundaries, ponds and hills. This type of design lowers construction costs significantly as it cuts back on excavation and grading.

After a full year of growing in the course, 45 acres of pasture and 100 acres of tillable land with some woodlands and wetlands were transformed into 3 acres of greens, 3 acres of tee boxes and 27 acres of fairways. In doing this, the family preserved the natural attributes that enhance the enjoyment of a day on the Honeybrook links. From the west branch of the Brandywine Creek flowing through the southern reaches of the course to the sights and smells of neighboring farms and clip clop of passing Amish horse drawn buggies, golfers are sure not to forget they're in the country.

In spring of 2000, Honeybrook Golf Club opened as a semi-private club, hitting the sweet spot in mid-range golfing between public courses and expensive private ones.

Continued on Page 10



Memberships were offered early on because golfers requested them, although the course is still open to the public 7 days a week. The response from local golfers was immediate and positive, but what really put Honeybrook Golf Club on the map was a review on Day 4 by noted Philadelphia golf writer Joe Logan, who is legendary for being a tough critic. His glowing review was published in the Philadelphia Inquirer, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Community partnerships

Two decades later, Honeybrook is a mainstay of its namesake Honey Brook Township and a charter member of the Honey Brook Community Partnership. The club regularly sponsors fundraising events for scholarships, grant programs and the local Honey Brook Food Pantry. Many a young golfer “grew up” at Honeybrook, both playing and working their way through college.

When Tom, Ted and Donna decided to convert the family farm into a golf course, they did much more than build a golf club. They guaranteed that these 165 acres would remain open space. They created a family work environment for themselves, several of their grown children and their staff. They made golf accessible to women, new golfers and those with middle-class budgets with an “Everyone is Welcome” philosophy. And they earned every bit of their tagline: “Pennsylvania’s Friendliest Golf Club”.

That’s a legacy few golf courses could match.

Blue Power

Ted, course superintendent, and his brother Tom appreciated the value of New Holland equipment from their farming days when they used a New Holland baler and a manure spreader.

When planning the golf course, Ted knew he would need tractors for pulling mowers, aerating the greens and fairways, and other maintenance tasks. He said, “I wanted something heavy because our experience from farming was, if you buy decent equipment it’s going to last for a long time and it’s going to hold up.”

“We like to buy from local people,” Ted added. So, when the time came, they returned to their local New Holland dealer with whom they had a good relationship.

They’ve had their New Holland TN65 and TN60A tractors for about 15 years, and they’re still going strong. Then in December 2021, they purchased a PowerStar™ 75 tractor. The protection of the cab is a great help when they plow snow in the winter and mow the rough in the summer. And the 60TL front-end loader makes the tractor ideal for hauling and dumping sand.



HONEYBROOK GOLF CLUB OWNERS

TOM PIERSOL
(LEFT)

DONNA HORVATH
(MIDDLE)

TED PIERSOL
(RIGHT)

Take a course photo tour at honeybrookgolf.com.