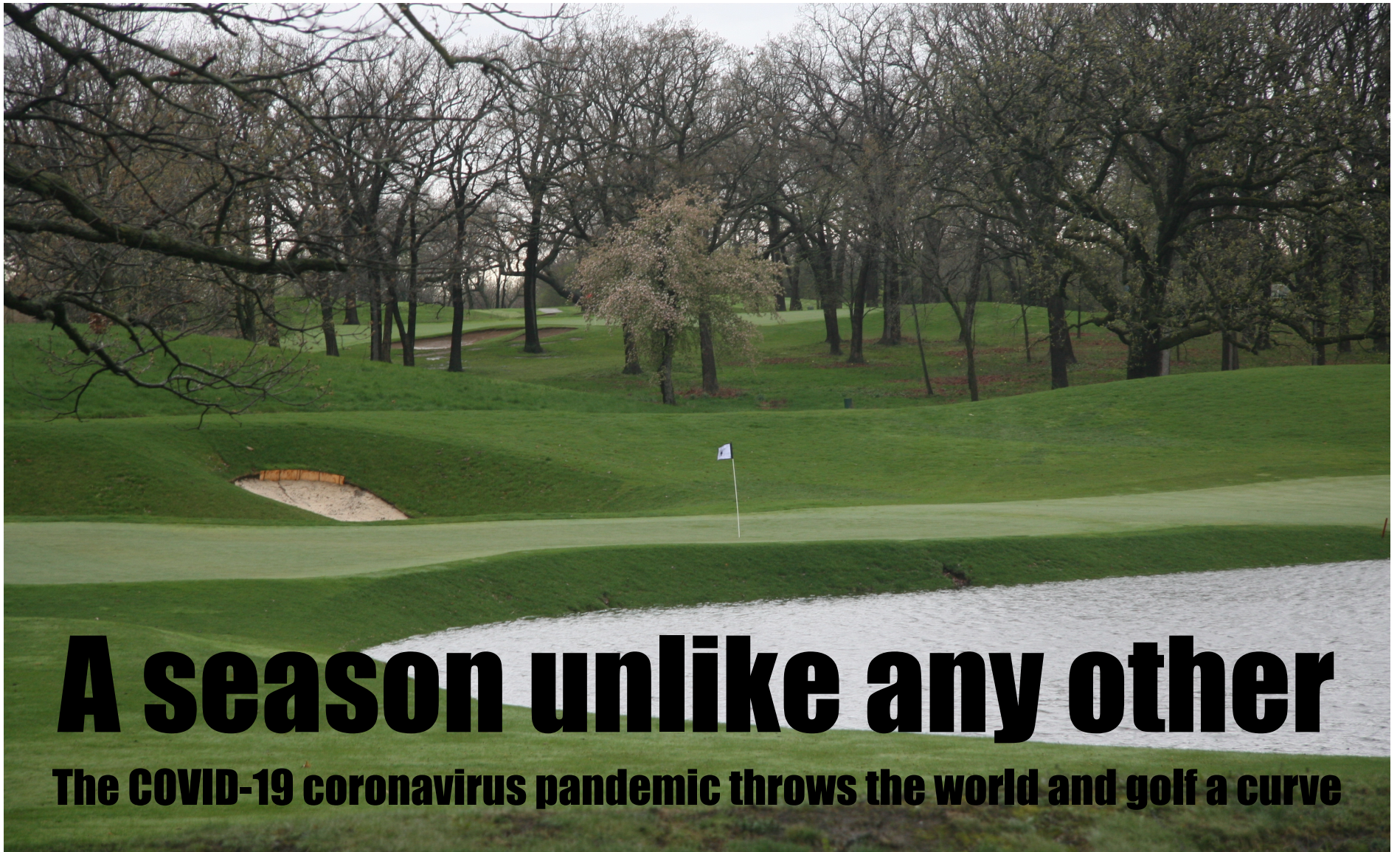


Inside: Golf gears back up • Long drive to Cog Hill

ILLINOIS GOLFER

DIGITAL EDITION

APRIL 2020



A season unlike any other

The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic throws the world and golf a curve

The Buzz

New owner for Flossmoor

The golf course at Flossmoor Country Club is one of the great subtle tests in American golf. It won't kill you with length, but put a tee shot or an approach in the wrong place and you can break out in a cold sweat trying to find a way to save par – or bogey.

