

Honeybrook Golf Club: Everyone is welcome

When Honeybrook opened its fairways to golfers twenty years ago, few people dreamed of the vibrant community hub it would become. The western edge of Chester County was a sleepy, largely agricultural area, while a dozen miles east, Downingtown, Exton and Chester Springs were beginning an explosive growth spurt.

But over the next two decades, Honeybrook Golf Club's founders, siblings Donna Horvath and Tom and Ted Piersol, lent their personalities to the business, now known as Pennsylvania's friendliest golf club.

They bucked commonly held beliefs that golf should be a boys' club, and welcomed women and new golfers. They started youth golf camps and programs that attracted young families (and future golfers) with an affordable alternative to the full-service private country clubs Chester County is famous for.

THE COURSE

During the 1980s and 1990s, the golf industry grew fast, and the trend was bigger, longer, tougher, and more expensive courses. It was a great time for those good enough to conquer those tracks, and wealthy enough to afford \$100-plus rounds. But by 2000, construction slowed up and the cost of entry for developers skyrocketed – and the cost for beginner golfers grew, too.

"The industry was ignoring the middle-class golfer," said Ted Piersol. "We wanted a course that would be tough for the low handicapper, yet accessible to others."

Along came Bethlehem golf course designer Jim Blaukovitch, who had an offer for the siblings. He liked the lay of the land at Honeybrook, a dairy farm that had been in the family for more than 70 years. He said he could create a layout that uses the natural resources, hills, springs, ponds, and the West Branch of the Brandywine, to produce a beautiful course that would not beat up the average golfer. And, he would do it without changing much of the landscape, without moving a lot of dirt, which translated into reasonable construction costs.



Courtesy photo

Jason Castaldi is a Coatesville teacher, golf coach, and longtime member of Honeybrook Golf Club.

Easter week two years later, Honeybrook Golf Club opened for business as a semi-private club, accepting just over 100 members, but remaining open to the daily-fee public seven days a week.

Noted Philadelphia golf writer, Joe Logan, was there that week and wrote in the April 23, 2000, Philadelphia Inquirer sports section: "If the crowd there on Thursday—the fourth day of operation—was any indication, the Piersols made a smart move. Honeybrook has real promise." And the golfers kept coming.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Over the last two decades, Honeybrook has grown beyond simply being a tract of land familiar to golfers, to a community symbol representing fun, family, good food

and philanthropy.

The Greenside Grill is a casual fine dining experience open to the public seven days a week. It features a cozy pub on the inside and a porch with one of the greatest dining views in the County. It's a gathering place for locals looking for good food and conversation, and for golfers ready to enjoy a recap of their day on the greens. Though COVID 19 has changed some of the rules, the Greenside Grill's reputation stands strong.

A charter member of the Honey Brook Community Partnership, the golf club regularly sponsors events that bring Honey Brook Borough and Honey Brook Township together with things like scholarships for high school graduates and grant programs for worthy local initiatives.

Honeybrook Golf Club raises thousands of dollars each year for the Honey Brook Food Pantry. Founded in 2014 by Board Chairman Kenneth Ross, the Pantry provides food security to area residents in need. According to Ross, "Honeybrook Golf Club has been the longest standing supporter of the Honey Brook Food Pantry. From providing a venue for our annual golf outing and Music Fest, to picking up and collecting food and making donations, to offering hours of volunteer service, HBGC truly embodies what support means."

THE LEGACY

If you spend much time at Honeybrook Golf Club, you'll walk away with a feeling you've experienced something more than a round of golf or a good meal. Most online reviewers point out the friendly staff they encounter, from the bag drop to the restaurant. There are families who have had three or four children work at Honeybrook from first job through college.

And we have members who call Honeybrook home.

Take, for example, 42 year-old Coatesville teacher Jason Castaldi. When his father, Ed, became a charter member of the club in 2000, Jason was away at Penn State. Already a decent player, he refined his game on the fairways at Honeybrook after graduation. And he got better and better.

"Even back then, Honeybrook was a welcoming place," Castaldi said. "Some courses and clubs are intimidating, but not Honeybrook."

So, when he started coaching the Coatesville High School golf team 14 years ago, he brought his team to Honeybrook to practice, because "Honeybrook embraces new golfers. Everyone is welcome all the time."

Jason now has a USGA handicap of 1 and fought his way

to the Club Championship in 2019. And his father, Ed, is still a member and recently won the SuperSenior Net Club Championship.

"I feel comfortable with all the other members at Honeybrook," Jason said. "I just like being there. It feels like home."



Courtesy photo

Honeybrook hosts a music festival each summer to benefit the Honey Brook Food Pantry.

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