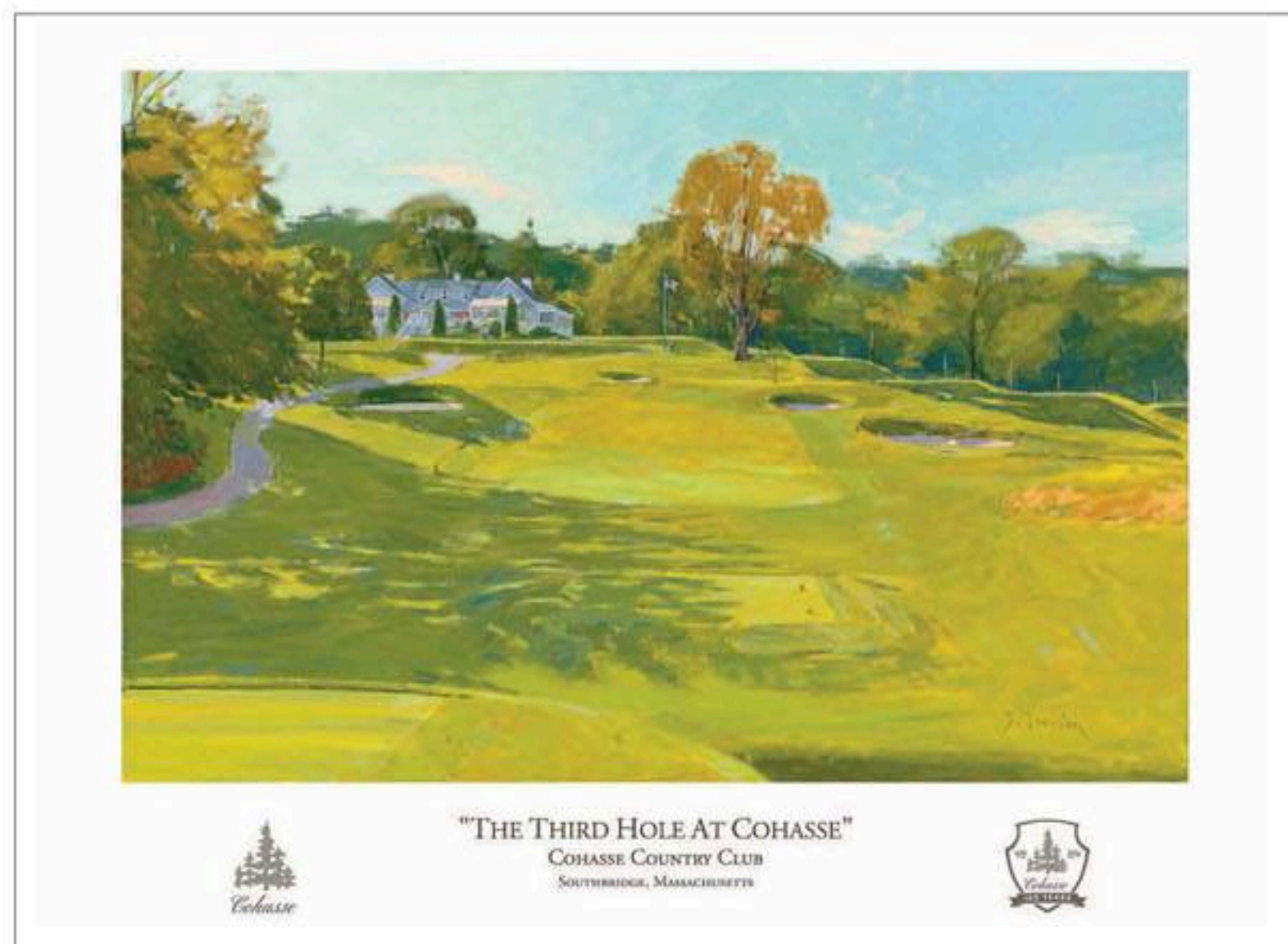


Region's nationally-recognized Cohasse Country Club turns 100

One of
the nation's
*'Finest
of the
Nines'*
is right
in
Southbridge



And
it's
*"just a
great
place
in
general."*

SEAN NOONAN
FORMER PRO-GOLFER

By Elisa Krochmalnyckj

How far do local golfers have to travel to be at one of the best nine-hole golf clubs in all of the United States and Canada?

Not far at all because Cohasse Country Club, in Southbridge, is one of the region's unsung gems for 100

years — exactly 100 years.

Cohasse was designed by the legendary Donald Ross, and was ranked Number eight in the list of the top nine-hole courses in North America in the book "The Finest Nines" by Anthony Pioppi, which

was released in February.

"Before I even started ranking them, I knew that Cohasse was in my top 25," Pioppi said. "I also knew that Cohasse's membership didn't realize what they had. Why would they think the course they play on every day is one of the best in North America?"

Edward Galonek Sr., who has been golfing at Cohasse for 50 years, questioned Pioppi's rankings.

"I think we're more than the eighth — we're probably the second-best 9-hole course in the country," said Galonek, who will be hitting the first drive at Cohasse's centennial celebration July 13-15. "I've played golf all over the country, and I'd match these greens with anyone's."

The club is private, which means that a person, couple or or family can buy a membership, then use the course as often as they want. Ironically, Galonek said, while it's an exceptional course, it's also one of the least expensive.

"It's the best deal in golf right now," he said. "They have different types of memberships, junior memberships, first-time member-

ships, senior memberships. For the money, it's the best deal going — anywhere."

