



# Family affair

With a quality golf course that has stood the test of time and generations of family-based memberships, Glen Flora Country Club celebrates its first 100 years

By Tim Cronin

**T**he easy way to explain the quality of Glen Flora Country Club as a golf course is to report what Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer and Gary Player shot in 1963 during a 36-hole confection known as the Holiday Golf Classic.

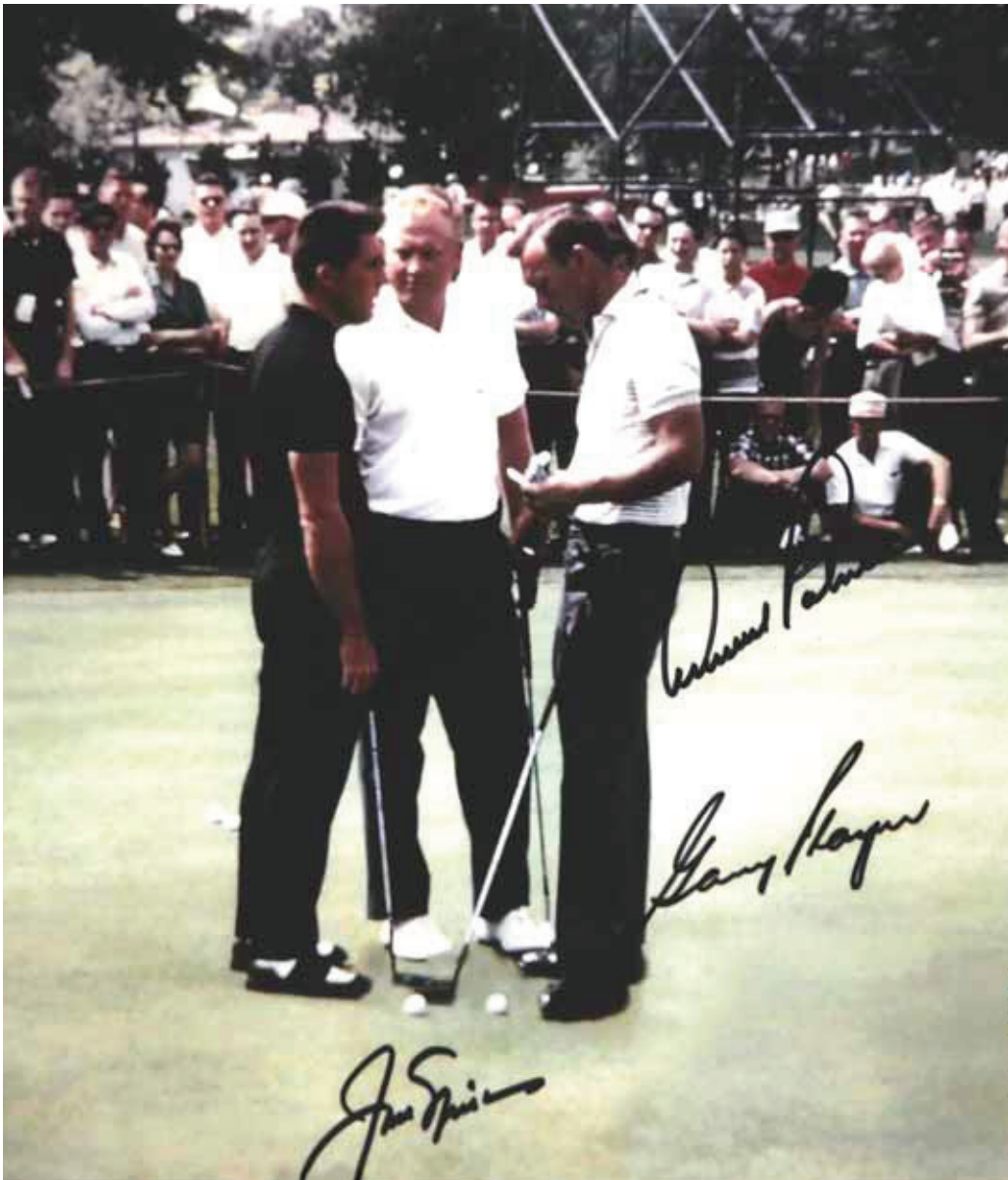
Palmer posted a 67 and 74, finishing last at 1-over-par 141. Nicklaus scored 138 on rounds of 68 and 70. And Player went 67-69, an aggregate of 4-under 136 on the course that tipped out at around 6,500 yards and was dubbed a par 70 for that adventure.

The layout, designed by club professional Austere Claeysens in 1922, isn't any longer today, but the greens are still vexing and the trees—at least those still standing after a summer of wicked storms—still narrow the fairways.

Glen Flora holds its own in more ways than one. The club is celebrating its centennial this year, even after it underwent foreclosure last fall. A \$6 million renovation of the clubhouse, which came just as the economy went into free-fall, ultimately proved too much to handle financially.

The good news is, the bank believes Glen Flora is a good prospect for survival and brought in golf architect Joe Jemsek's fledgling course management firm to take over the business end of the operation.