The quality of the course and the usual amenities of a country club – fine food, a cool pool, tennis courts on the other side of the parking lot – weren't enough to keep the membership at what had largely been a town club humming in recent years. A superb refurbishing of the course by **Ray Hearn** didn't bring in too many newcomers.

Flossmoor was down to 39 members when it was sold to a group headed by a trio of **Goich** brothers, including **George** and **David**, the former a pro, the latter the president of Olympia Fields when it hosted the 2003 U.S. Open, over the winter. The name was tweaked – it's Flossmoor Golf Club now – and the focus will be on golf. Lunch will be served, and the pool will open eventually for those who wish to pay, but the dinner and banquet business is out.

"We will grow the correct way," said George Goich, who went to high school

at Thornwood but didn't get into golf until graduating from Southern Illinois.

The pro with 30 years under his belt is running the operation. Before the pandemic, his was aiming high, hoping to build the membership of the now golf-only club back to 250 over time. Whatever the original timetable was, it has to be longer now.

Former members can rejoin without paying the \$12,000 initiation fee. Dues are \$700 a month, \$500 for seniors.

CASHING IN: Upshot of the extended TV deal between the PGA Tour and CBS and NBC/Golf Channel: The BMW and the other playoff tournaments will alternate between NBC and CBS, with the Eye net getting the playoffs in 2023-25-27-29. And with the hefty rights fees increase, watch for more ads and less golf. The nine-year pact, worth \$700 million annually, takes effect next year.

ALSO BUZZING: Congrats to longtime Cog Hill general manager **Nick Mokolke** on a well-deserved retirement. Now he can cook a pork chop sandwich for himself. **Troy Newport** is the new guy running the big plant on Archer Ave. after a year under Mokolke's wing. New at Cog: TopTracer for the practice center. Cog is the first outdoor range with it, matching Mistwood's indoor dome.

COVER PHOTO: DUBSDREAD'S 18TH / TIM CRONIN

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THE CALENDAR WILL RESUME ONCE A FIRM SCHEDULE FOR TOURNAMENT PLAY IS ESTABLISHED.

TECHNICAL PROBLEMS HAVE PROHIBITED THE REPRODUCTION OF THE DIRECTORY IN THIS ISSUE. THEY ALSO ACCOUNT FOR THE SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT STYLE FOR THIS ISSUE.

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The Grill Room

A year beyond category

The greatest hopes and worst fears are seldom realized, the saying goes.

Then 2020 came along. Stealthily, it dragged along the first worldwide pandemic in 101 years. The novel coronavirus that begets COVID-19 was on nobody's dance card on New Year's Day, when promises not to be kept were made in every time zone.

The pandemic proved to be a keeper.

It was just a problem for an unknown city in China, until it wasn't, and then it was everywhere, including around the corner from all of us, if not closer.

Golf is an extraneous activity, a mere novelty, when doctors and nurses are fighting to save the lives of previously healthy patients, if not their own. Saving par pales in comparison. Lower a handicap? Sorry, pal, first let's flatten the curve.

That may be happening, albeit slowly, for limited golf play comes back to Illinois on May 1, and that wasn't about to happen unless the numbers were encouraging.

Call it Happy Friday, no matter what the weather, for golfers good and otherwise are champing at the bit to play the game they love without going to Indiana, Wisconsin or Iowa.

The first and last-named states allowed their courses to stay open. Wisconsin allowed courses to reopen on April 24.

So Illinois comes to the party late, but at least arrives, and carefully. A twosome every quarter hour, walking, will keep people apart, but it will also keep most every course in the red.

Late March and April was bad enough, with nary a player allowed on a course – Pekin Country Club tried to open and was told to close – for over a month.

There is no instruction book for a pandemic, especially one where the federal government does nothing to combat it for the first month. Golf, like the rest of us, has had to fend for itself. Schedules from the PGA Tour to the 9-hole league at the local munis have been shredded. Equipment – all the cool new toys guaranteed for the 54th year in a row to be the best in history – gathers dust in pro shops from Maine to Maui.

