



Brantford green 16.

# Golf Course Renovations

## RIVERMEAD & BRANTFORD G&CC

*Written by and photos provided by Jamie Knorr, Superintendent, Rivermead GC & Stephen Hicks, Superintendent, Brantford G&CC.*

Following a relative lull in course improvements pre-Covid, a recent surge in course renovations have kept maintenance teams, course architects, and construction crews very busy the past few seasons. Two individual projects spanning several seasons provide a unique look into recent renovation work in the area as well as some 'watchouts' for golf clubs looking to undertake a major construction project in the near future.

### RIVERMEAD GOLF CLUB

The primary goal of the Rivermead Golf Club renovation was to create an aesthetically pleasing and playable design for club members while remaining manageable by the turf management team. Creating and implementing a well-designed course would prove profitable in numerous ways in the years to come.

Renovating a golf course is not for the faint of heart. Garnering support from the board and club members, effective communication, and trust between all the key participants are necessary to see any project to fruition. Otherwise, the project has a good chance of being compromised.

Hiring the right architect and contractor is hugely influential on the success of the project. We were extremely fortunate to work with two professionals who knew their "stuff" and who were more than willing to work together in order to seek perfection.

One primary goal of the project was to reduce the size of the bunkers to minimize daily maintenance and reflect course design that would have been more common in the early 1900s. New fairway contouring was implemented in order to provide straighter fairway lines for sight views and maintenance. The goal is to challenge the lower handicap players, while improving the pace of play and enjoyment for higher handicap players. New forward tees were built which play to a distance of 4710 yds, while several new back tees were built lengthening the course to 6715 yds. Necessary drainage work was completed along with upgraded irrigation around all greens complexes as well as improved fairway irrigation and rough irrigation.

### MY ADVICE, OR CAUTIOUS TALES, TO THE READERS ARE:

- 1. Be flexible. No, seriously, **always be malleable.**** If the costs are the same, and the product can be improved by changes, then do whatever it takes to create the best product – not the best spreadsheet.
- 2. Be a great communicator.** You will need to set aside more time than you have ever expected to ensure you get the correct points across to all stakeholders.
- 3. It is an absolute grind. Every. Day. Go off** property to see another golf course or take a long weekend in the middle of a project (if able), as a fresh set of eyes definitely improved my disposition.
- 4. Finally, and possibly most importantly... if you can avoid it, do not start a project with the birth of your first child and end with the birth of your second child.** My wife is a saint, and she deserves a lot of praise for putting up with all this grass nonsense.

The onslaught of unpredictable weather patterns, numerous repercussions of the pandemic, difficulty in hiring quality staff, and an increase in cost of materials and labour all contributed to constant delays and re-evaluating next steps in moving forward. Remaining fiscally responsible is never an easy task, and it is essential if one is to deliver a prosperous outcome. We were fortunate to keep within our budget outlines, but it did not come without challenge. On top of all of



*Hole #17, Rivermead, green complex after renovation work.*



*Hole #16, Brantford.*



*Hole #17, Rivermead, green complex during renovations work.*



*Hole #7, Brantford.*



*Rivermead staff sodding #5 fairway.*



*Hole #9, Brantford.*

these challenges was our intent to maintain a full functioning playable course for members. Two holes were constructed in the fall of 2018, two more in the fall of 2019, two holes in the summer of 2021, eight holes in 2022, and four holes in 2023. Only on rare occasions was a hole altered with temporary pins or forward tees.

Ultimately, it was decided some tasks would be completed in-house and by project's end, over 1000 pallets of sod were laid by our team, equal to 14 full-size football fields. Validation and appreciation of the crew's effort kept our team coming in on a daily basis and for that we are extremely grateful. Without their dedication and attention to detail, this project would not have succeeded as well as it did.

The success of this project with the essential team leaders (architect Jeff Mingay and Dan Lacroix of Lacroix Golf Creations INC.) who listened and responded intently to me and my role as superintendent. The ability to work together, listening to each other's ideas and thoughts were a major contributing factor to the success of this renovation. No one person was more important than another, and we all had the same end goal in mind. The incredible support and trust that came from management and the Board of Directors, along with the encouraging words that came from the members on a daily basis was invaluable to our crew. A host of gratitude goes out to my team, the Board of Directors, and our members throughout this entire process.

## BRANTFORD GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB

The original scope of the club was to explore a potential bunker renovation at Brantford G&CC with the goal to reduce bunker maintenance costs and provide a cohesive appearance to all the bunkers. The last renovation was completed in three phases with a complete change in aesthetics during the final phase. Our renovation committee

was interested in two things: grass-faced bunkers with flat floors and solicited Canadian architects only. Of that group, there was unanimous support for selecting Rod Whitman and Keith Cutten.

As planning for the project continued, I shared with the committee that our current irrigation infrastructure would be thirty years old by the time the project started, and that expanding a satellite-based system with existing mainline valves would be riddled with potentially expensive issues. Therefore, the committee agreed to explore an irrigation system replacement, including the pumping station with the help of Tim Fredericks and Future Green Irrigation. At the outset of the work, there was only one green set to be completely rebuilt – hole 17, as it drained significantly worse than any other on the property. By the end of the project that began in June of 2021 with the creation of a 19<sup>th</sup> hole green, (now significantly completed as of the end of October 2023), the club now features five new greens in play on a day-to-day basis. As with any project, there were mitigating factors that forced changes to original plans, though overall little sacrifice was made to playability, layout, or agronomy.

Our club was very fortunate to have locked in pricing for the irrigation renovation in early 2021, as the total cost for that component of the project was \$3.2 million. Working with an excellent installer made the project go smoothly, even when there were bumps along the road. Kudos to Shawn Gill and his team, as they were flexible working with the club, as Whitman, Axland, and Cutten (WAC Golf) are a design-build firm. So, while there were plans drawn and budgets created based on those plans, the architects and their shapers always were focused on building the best possible features on site. This included many changes to the original plans (i.e., five more new greens). In that regard, the contractors were responsible for installation of all materials and our responsibilities were the immediate maintenance of those newly installed features. ■