

Turning Back The Clo

Needing a 75th birthday facelift, the venerable Donald Ross-designed Penobscot Valley Country Club in Orono is in the midst of a makeover its members believe will again place it among Maine's premier private facilities.

WITH THE CLUBHOUSE BEING demolished around him in September, head pro Colin Gillies said the sacrifice was well worth working out of a trailer for a pro shop and serving food and beverages under a 400-square-foot tent. "Once the course and clubhouse are done we will be a desirable option" for people seeking a private club, he said. "This side of Portland, there is little option for private clubs in Maine."

Designed by the legendary Donald Ross, Penobscot Valley Country Club has been maintained at a high level but has had no major capital projects in many years, Gillies said. "Over time, the bunkers get full of excess sand and lose shape and definition. Plus, more than 30 bunkers got filled in over the years because of the cost of maintenance. The original intent of the design had been lost."

So when members decided they needed a new clubhouse, they also decided a course restoration project was overdue. Their search for a golf course architect to oversee the work ended with Ron Forse of Hopwood, Pa. "We got rave reviews about Ron," Gillies said, "and the Donald Ross Society recommended him highly. He has been first-rate the whole time."

Forse devised a \$1 million, long-range plan for Penobscot Valley, and members voted to undertake it in three stages over five years. The first \$300,000 phase of the work, addressing "big-impact" needs, will be completed by the end of October, according to Forse. That work entails:

- Reconstructing the tees and bunkers on the 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 15th and 17th holes in their entirety.

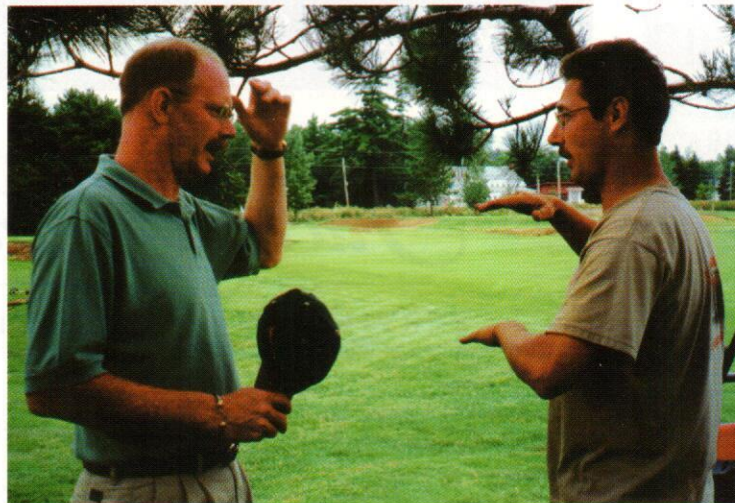
- Rebuilding a number of troublesome bunkers that held water.
- Regrading several fairways plagued with "a washboard effect" in which the contours are a series of bumps.
- Adding eight forward tees to shorten the course for ladies and senior members.

Although club members intend to pursue the next two phases of reconstruction when funding becomes available, Gillies predicted that "they will be so enamored with what they've seen so far, I think the money will be a bit easier to come by in the future. They will see the results and say, 'Wow, that's really something special. I think we need to do more.' It is spectacular what has been done here in a short, short time."

The contractor, Zona & Henderson of Irwin, Pa., which has worked with Forse on several major bunker projects, is "doing better Ross bunkers than just about anyone," the architect said.

Penobscot Valley displays the reasons Ross is considered one of the greatest course architects ever, said Forse, who has restored 24 Ross courses all over the country. "The routing is genius," he said. "Using the topography and wind direction, he created a maximum variety of golf holes. The routing and bunkering especially show his great feel for variety and making people play good strategic golf to score well. He does such things as tipping the slope of the green toward a fairway bunker so that the optimum approach shot must come from a previous shot that risks the sand."

Penobscot Valley, Forse added, wonderfully displays Ross's tendency toward "duet bunkers — couplets of bunkers side by



Ron Forse, left, discusses the depth of the sand to be used in restored bunkers with Chaz Henderson, the project's contractor.

MARK LESLIE