

Club Focus

A Breath of Fresh Air

Fresh Meadow is an engaging, historic layout that is poised to take its rightful place among Long Island's best clubs

BY REED RICHARDSON

In a prime location on Long Island's North Shore sits a small hamlet called Lake Success – an apt hometown for Fresh Meadow Country Club. The club, which hosts this year's Ike Championship on June 26 & 27, has an established track record of beating the odds. It has not only witnessed the rise of some of golf's most legendary names, but more importantly, it won a fight for its survival. While many people have heard of Fresh Meadow, it has been out of the spotlight for several decades, and few are familiar with its intricacies and charms. But now, as the most prestigious amateur stroke-play championship in the Met Area visits Fresh Meadow for the first time, the club has the chance to reintroduce itself to legions of new fans.

The Early Days: Queens

The final hole of the 1930 PGA Championship at Fresh Meadow Country Club was nothing but heartbreak for golf legend Gene Sarazen. Tied with Tommy Armour after 35 holes of match play, Sarazen hooked his drive on the par-four 18th into the rough and dumped his approach into a greenside bunker. He then

watched anxiously as his blast out of the sand rolled a perilous 10 feet beyond the hole. When his subsequent par putt slid past the cup, the Wanamaker Trophy went to Armour. While it was surprising that Sarazen, a notoriously strong finisher, faltered down the stretch, the bigger shock was that his miscues occurred at Fresh Meadow, where Sarazen had been the club professional since 1925.

The very fact that Fresh Meadow Country Club, which had only been incorporated in 1922, was able to attract a three-time major winner like Sarazen to be its head pro was a testament to both the pedigree of its golf course and the stature of its founders. These founders included Benjamin C. Ribman, a leader of Brooklyn's Unity Club, the largest Jewish community group in the United States, and Nathan Jones, president of the Manufacturers Trust Company. Together, they convinced

Fresh Meadow's stately clubhouse sits atop a hill overlooking the course.

Gene Sarazen was only 23 when he became head pro at Fresh Meadow, but he had already won three majors.

100 other prominent New Yorkers to join with them in building a world-class country club on 106 acres of farmland in eastern Queens. And when it came time to lay out their course, they spared no expense, hiring renowned golf course architect A.W. Tillinghast, who at that point had completed Baltusrol, Somerset Hills and Quaker Ridge, and would soon draw up plans for both the West and East courses at Winged Foot.

Despite Tillie's multiple projects, he was able to get the first nine holes at Fresh Meadow ready for play in May of 1922, and the full par-70 course formally opened on June 15, 1923 – one day before Tillie appeared at Winged Foot's opening day. Fresh Meadow immediately joined the pantheon of great Met Area courses, and by its 10th anniversary it had already played host to the 1930 PGA Championship and the 1932 U.S. Open.

During the next decade, however, the club struggled against the one-two punch of the Great Depression and the ensuing postwar development boom that enveloped Queens. Even the high-profile Goodall Round Robin events – match play exhibitions played at Fresh Meadow from 1939 to 1941, which lured in the likes of Ben Hogan, Sam Snead and Wal-



COURTESY USGA

The first hole (below) tumbles downhill to a wide landing area.

ter Hagen – weren't enough to reverse the club's financial fortunes. So, in early 1946, Fresh Meadow sold its Queens property to New York Life, which converted the site into



COURTESY OF FRESH MEADOW CC



The walk from tee to green on No. 13 (far right) takes players through an island pagoda (above).

a sprawling retail and residential complex for its thousands of employees. With the proceeds from the sale, Fresh Meadow purchased the financially strapped Lakeville Club in nearby Lake Success, and the members had a new location for their beloved club.



JIM KRAJICEK

The Current Course

Similar to Tillinghast's original Fresh Meadow layout in Queens, the Lakeville Club's initial golf course architects – Charles Alison and H.S. Colt,