Golden Tee is probably the only winner in all this.

Cynics abound, believing the restrictions on the number of players and so on have been designed so people will violate them, allowing Gov. J.B. Pritzker to pull the plug and send hackers back home to the honey-do lists. The same chatter is going on in other states, other governors the targets, and sounds as lame there as here.

What this is is a start. If the curve doesn't rise, if golfers and boaters and hunters keep their distance, you'll see tee times closer together, foursomes allowed, carts ready to ride, and we'll get closer to normal. Maybe that comes in June. Maybe July.

Nobody knows.

The plan is for spectators to be allowed to attend the John Deere Classic, the first tournament on the PGA Tour with fans after four are played with only birds and squirrels in the gallery. Will that happen?

Will the BMW Championship go off on its rescheduled dates in August? Will the Ryder Cup really be played in Wisconsin with thousands attending from Europe?

Will the second wave be worse than that first? That was the case with the so-called Spanish Flu of 1918-19. If so, doesn't golf, every other sport, and most businesses shut down again?

Maybe there will be a vaccine more quickly than the 12-18 months that have been touted. Maybe it takes four years, as it did for mumps in the last century. Or seven years, the case with polio, once studies got on track.

We only know that a year like this has not been seen in our lifetimes, and that we don't want to see it again. Whether you venture out to play golf soon or not, stay safe.

Play (far) away, please

Golf allowed to resume during stay-at-home order

BY TIM CRONIN
REPORTING FROM CHICAGO

Flagsticks are in the cups at Cog Hill and many other courses in Illinois on the eve of the resumption of golf in the state.

That's the good news for golfers.

The bad news is the amount and range of the restrictions placed on players and courses when play resumes on Fri., May 1.

The key points:

- Twosomes only.
- Fifteen-minute separation of tee times.
- No motor carts, except for the disabled.
- The player has to provide his own pull cart.
- No practice areas – putting green, chipping green or range.
- Food and beverage service only as a take-away item. You can eat on the course but not by the clubhouse.
- No sales of any golf items. If you run out of balls after nine holes, tough luck.
- No caddies, which will mostly affect private clubs.

The resumption of golf, which, except for a brief period, has been prohibited by the original and subsequent stay-at-home orders ordered by Gov. J.B. Pritzker beginning March 21, is part of the new stay-at-home order running through the end of May.

Boating and hunting – the latter if in season – are also allowed, classified, as golf now is, as outdoor recreation. Golf had been in the nonessential business category.

Boaters and hunters are also in the twosome category, which is why that limit, at least at the start, will also apply to golf.

Only eight players will go off the tee per hour, putting a major crimp in both the ability of players to play and of courses to bring in revenue. That's about a quarter of the usual volume, and when the lack of motor cart and restaurant revenue is factored in, the average course may bring in about 20 percent of the usual revenue. Running tee times from 7 a.m. through 4:30 p.m. would put 80 players on the course. With sunset at 7:50 p.m. on Friday and players playing in three hours or less, that



Tim Cronin / Illinois Golfer

READY, SET GO! The sign at Water's Edge in Worth announces the reopening of the game.

would be about the maximum number of players.

“We’re all gonna get beat up this year,” said Mark Haines, owner of Lincoln Oaks Golf Course in south suburban Crete. “In another month or so, it could get really bad. Golf courses today rely on leagues and outings. How can we do leagues with eight players an hour?”

He also saw no reason to prohibit practice.

“It’s asinine,” Haines said. “You can’t go to the practice green or the chipping green. At White Hawk (in Crown Point, Ind.), they had six different stations and you weren’t near anyone. So you can’t properly loosen up.”

Haines wrote on Lincoln Oaks’ Facebook page that it cost him \$4,250 a day to run the course, adding “Allow 4 somes and now we can come close to paying some bills.”

Haines’ experience at White Hawk, where he counted 103 Illinois license plates among 176 vehicles the day he played, was not unusual. Illinoisans have been flocking to courses in Indiana, which never closed them as part of its stay-at-home order. Michigan residents also crossed the border to play in the Hoosier state. In western Illinois, players crossed the Mississippi River to play in Iowa, though in Davenport, the city-controlled courses allowed only Iowa residents to play.