As far as the golf course is concerned, there's never been a problem with a course where Nicklaus shoots even par while hitting every green in regulation, as was the case with that 70 in 1963—or with this year's U.S. Amateur qualifying, when only four players broke par over 36 holes.



PHOTOS COURTESY GLEN FLORA

**A signed photo of golf legends Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer and Gary Player from the 1963 Holiday Golf Classic at Glen Flora is on display at the club.**



PHOTO BY BUZZ ORR/DGA

**Glen Flora's clubhouse burned down in 1970, but the club took it in stride and it continues to thrive today with a newly renovated clubhouse and additions of a pool and tennis facility.**

broke par over 36 holes.

"We will survive very well," member George Harlow said recently.

Harlow is an authority on Glen Flora. This is his 60th year at the cozy club on Sheridan Road. Now a golden senior, he joined as a junior member in 1952, and the love affair was on.

"It's been my home," Harlow said. "We have a lot of members who have been here 30 years. Glen Flora really means something to them."

Harlow has seen just about everything worth seeing, good and bad, from the visit of the Big Three to the Women's Western Open to the night of Dec. 19, 1970, when the clubhouse burned down.

"We'd just finished a four-year remodeling program," Harlow said. "During the reconstruction, the pro shop ran out of a trailer. But golf went on as usual."

It always does at Glen Flora. It always has. Conceived in the winter of 1911 as Waukegan Country Club by members of a similarly named earlier group that had a couple of rudimentary holes in the growing town's business district, founders E.L. Clarke, R.C. Price, A.C. Fisher and W.G. Strong renamed it Glen Flora five weeks later, and Glen Flora it

has been since.

At first, there were nine holes immediately west of the current club. A one-room clubhouse provided a place to hang one's jacket, and not much else. But the club took root, and in 1922, the course designed by Claeysens opened to considerable approval.

Few discouraging words have been heard since—by those hitting the fairways and stopping their approaches below the cup, anyway. Water graces 11 holes, and bunkers are plentiful.

"Five or six of the greens are truly unique," said Jemsek, who grew up in the game as the son of Frank Jemsek and grandson of the original Joe Jemsek.

There are punch bowl greens and a Biarritz, a green with a gully bisecting the middle, and a couple of Redan-like putting surfaces as well.

Then there is the 11th hole. A par 3. "It legitimately is a dogleg par 3," Jemsek reports.

"There is a giant hickory tree on the front, and the slope of a hill," Harlow said. "The green is down in a cavity. From the tee, all you can see is the top of the flag and the back of the green."

Crazy, but the members love it, even though, as Jemsek says, "If you don't hit a cut, you can't get to the middle or right side of the green."

That didn't stop member Bob Trombino from acing the hole once upon a time—as he has the other par 3s on the

course—and, according to legend, eagled every other hole on the layout as well. Trombino's feat may be unique, but he's hardly the only player who puts a peg in the first tee just about every day he can. Glen Flora's players play, trying to get a handle on the anything-but-flat greens.

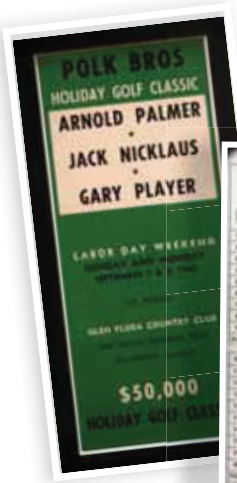
"The greens roll and are defended by their contouring," Jemsek said. "But the fairways are defended by their trees."

That's the case even after a summer's worth of storms took out nearly 300 of them. But there's a funny thing about that, Harlow noted.

"All these winds, they never knock down the trees that haunt you," he said.

There aren't ghosts at Glen Flora, but there are memories. Harlow was a third-year member when the Women's Western Open, the original major open for the ladies, played through. Betty Jameson, the San Antonio stylist, had 13 one-putt greens en route to a 6-and-5 drubbing of defending champion Louise Suggs in the 36-hole final match.

For her trouble, Jameson won \$1,000, which in 1954 was about as good as it got in women's golf. Nine years later, thanks to the philanthropy of the Polk Bros. furniture store chain, Palmer, Player and Nicklaus would divide \$50,000 for their 36-hole chore. Player pocketed the winner's share of \$20,000, but not a great deal of people took note, perhaps because a two-day ticket was \$12.95 and one day's admission was \$7,



**Gary Player won the 1963 Holiday Golf Classic and took home his winner's share of \$20,000.**

the average age was in the high 60s," Harlow said.

Not so today. A pool and tennis facilities help keep the club young.

"We've always been a club where the children and the grandchildren of members were invited to participate," he said. "A membership at Glen Flora is worth every penny to a family. And you've got to have the families for a club to survive."

According to Jemsek, there are 65 new members this year.

"The club is turning a new corner in the new millennium," Jemsek said.

And looking ahead—aren't the first hundred years the toughest? 🍏

*Tim Cronin covers golf for the Southtown Star.*

pricey for 1963.

"It was easy to watch them at any time," Harlow said. "There were several thousand people there, but we thought we'd have more."

But it brought attention to Glen Flora, and the publicity probably boosted membership in the long term. Harlow recalled the club's demographics weren't favorable when he joined in 1952.

"It was mostly a men's club, and



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