



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 25, 2018

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Wanakah Country Club prepares to host the 35th New York State Mid-Amateur and highlight its recently renovated golf course.

HAMBURG, N.Y. –Wanakah Country Club, which was founded in 1899 and designed by William Watson, commands sweeping views of Lake Erie and Canada to the North and downtown Buffalo to the East. This week September 28th - 30th Wanakah will play host to the best golfers throughout the state of New York age 25 and above. It is the first time since 1999 that Wanakah will host a state “major”. Several of Western New York’s top golfers, including Wanakah’s own three-time Club Champion, Jamie Miller who won the State Mid-Am in 2014 will be competing against the best players from as far away as Long Island. “It is a real honor to host such a prestigious event on our newly renovated golf course” said Pete Augustine, Wanakah’s President.

“Even before the renovations, Wanakah was a very good golf course,” said Andrew Hickey, Director of Rules and Competitions at the NYSGA. “But it’s clear that the club prioritized improvements that as a whole elevated the course layout to one of the best in Western New York. Our players are going to enjoy the course and the test that Wanakah will provide.”

Over 300 of New York’s top amateur golfers (25 & older) attempted to qualify for the championship at one of ten sectional qualifiers hosted by member clubs around the various regions of the state (Eligible players must have Handicap Index of 9.4 or less). Of those participants, the top-128 advanced to this year’s championship and will attempt to inscribe their name on the prestigious Bob Hogan Memorial Trophy throughout 54 holes of stroke play.

If it were not for the recent renovation the course may not have attracted such a high caliber event. “The course sits on relatively flat coastline and was constructed on heavy clay soil, so drainage was poor which resulted in agronomic and playability challenges”, said Rich Gladhill, Wanakah’s Grounds Superintendent.

Those challenges were addressed in 2005 when the club created a master plan in conjunction with renowned golf course architect Arthur Hills and then partner Chris Wilczynski. That plan was revamped four years later and this year, Michigan golf course architect Chris Wilczynski, ASGCA has completed the renovation of the entire 18-hole course to the overwhelming delight of the club's membership.

“The main reason for the master plan in the first place was to improve the drainage on the golf course,” Wilczynski said. “The property is fairly flat with heavy clay soils, so drainage was always the issue. It was always about drainage and trying to improve the conditions and allow for more days to play golf.”

Extensive drainage and irrigation work was completed, tees were added to lengthen and shorten the course, greens were expanded, bunkers were rebuilt and repositioned, fairways were contoured and approximately 500 trees were removed so the course’s views of Lake Erie now are even more impressive. “It has been a lot of fun to watch and help orchestrate the transformation of the property,”

Wilczynski added. "From our original vision to the completion of the last hole this past spring, the project has been very rewarding!"

"There were years when carts could not be used for weeks at a time," said Mike Karnath, who is in his fifth year as Wanakah's General Manager and Chief Operating Officer. "Now we have carts daily, regardless of the amount of rain."

"Chris has transformed a few pedestrian holes into holes that now really wow those who play," Karnath added. "Some good holes became great and some great holes became spectacular. The course is challenging for scratch players yet fair for high handicappers. We have also received an increase in demand from state and local golf associations to host events."

Wilczynski also was able to complete the work without having to close the golf course. "This was a unique project in that we didn't shut the course down to implement the plan," he said. "The members didn't want to lose the golf course. We worked initially with Eagle Golf Construction and then with TDI Golf Construction for the renovation work. The collaboration and teamwork between all parties involved allowed us to phase the work over a period with the least impact possible to play and maintenance of the course." This is a good case study for how a project can be completed in this manner," Wilczynski added.

Most of the work was done in the spring and autumn shoulder seasons, keeping the course playable throughout the prime summer season. "Our season is short in western New York," Karnath said. "We wanted to offer members the ability to play and enjoy the course and not lose a full year."

Earlier in the season Wanakah dedicated an elaborate pedestal clock to commemorate the completion of the master plan.

"Everyone has been thrilled," Karnath said. "The course now has great playability regardless of the season and it really makes you think about all shots. Overall, everyone who plays leaves smiling."

Wanakah is excited see how the best golfers in the state will fare on its newly renovated course. "With our location right on the shore of Lake Erie, the wind here can affect everyone's strategy, and play a major role in shot decision making. Combine the wind, length, new bunkering, and challenging greens the course should be a good test for the Mid- Am participants", said Marc Rosa, Wanakah's Head Golf Professional.

Besides hosting this year's State Mid-Am, the Club plays host to several other tournaments, including several charity events to help give back to the Western New York community.

Wanakah Country Club is among Western New York's premier full-service country clubs. The club's inspiring and scenic setting includes a pool, clay tennis courts and a spectacular Willie Watson designed golf course on the shores of Lake Erie just 15 minutes from downtown Buffalo. To learn more, visit www.wanakahcc.com.

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