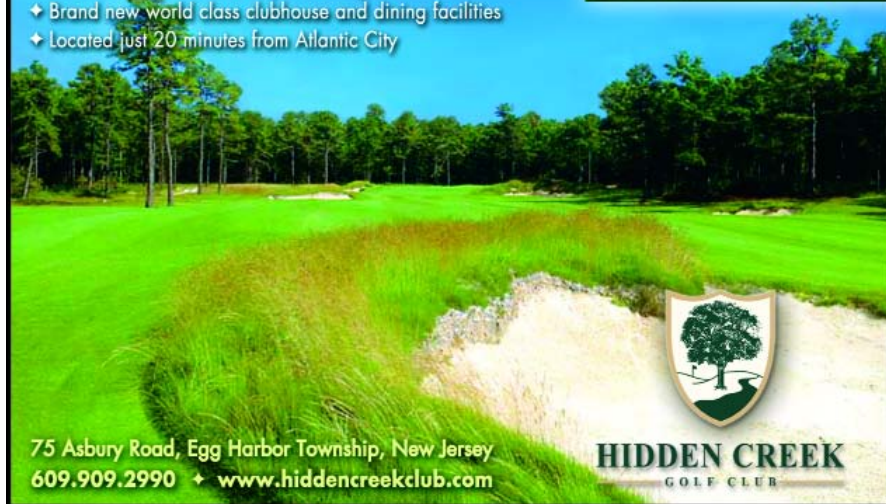
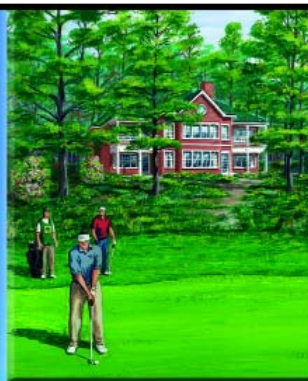
who completed the course in 1925 – designed a par-70 layout that favored par threes and long par fours. (In a strange coincidence, Nathan Jones, one of Fresh Meadow's founders, had also been instrumental in obtaining the land used to create the Lakeville Club and golf course.) After some minor renovations and course lengthening, today's Fresh Meadow, formerly Lakeville, plays to a relatively modest 6,700 yards. But with a course and slope rating of 72.7 and 138, it is more difficult than the yardage suggests.

"It's all right there in front of you, laid out very beautifully," current head professional Charlie Bolling says about Fresh Meadow. "It isn't terribly deceptive, and you can hit your driver on almost every hole." But Bolling cautions that while long hitters may have an advantage off the tee, the players who can best handle Fresh Meadow's quick greens, nearly every one of which slopes back to front, will be the ones circling their scores. In other words, "stay below the hole," says Bolling. It's an old golf adage, but one that is imperative at Fresh Meadow.

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The most memorable holes at Fresh Meadow include the par-three 13th, with its quaint footbridges and island pagoda, as well as the home hole, with its wave-like bunkering. Most club members find a pair of long par fours – the dogleg-left 12th and the dogleg-right 3rd holes – to be the course's biggest challenges. The 12th plays 454 yards uphill to a green partially protected by a lake, while the 3rd hole slopes downhill and is particularly unforgiving

of approach shots that don't hold the green. "You could put the 3rd hole on any PGA Tour course," says Bolling, a former Tour player himself. "It's that tough." Ike competitors, be warned.

Championship History

Not long after his wrenching defeat at the 1930 PGA Championship, Sarazen resigned from Fresh Meadow. The club had been awarded the U.S. Open in 1932, and Sarazen wanted to avoid once again falling victim to the "home-pro jinx." But Sarazen didn't go to just any club. In yet another interesting coincidence connecting the former and latter-day versions of Fresh Meadow, Sarazen ended up taking the head professional job at Lakeville, foreshadowing the club's relocation nearly 15 years later. And whether credit belongs to superstition or his newly invented sand wedge, Sarazen's return to Fresh Meadow for the 1932 U.S. Open produced exactly the results he was seeking. He won the tournament by three strokes, shooting 70-66 in the final two rounds.

Although that was the last time one of golf's major championships would visit Fresh Meadow, the club was the site of the 1938 Met Open, the 1942 Metropolitan PGA Championship (won by Winged Foot head pro Craig Wood), as well as a unique, two-day match between Sam Snead and Byron Nelson in 1945 (they played to a draw). After moving from Queens, the newly situated Fresh Meadow hosted the 1971 Met Open and the MGA Senior Open.

The Future

The Ike Championship, presented by Canon, USA, is traditionally the most popular MGA tournament for individual players. The talented field of roughly 110 players will try their best to prevent 20-year-old Andrew Giuliani from defending his 2005 title.

"The guys in the Ike will be able to rip drivers everywhere," Fresh Meadow pro Bolling notes, "but it's the players who manage their approach shots the best and putt well who will have the best chance to win." And in the town of Lake Success, winning is what gets you remembered. ■

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