

Davis gets another look at NFCC

GOLF: Course architect playing 15th Porter Cup on holes he renovated.

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LEWISTON — Tripp Davis has a special appreciation for Niagara Falls Country Club.

The 50-year-old from Norman, Oklahoma and his golf architecture firm, Tripp Davis and Associates, have renovated and restored 10 of the course's 18 holes.

Nobody has worked harder to understand designer A.W. Tillinghast's original intentions for each hole, which is all in a day's work in the golf architecture business.

"When you're doing renovations and restorations, especially at an old classic golf course like this, you're trying to enhance the original architect's design intent," Davis said Wednesday after shooting a 2-over 72 in the opening round of the 60th Porter Cup, his 15th. "So when you're working on a golf course like Niagara Falls, a lot of it is about strategy. You're trying to enhance the strategic character of the golf hole.

"Here, the greens, Tillinghast had a style where you have a decent amount of subtle movement in his greens, so that's what we try to do."

Davis does a little bit of everything for golf courses, from designing new builds and renovations to restoring old courses. He's done the latter two at NFCC, renovating and restoring the entire front nine and No. 12 over the past decade. This fall, he'll be back in town updating bunkers on No. 11.

NIAGARA GAZETTE

Niagara Falls, New York

Working an old course like NFCC, which was designed by Tillinghast in 1919 and has been updated by Robert Trent Jones Sr., Geoffrey S. Cornish and Brian M. Silva, is more about modernizing than making sweeping changes, Davis said.

"When you think of restoring a house, you're thinking of putting it back to the way it was," he explained. "But you're still going to put air conditioning in, you're still going to put in running water, electricity and so forth.

"If you have a house built in 1810, it probably didn't have running water, didn't have electricity, sewer, so when you restore a house like that, you're still renovating part of it."

At NFCC, Davis has mostly worked on the greens, updating the originals to keep up with modern technology. The new greens, for example, are made of "about 70 percent" sand, Davis said, whereas they were mostly soil in the past. The sand allows for better drainage but makes the greens faster.

The original sloping of the greens was created with slower play in mind. The faster speed might make some of those original slopes extremely difficult, which is where Davis might go from restoration to renovation and adjust some of the angles to better match his interpretation of Tillinghast's intent.

Sometimes, the work is much less intricate. Davis has redone many of the bunkers at NFCC, putting in a liner and "a more expensive type of sand that is easier to maintain a consistent density." Now, a bunker baking in the sun will play more similarly to one cooled by shade, limiting the variables outside of golfers' control.

Davis, who is originally from Atlanta, started his firm in 1994, right after earning his master's degree in landscape architecture from the University of Oklahoma. He was an All-American



golfer for the Sooners a few years earlier, helping them win the national championship as a senior in 1989.

After breaking into the professional ranks for over a year, he returned to Oklahoma in 1991 to work on his master's.

"It's something I wanted to do since I was a kid," Davis said. "When I was at Oklahoma I really wanted to study landscape architecture while I was playing, but the schedules just didn't work."

After completing his master's, Davis' connections in the golf world afforded him the opportunity to work on a couple of state park courses. That led to other small projects, and the firm took off from there.

Meanwhile, Davis was attempting to get back into competitive golf. Because of his short pro stint, he had to apply to recover his amateur status. Between that process and a growing business, he didn't return to the amateur scene until 1997.

He won the 2000 Oklahoma State Amateur Championship that June and made his Porter Cup debut a month later after defending champion Hunter Haas, a fellow former Sooner, elected to turn pro a few weeks before the tournament. Haas recommended Davis for the vacant spot.

Davis tied for seventh that year, then came back and tied for fifth in '01.

"I played well enough to get invited back," he said, "and then I played well enough the next year to get invited back, and after a while you kind of build some relationships."

NIAGARA SINCE 1854 GAZETTE

Niagara Falls, New York

Davis and his firm have designed 18 new golf courses, including Old American Golf Club in Dallas, which hosted an LPGA event this year. They also built one in China that opened in 2013.

Their most recent finished project was renovating and restoring Dallas' Northwood Club, which hosted the 1952 U.S. Open.

"Holistically, that may be the best work I've done today," Davis said. "... It turned out really well and has gotten a lot of praise."

Davis and Associates employs four people in Norman and one in New York City, where the firm does a good chunk of its work. Upcoming projects include No. 11 at NFCC and another small project at Rolling Hills Country Club in Connecticut.



Tripp Davis, a golf course architect and Porter Cup veteran from Norman, Oklahoma, tees off in the opening round of the 60th Porter Cup on Wednesday at Niagara Falls Country Club.

Credit: Paul Battson/contributor

https://www.niagara-gazette.com/sports/local_sports/davis-gets-another-look-at-nfcc/article_969aa411-c11f-5998-9fc1-a8ec25401637.html