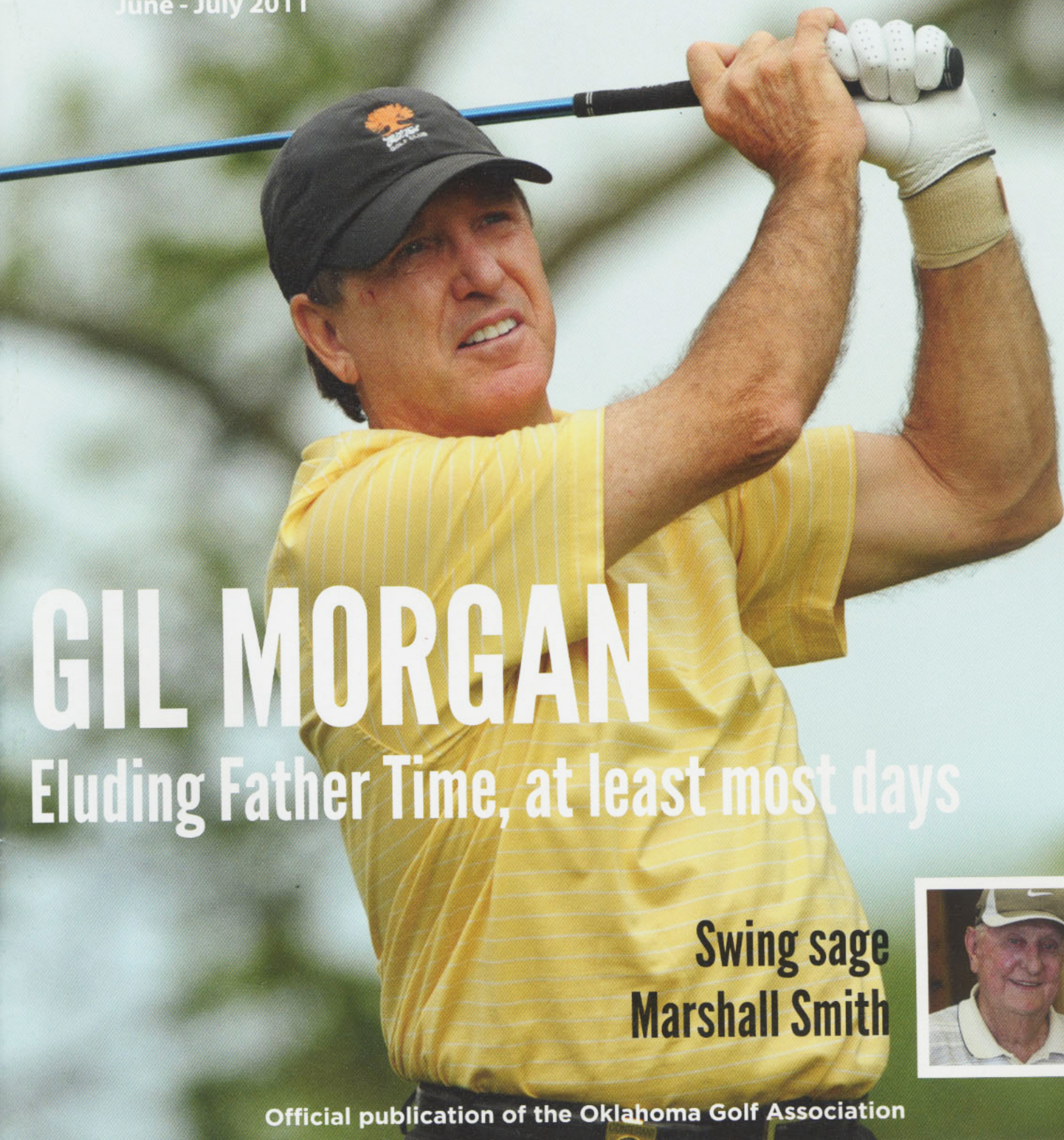


# Golf Oklahoma

[www.golfoklahoma.org](http://www.golfoklahoma.org)

June - July 2011



## GIL MORGAN

Eluding Father Time, at least most days

Swing sage  
Marshall Smith



Official publication of the Oklahoma Golf Association





# Where we play

# Back in business

## Tulsa Country Club ready for next century

BY RANDY KREHBIEL

Tulsa Country Club took a big step back so it could take a bigger step forward.

Come July, TCC expects to formally unveil Rees Jones' thorough renovation of the club's 103-year-old golf course. The \$8.5 million project, which included extensive remodeling of clubhouse facilities, channels the spirit of A.W. Tillinghast's 1920 redesign.