Pritzker’s original stay-at-home order, crafted by the state’s medical experts, had golf on the prohibited list. In mid-afternoon on Wed., March 25, that order was interpreted to allow golf, given the large amount of open

Chronology of golf in a pandemic

March 21 Illinois, Michigan – golf prohibited

March 24 Wisconsin – golf prohibited

March 24 Illinois – golf allowed

From the original executive order: “If a golf course opens, the clubhouse must remain closed, it may not provide food or beverage service, including food or beverage cart service, or allow the use of golf carts by golfers. Only online or telephone scheduling is allowed. Golfers and staff must observe social distancing guidelines while at the golf course.”

March 26 Illinois – golf prohibited

April 24 Wisconsin – golf allowed

April 27 Michigan – golf allowed

May 1 Illinois – golf allowed

Illinois play is restricted to twosomes.

space a course occupies and the relatively small number of people who are playing at one time, even with foursomes. For about 36 hours, that was the case. On Thur., March 26, the lid came down again, matching orders in Michigan and Wisconsin.

All the while, the state’s major golf organizations, led by the Chicago District Golf Association and Illinois PGA, were pushing Pritzker’s office to reverse the ban and allow golf to be played as close to normal as possible.

“When we started looking at this, the idea was just to point out there’s a natural social

distancing to golf, it’s an outdoor activity,” CDGA executive director Robert Markionni said. “They do want people to get out and do things. In March, it didn’t matter much because the weather was lousy. Now, you get into May, we just kept trying to point out that golf is an activity that can be played outdoors with natural social distancing, and it should be classified as an outdoor activity, not as a non-essential business.

“That was the baseline argument. Then the ancillary arguments: It is exercise. It is a step back to normalcy for those who play the game. We all want to do stuff that we were doing before. If you can go out and play golf, I don’t care if it’s three holes or six holes or nine holes, you’re bringing something back in, giving people an opportunity to do something. And a million people in this state are golfers.”

Golf as a cure for cabin fever seemed to be a good argument.

“We weren’t trying to say golf should be treated special,” Markionni said. “We were just trying to simply say golf should be part of the solution and really isn’t part of the problem.”

Carrie Williams, executive director of the Illinois PGA and co-leader with Markionni of the effort to restart the game, noted adherence to the guidelines will be critical.

“We provided our thoughts, and we knew it would be vetted by their medical team,” Williams said.

“It is our hope that anyone violating the guidelines would be penalized on a facility-by-

facility basis. But it is our concern that if there are multiple violators or infractions, that golf could be taken off the table for all.”

Williams said some 30 to 40 percent of Illinois PGA members had either been furloughed or were working on maintenance staffs, mowing fairways and the like, as courses tried to at least keep their facility close to golf ready during the five weeks they were closed. Many of those days, especially in the northern half of Illinois, weren't golf-worthy, but a golf course eats money every day.

A CDGA staffer predicted precisely what Illinois would do when the ban on golf was lifted. On April 15, downstate-based senior director of field operations Rick LeHew told the Olney Daily Mail he believed play should be returned with walking twosomes, starting 15 minutes apart, with raised cups and no bunker rakes.

“Foursomes, you have guys standing around at the tee and on the putting green, too close to each other,” LeHew told the paper, advocating for “touchless” golf as much as possible while speaking only for himself, not the CDGA.

That's the idea behind the order to leave the flagstick in place, as well as the banning of carts.

“The idea is to eliminate all touches,” LeHew said. “Golf courses are not equipped to issue carts to every person and limit them to one person per cart. And you'd have to clean the cart each time it's used. No touches. So you eliminate it.”

The fine print in the order

- Phone or online reservations only – no walkup play.
- No water fountains or on-course coolers can be put out by the course.
- No tournament play, as it would cause players to remain by the clubhouse.
- Only indoor access by players would be for restrooms.
- Players should change shoes in the parking lot.
- “Social” distancing of 6 feet or more at all times.

In Indiana, carts are allowed – one player per cart unless there are family members – and they're cleaned after each use. So it can be done, though there have been cart shortages, with some players waiting for a cart to be brought back from the 18th green, then cleaned, before it's been available.