Centenarian Club

Among the honors being bestowed on Cohasse as part of its 100th birthday is one from nationally recognized contemporary artist David Lussier. Lussier, who is commissioned by the United States Golf Association to create commemorative paintings — including for the 116th US Open Golf championship — was commissioned to do a painting of Cohasse. "He's a world-class renowned artist — doing a commemorative painting for Cohasse," said Jay Mallon, Cohasse's office manager. "When you have a course that is designed by Ross, that changes everything."

The painting will be officially presented at Cohasse's anniversary weekend, July 13 to 15. Cohasse was developed by the Wells family, who owned American Optical and founded Old Sturbridge Village. The Wellses' so-called summer home was on Walker Pond. The house and a separate building that was their library remain on site.

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The Wellses built Cohasse as a small, local place for the blue-collar workers at American Optical. The Wellses hired a young designer from Scotland just beginning to make a name for himself in the United States.

“Here they built Cohasse as a private little course — and it’s designed by Donald Ross, who is a world-famous architect,” Mallon said. “And now it’s one of the top 10 nine-hole golf courses in North America.”

Sean Noonan, a Sturbridge golfer who played professionally in the 1990s, said he thinks that the more people know about Cohasse, the more they’ll understand what a treasure it is.

“The quality of the golf course, the condition of the golf course — it’s always been right along with the top courses,” Noonan said. “People

don’t know that, even though it’s right in our back yard.”

Noonan has a lot of good memories of golfing at Cohasse.

“I started playing up at Cohasse back in the late 1980s, when I was in college,” he said. “When I turned pro I traveled all over the country.



When I was back in town, they’d let me come up and practice and play there. It was a great place to hang out. Some days I’d play 36 holes — I went around and around and kept going. That’s the charm of a nine-holer.”

Now, Noonan’s son, Liam, who plays for the St. John’s High School golf team, is a junior member there.

“I hope that some of the younger families become members — it’s a great place to learn to golf,” Noonan said. “It’s just a great place in general.”

For Galonek, one of the nicest things about Cohasse is that now, you can play whenever you want.

“It’s one of the few courses in the world where you don’t have to call for a tee time,” he said. “You just show up. They always squeeze you in.”

That’s a result of a recent lull na-

tionwide in interest in golf. That trend is reversing, and its popularity is beginning to surge again — and 9-hole courses are becoming more and more popular.

“I understand why,” Galonek said. “It takes so much time to play 18, and young people don’t have that time. That’s one of the good things about a nine-hole course.”

And when it comes to 9-hole courses, Cohasse is exceptional.

“The greens at Cohasse are as true as you can possibly imagine,” Galonek said. “The speed is phenomenal. They’re really, really some of the best greens I’ve ever played.”

‘Finest Nines’

Pioppi’s criteria for the top nine-hole golf courses in North America is only the design and

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Nationally-renowned Cohasse Country Club turns 100

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playability.

"It has nothing to do with things like having the best restaurant, or club house," said Pioppi.

Pioppi grew up in Southbridge and has memories of Cohasse that go back as long as he can remember.

"My recollection is that my grandmother took my brother and me there, I think I was somewhere like 5 years old. She drove us around in her cart, and I think we played hole 1, 2 and 3," Pioppi said.

Pioppi continued to play at Cohasse throughout his youth, but back then never even imagined he would eventually become a golf

historian, golf writer, and expert on golf-course architecture and be commissioned to write several books about it.

In retrospect, he realizes the seeds for that future were sowed at Cohasse. He can pinpoint exactly where that seed was planted.

"I remember standing at the first fairway at Cohasse, just staring, thinking "This is amazing. There are three ways to play this hole," Pioppi recounted. "That's when the light bulb must have gone off."

It wasn't until years later, when Pioppi was commissioned to write the "Finest Nines" book, that he realized that Cohasse is everything he thought it was — and more.

"The kind of hole I was looking at allows for an excellent golfer to play it one way, an average player to play it another way, a new golfer to do it a third way, a way for the longer-hitter, the shorter-hitter— you don't find that in every golf course," he said. "It's not even something people realize is one of the things that makes it a hole you are really going to enjoy."

Pioppi said it was great to have the his life-long opinion that Cohasse was an exceptional course validated by so many experts in the field.

"I was ready to defer to people who understand golf courses, and when I realized the agreed with me about Cohasse, I was very glad," he said. ♦

Surgical consults

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the time of the surgery because they do not have any pain. This allows for patients to return to a more normal lifestyle much more quickly than in the old days when patients were in the hospital for an extended stay after every common operation. There is still restrictions on patients after they have an operation, but these are tailored to each patient individually and are discussed with the patient prior to surgery. This allows the patient to may make arrangements so their postoperative recovery is smooth.

Finally, there really is no need to be anxious

when you go to a surgical office. A great surgeon will take time to listen to your problem, perform a thorough examination and come up with the best way to try to help make you feel



Town Meeting

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home fields are in Brookfield and Brimfield.

"Now Brimfield is rewriting their field-usage rules, because Sturbridge has been leaning on them for so long," Thompson said. "It makes no sense. We are not a poor town. And in a time when communities are trying to find ways to get children off screens and outside, it is wrong that Sturbridge has inadequate fields."

Blanchard said supports the proposal for the sake of the 2,500 children in town who play sports and really do need those fields.

Still, she said, there are many other things that are also needed in town. ♦

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