"What I had to do is kind of bring him back to life," said Jones. "We brought back Tillinghast's ideas from the courses of his we've worked on over the years."

The result, said TCC head pro Jeff Combe, is "absolutely fantastic."

"I've been here 20 years," said Combe, "and I've never seen this membership so excited."

The state's second-oldest continuously operating country club, TCC began in 1908, on the same rolling acreage just northeast of downtown it occupies today. Many historic events in Oklahoma golf history occurred at Tulsa Country Club, including the founding of both the Oklahoma Golf Association and the Women's Oklahoma Golf Association, and the first Oklahoma Open and first state amateur. One of its early pros was Bill Mehlhorn, later a member of the first Ryder Cup team. Gene Sarazen played there, and Byron

Nelson and Sam Snead. JoAnne Carner, then known as JoAnne Gunderson, won the second of her five U.S. Women's Amateur titles at Tulsa Country Club in 1960.

The original nine holes were laid out by William Nichols of Muskogee, one of Oklahoma's leading early golfers; in 1910, Nichols won the first Oklahoma Open on the course. At some point the course was extended to 18 holes.

Tillinghast came to Tulsa to look over the course in 1919, accompanied by Charles "Chick" Evans, who in 1916 had become the first person (Bobby Jones is the only one since) to win the U.S. Open and U.S. Amateur in the same year. The following April, Tillinghast signed a one-page contract to redesign the TCC course for a fee of \$2,000.

"Plans, which are at present in a tentative state, call for additional yardage of 500 to 600 yards but (it) will remain an 18-hole course," reported the Tulsa Tribune. "However, it will be (so) completely rearranged that it will be practically unknown."

Born to moderate wealth and an aversion to convention, Tillinghast spent the better part of his early adulthood hanging around golf's upper echelons, immersing himself in the game's history and culture. Among other things, he claimed to have been present the

day the term "birdie" was coined.

Beginning in 1909, when he helped lay out the course at Shawnee-on-the-Delaware, Pa., Tillinghast's reputation as a golf architect rose rapidly. In 1917, he convinced the membership of the Baltusrol Golf Club to plow up a course where two U.S. Opens had been played and replace it with two layouts of his design. Tillinghast's genius was in fitting courses to their landscape. In an age of wooden shafts and aerodynamically uncertain balls, accuracy and cunning counted far more than power. He dotted his courses with bunkers and protected greens and did not much care for par fives. Each hole, Tillinghast said, should be an inspiration unto itself.

Alternately charming and abrasive, Tillinghast rarely went anywhere without a pint of refreshment and a pistol. He could be reckless with both, and was known to disappear for weeks on end. But the man could work. At best count, he designed or redesigned more than 250 courses during his lifetime, including Baltusrol, Bethpage, Winged Foot, Ridgewood and Cedar Crest.

Except for installing grass greens – the previous putting surfaces were sand – the exact nature of Tillinghast's work at Tulsa Country Club is no longer certain. The course was



altered numerous times over the years, must notably in the mid-1960s, when the holes were renumbered and some reconfigured to accommodate the relocation of the clubhouse from the east side of the property to the west.

Tillinghast fell from favor as an architect in the 1930s and for decades was all but forgotten, especially with the advent of more dramatic designs in the 1970s and 1980s. He's back in fashion now, though, presenting Tulsa Country Club an opportunity to polish up its course while upgrading its infrastructure.

In 2005, it formulated a master plan that began with a \$2 million make-over of the swimming pool and deck areas. Then came the big bite – reworking the clubhouse and replacing the club's irrigation and drainage system.

"We were facing the necessity of replacing infrastructure on our golf course," said TCC General Manager Jason Fiscus. "We had to decide if we as a club were going to spend money to replace these parts ... or really do a good job."

"The general feeling was that we knew our greens were at the end of their life span," said club president Joby Wood. "We knew our irrigation system was past the end of its life span."

"The challenge was deciding we could do it," said club president Joby Wood. "That was a big hurdle. We knew we needed to do it. Raising the money was the delicate part. The key to that was making it affordable to our members."

The first phase involved renovations to the 45-year-old clubhouse. The grill room was expanded and redecorated, the pro shop and bag room moved and the fitness area upgraded. The clubhouse is important at TCC because it gets a lot of family use.

"The improvements to the clubhouse ... allowed us to tackle the course," said Fiscus. "The enhanced facility kept us going."

"The clubhouse projected turned out well," Wood agreed. "It certainly exceeded expectations."

Jones and his firm were hired in 2008. They had considerable experience renovat-

ing and restoring Tillinghast courses, including Baltusrol and Bethpage.