Losing play in March and April, typically poor weather months, was painful, but every day in May brings with it the prospect of better weather, and to be closed would mean revenue never to be recovered.

The restrictions aside, a spot check conducted by Illinois Golfer could find no privately-owned courses that were not opening.

The Chicago Park District courses are staying closed, following Mayor Lori Lightfoot's closure of parks and beaches in general, but the Cook County Forest Preserve District's courses are reopening.

As they qualify as small businesses, some course owners applied for the emergency grant/loans from Washington.

Brian Broderick, owner of Carriage Greens Country Club in Darien, said he received \$6,000 of the \$55,000 he requested. He was livid when he saw the two pages of restrictions that accompanied the right to reopen his business.

“They're bullshit, a Band-Aid on a gushing wound,” Broderick said. “These rules are absolutely insane and ridiculous.”

Broderick also lashed out at the Illinois PGA and Chicago District Golf Association, which had been lobbying Pritzker's office for a lifting of the ban.

“We're done with them,” Broderick said. “We're not paying any more monthly fees. I don't know how many people they had in Springfield banging on the door, but you don't get any points for trying. You get points for results.”

“I see zero value in these associations. No one even tried to contact me.”

The revised stay-at-home order carries with it a caveat. Should there be a spike in infections, everything being opened, golf courses and some state parks included, could be closed down. The same may be true if potential spot checks show courses or areas around clubhouses are overcrowded. Golfers are – as they are filling out their scorecards – on the honor system.

What real golfer can't handle that?

Big hitters coming to Cog Hill

World Long Drive Championship still on

BY TIM CRONIN

REPORTING FROM LEMONT, ILLINOIS

They think big at Cog Hill. They always have.

“I had to innovate,” Joe Jemsek said on more than one occasion regarding his stewardship, first at St. Andrews and eventually at Cog Hill.

He said that as the man who created a country club setting for the public golfer, from the carpet he loved to replace in the clubhouse to the quality conditions on Cog Hill No. 4.

Jemsek built No. 4 with the hope it would someday host a major championship. The Western Open settled there, and the U.S. Amateur, which purists still regard as a major, played through in 1997.

The Jemsek family is thinking big again. Presuming the pandemic abates, Cog Hill hosts the World Long Drive Championship from Sept. 3-9, doing so on a specially-built grid on the southeast side of Archer Ave.

You might be able to land a Piper Cub on the grid. It’s going to be 750 yards long.

That’s long enough to accept Joe Jemsek’s famed 501-yard drive off the top of the sky ride

during the 1934 Century of Progress exhibition. Jemsek won that World’s Fair contest against other local pros by smacking a fade that rode the wind while others hit hooks, which the wind knocked down – 630 feet down.

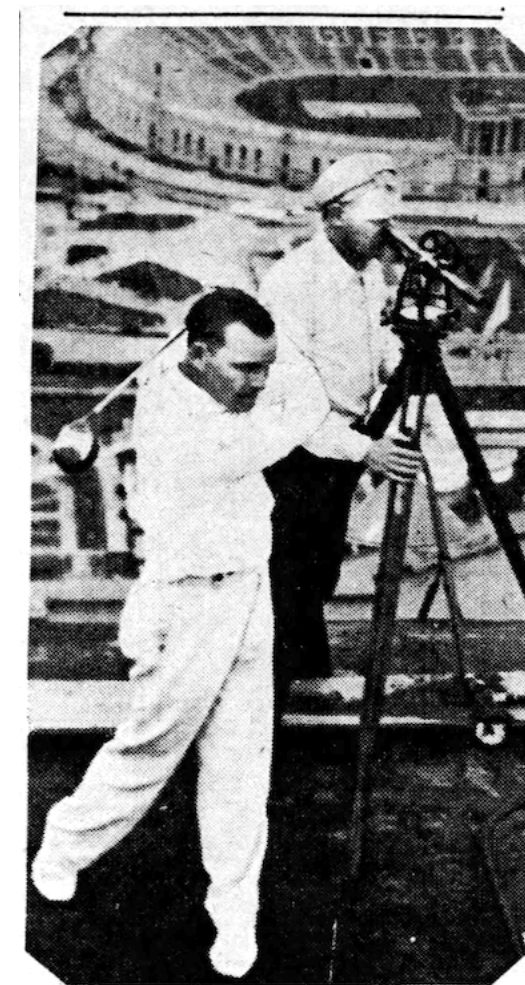
“Long drive contests are in our blood,” said Cog Hill president Katherine Jemsek, Joe’s granddaughter. “We look forward to welcoming fans, sports enthusiasts as well as competitors to historic Cog Hill in September.”

