

suburbanlife

Lookaway Golf Club emerges from winter eager to welcome its members back for its 23rd season of exceptional golf.

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IN FULL SWING

Lookaway Golf Club emerges from winter eager to welcome its members back for its 23rd season of exceptional golf.

by PHIL GIANFICARO

When it opened for business in 1999, Lookaway Golf Club adopted a philosophy that remains true to this day: Members are not only a priority, but the priority. Lookaway, a members-only championship course in bucolic Bucks County, strives to ensure an engaging and memorable experience for each individual who steps onto the property, from the tee box to the clubhouse, and all points in between.

Designed by renowned Hall of Fame golf course architect Rees Jones, the picturesque 18-hole course in Buckingham satisfies the demands of low-handicap players, yet it also offers the playability favored by novice or average golfers. The result: a number of well-deserved accolades, including the No. 18 spot on *Golf Digest's* list of the best golf courses in Pennsylvania.

"We have a pristine golf course that's always in great condition," notes Dave Renk, Lookaway's Course Superintendent. "It's generous off the tee, but also forces you to hit good golf shots to the green. Once there, the fast, smooth greens can get away from you in a hurry. In 2020, we brought Rees Jones and his architects back to Lookaway to make the course more enjoyable for the higher-handicap players. We didn't make the course easier, just more fun."

Known for its idyllic setting, finely manicured greens, and convivial culture, Lookaway encompasses 250 acres of beautiful woodlands, streams, and ponds. In a 2014 interview with Phil Sokol of The Sports Network, Jones described Lookaway as "a finesse golf course." To his point, each hole challenges players in different ways, with carefully placed bunkers and rough



areas. While every course has what's considered a "signature" hole, Lookaway is blessed to have three: Nos. 4, 14, and 18, each a par-4.

► **No. 4, 362 yards.** Framed by wooded areas, the tee shot plays across a narrow stream onto a generous landing area. The approach shot will be short, but must be precise to avoid bunkers placed around the modest green.

► **No. 14, 477 yards,** the longest on the course. With Buckingham Mountain rising in the background and framed by mature trees, the hole plays slightly downhill, but requires two well-placed shots to reach the green.

► **No. 18, 434 yards.** The iconic finishing hole starts with a nearly 200-yard carry over wetlands. The second shot on this dogleg left will be a challenge. Golfers would be wise to take enough club to attempt the approach shot over a second wetlands area, uphill, to the well-bunkered green tucked into the hillside behind the clubhouse. Incidentally, Lookaway's clubhouse dates to the mid-1700s and is believed to be the oldest clubhouse in the country.



In the Spotlight

Lookaway's reputation for exceptional play has attracted not only new members, but also many of the top tournaments locally and statewide. In 2020, for example, Lookaway hosted the inaugural Philadelphia Players Championship, which featured nearly 100 of the top professionals and 10 locally based amateurs. Likewise, when world events halted renovation work at Fox Chapel Golf Club in Pittsburgh early last year, the Pennsylvania Golf Association chose Lookaway to host the 107th Pennsylvania Amateur Championship.

"When the Pennsylvania Golf Association said it was in need of a host site for the PA Amateur, I saw that as a good opportunity for Lookaway," says Michael Little, Lookaway's PGA Head Golf Professional. "It turned out to be a great opportunity for us to showcase our course to the best players in the state. They provided us valuable feedback about the course, atmosphere, and service setting us up to host future major events."

Little had quite a season himself, winning three tournaments last year: the William Hynman III Memorial Classic and the TaylorMade Classic, both in August; and the Golf Association of Philadelphia (GAP) Open Championship in October. He finished second in the 2020 Philadelphia Players Championship on his home course, and won the Philadelphia PGA Player of the Year award.

"There is a sense of pride among Lookaway members knowing their pro can represent

the club well," says Little. "It helps the reputation of the facility. We're a golf club, and we support the game of golf. That's good for the game and our members."

Lookaway will again host the Philadelphia Players Championship in 2021, as well as GAP's Middle-Amateur Championship. GAP Executive Director Mark Peterson says the Philadelphia area has a number of wonderful golf facilities, but "few are as supportive as Lookaway."

"The staff, the facility, the setting all makes Lookaway one of our favorite championship host venues," he adds. "We enjoyed a wonderful Pennsylvania Amateur Championship on very short notice, and look forward to an amazing GAP Mid-Am with more planning. The team at Lookaway is certain to make our championship experience one to remember."

Rising to the Occasion

Besides hosting superlative championship golf last year, the club met the tremendous challenges that arrived with the pandemic. The club integrated a number of thoughtful and sensible safety measures to ensure a low-risk environment for members, staff, and guests, whether for golf, dining, or attending special events. When play resumed May 1st, members embraced their treasured golf retreat as a safe, enduring escape from the outside world.

"We introduced all the recommended mitigation efforts to make golf at Lookaway safe,"

Little says. "We were able to keep players safe, but also maintain the camaraderie players want with their peers. We strived to be a leader in the industry regarding safe practices."

Lookaway's indoor training facility, which is particularly popular when inclement weather restricts play, is another notable addition. Staffed by PGA professionals, the two-bay facility includes a best-in-class golf simulator from industry-leading TrackMan to help members improve aspects of their game. Players can

track their club strokes and ball flights with the most advanced software available. In addition, the facility offers lessons, club fittings, and technology that enables golfers to play some of the world's finest courses (including Lookaway) in stunning virtual detail.

"Our indoor training facility is open six days a week and has gained a lot of traction," Little adds. "We added a new putting green and a second TrackMan simulator. There's full camera equipment for members to get video analysis and club and ball data on each swing. We're really excited about the overall benefit to our membership."

While Lookaway has its eye on the present, it also understands the importance of developing the next generation of golfers. In 2020, Lookaway offered a six-week program for junior golfers. Thirty-six juniors attended, with greater numbers anticipated for 2021. Young golfers learn course etiquette, rules, fundamentals of the swing, and receive unparalleled on-course training. Little says the junior program also teaches younger players essential "life skills," such as sportsmanship and perseverance.

Truly, Lookaway strives to offer everything a golfer might want, be it a seasoned player or a novice: a challenging yet enjoyable course of unsurpassed beauty; opportunities to improve one's game and enjoy the time spent on the course, including a highly regarded caddie program; and the hospitality of a friendly, knowledgeable staff devoted to ensuring the satisfaction of members, their guests, and the future generations.

This may help to explain why their partners embrace the "Lookaway Lifestyle," and why Lookaway has become one of the premier golf clubs in the Philadelphia region. ■



Lookaway's indoor training facility has become popular among members.

Photography courtesy of Lookaway Golf Club



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