"He saw something really great here," said Wood, referring to Jones.



*The architects, Rees Jones and A.W. Tillinghast.*

The renovations to the course took nearly a year; not surprisingly, some members left as a result. What was surprising, said Fiscus, was the number of new members added – more than 70 altogether, including 60 golf memberships.

"There's been a tremendous amount of buzz," said Fiscus. "What's encouraging is that we've seen growth even earlier than we expected."

Although a few holes have seen significant change, and a 1.3-acre lake has been added to the property, the routing and direction of the course remain essentially the same. A new set of championship tees stretch the course to 7,000 yards at its longest, although it will actually be a little shorter for most players. That's because Jones installed 37 additional bunkers -- a Tillinghast trademark -- that make the course play a little narrower.

"There are bunkers to avoid, and there are bunkers to flirt with," said Jones.

"Tillinghast is one of my favorite architects because he believes in shot options. He wanted to make you think. He had an open approach to holes, and he had closed approaches."

Greens have been expanded by a total of 10,000 square feet, facilitating a greater vari-

ety of pin placements.

"It is really a nice piece of land," Jones said. "It's gently flowing, not too rugged, not too flat. It has a nice flow to it, a lot of change in angles."

"When you have an old site like that, it was chosen for golf. When you go to the desert or to Florida, then you have to make more changes."

One of the most important aspects of the job was the upgrading of Tulsa Country Club's outdated, worn out and expensive irrigation system. For decades, TCC has relied exclusively on city water. Now, with the construction of the new pond, it will be able to irrigate more area without buying more water.

"From a superintendent's standpoint, that's the most important factor," said TCC Superintendent Brady Finton. "We'll probably spend the same amount (on water), but we'll be able to water the entire property."

Finton said the planning and execution of the renovations has "been really, really fun."

"We really wanted to get the Tillinghast flavor," he said. "We couldn't go back to Tillie's actual design, but we could get the feel."

"This is not a '70s or '80s golf course," said Jones. "It's a pre-Depression course."

The biggest change is on No. 14, where the green now nestles up to the new lake.

"It will probably be our signature hole now," said Wood.

Not since building its current clubhouse and rerouting the course in the 1960s had the club taken on the kind of project this one presented. Wood admitted to more than a little apprehension.

"In a club scenario, one of several things you can have is rumors," he said. "We really had none of that. And the membership has been thrilled to death. They want it to be ready, really ready, before we open it up."

"We thought we'd be getting a lot of 'Why aren't we open,' but we've had none of that."

The course has been open – in a way. This spring members have been coming out just to walk the cart paths.

"What I hear most is that every hole is so nice now," said Jeff Combe. "What Rees

**See TCC on page 53**



has done is made the golf course enjoyable to everybody. Our membership has grown so much in terms of families, and he's made it so that everyone can use it."

A former member who had moved out of town visited recently, Combe said, and could hardly believe the transformation.

"He said, 'I've heard from all my friends about it, but you really can't describe it until you see it.'"

TCC has only the highest praise for Jones and his team.

"What Rees has done is he's balanced off the course," said Combe. "Before, the only real difficulty was around the greens. Now the greens are back to Tillinghast greens, and the bunkers cause more difficulty off the tee."

"Every hole has its own look. We don't have any holes that repeat themselves."

Combe said Jones adapted Tillinghast's principles, such as the use of fairway bunkers, to contemporary standards of play.

"He put the bunkers in according to how the hole would play today, as opposed to back then," Combe said. "But you get a real sense of what it was like back when Tillinghast did it."

Jones sounds just as enthusiastic.

## Hot Summer Deals

**In July and August afternoon rates are sizzlin hot at Ledgestone Country Club located in StoneBridge Village**

From 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.  
\$59 per golfer + \$10 Bar & Grill Voucher

After 2:00 p.m.  
\$49 per golfer + \$10 Bar & Grill Voucher

### Group Golf Savings

From 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. 20 or more golfers  
\$40 per player + free range balls

After 2:00 p.m.  
20 or more golfers \$30.00 per player + free range balls

**1600 Ledgestone Way - Branson West, MO 65737**  
**417-335-8187 - [www.ledgestonegolf.com](http://www.ledgestonegolf.com)**



**LEDGESTONE**

*Justice*   
**GOLF CAR EST. 1959**

**LARGEST INVENTORY IN OKLAHOMA**  
**OKLAHOMA DISTRIBUTOR FOR **

**Oklahoma City (405) 634-0571 (800) 276-0571 • Tulsa (918) 663-0571**  
**4301 S. Robinson Ave, OKC, OK • 10118 East 51st Street, Tulsa, OK**