The rest of the World Long Drive season has been cancelled, said World Long Drive Association executive director Matt Farrell.

“The WLD Tour is a global sport, so we also had to weigh many global travel restrictions, border closings, state of disaster and more across the world,” Farrell said. “We understand this is a heavy toll.”

Moving into Chicago, home of several long drive competitors, was important to the sponsoring WLDA.

“Coming off a memorable 2019 season, we’re expanding our commitment to global development of the sport through broader qualifying series that includes expansion in Asia and in other parts of the world,” Farrell said when the deal was announced.



Illinois Golfer Archives

BOOM! With Soldier Field in the background, Joe Jemsek unleashes his 501-yard drive during the 1934 World’s Fair.

AROUND ILLINOIS

Toll on courses could be heavy

BY TIM CRONIN

REPORTING FROM CHICAGO

As a sport, golf is in fine shape. It's on a run closing in on 600 years.

As a business, it's been difficult since 9/11. The attack on America sent people from the golf course to the office to boost productivity. The Great Recession of 2007-08 kept them there – if they were still employed.

Courses suffered. The golf boom that saw a never-ending increase in U.S. courses ended abruptly. Now it's a good year when only a few courses close.

The last newly-built public course in the Chicago area was Bowes Creek in Elgin, in 2009. This is the longest stretch without a new public course since the game arrived here.

In contrast, the longest recent stretch was six years between new courses – the public Pistakee Country Club in McHenry in 1941 and Hickory Knoll Golf Course in Lake Villa in 1947 – thanks to World War II.

Now comes the coronavirus COVID-19, the most contagious pandemic scourge in over a century. How many courses will not open this year, and perhaps never again, will be tallied as the year goes on.

An early casualty was the Railside Golf Club in Gibson City. It had closed in 2016, then reopened under new ownership that converted it to a 12-hole course and sold off the other land.

Railside's owners decided in early March to close the course again – before the coronavirus' spread prompted the first stay-at-home order in Illinois. Some 200 memberships were needed to keep the course functioning, the *Champaign News-Gazette* reported.

Earlier this year, Joliet Golf Club – renamed from Joliet Country Club before last season – was closed by its owners after a year as a public-private hybrid operation, and offered for sale as land for warehouses. Thus ends a history going back to 1906, when it opened as the Union League Country Club.

A handful of other downstate courses had already closings in advance of the pandemic.

Stone Creek in Urbana, the area's most upscale public layout, closed at the end of January, with the land the course is on – winding through a residential area – planned for conversion to parkland.

A few exits to the south on Interstate 57, two more courses are no more. Rogala Public Links in Mattoon closed at the end of 2019,

while Norton Knolls Golf Course in Oakland, near Charleston, shut its doors after a half-century of play.

Norton Knolls co-owner Kyle Willison said he might plant industrial hemp on half of the 65-acre property.

"It's just another cash crop that has come to Illinois," Willison, a licensed hemp grower, told the *Mattoon-Charleston Journal-Gazette and Times-Courier*.

In Wisconsin, a trio of courses in the northern half of the state have closed, two for at least for this year and one for good. Telemark Lodge Golf Course in Cable is closed for at least this year, though nearby co-owned Spider Lake Golf Resort will remain open. Egg Harbor golf fixture Alpine Lodge and Resort, a 36-hole complex near Green Bay, won't open this season. In Menomonie, Tanglewood Greens Golf Course is closing permanently, owner Raj Call announced.

People

Condolences to the family and many friends of Dan Manoyan, a Wisconsin-based golf writer who died at 69 on April 20. He was a fine writer, diligent reporter, and kept you laughing on and off the course. All who knew him will miss him.