



Rees Jones Leaves His Mark

In so many ways, the world was not ready for the COVID-19 pandemic, but as we creep out of its grasp the future is looking bright for Lambton Golf and Country Club. While the pandemic has been harsh on so many, it has also taught us so much over the past 20 months and changed the way so many of us live our lives and how we view the world, especially our little piece of it.

It also created a golf boom that few would have ever predicted, and in the same breath has given new life into an industry that had been struggling over the past decade to fill tee times and attract new players/members.

"On the positive side, the pandemic has introduced so many people to the game of golf and that's quite remarkable," says golf course architect Rees Jones, whose career of designing and renovating more than 250 golf courses has spanned six decades. "There was very little to do close to home, people couldn't travel, but they quickly figured out they could play golf with their friends outdoors and be safe."

Jones and company, including design associate Bryce Swanson, who is overseeing the current work at Lambton, worked on 13 golf course projects mostly in the United States throughout the pandemic. It certainly wasn't easy for the New Jersey-based company and there were delays, but they found creative ways to move projects along and get the job done.

"The Canadian government closed the border, and we couldn't get up there to see the work until September, but we have made it work," says Jones, noting they didn't visit any of their projects in Japan due to travel restrictions and safety concerns. Instead, Facetime, videos of the changes, drone footage, and marking up photos on



Rees Jones has been mapping out a plan of action at Lambton G&CC since 2007.

iPad forced new ways of communications and replaced site visits for many months.

"There has always been an ebb and flow for new course design and renovations based on the economy, but nobody had a road map for working through the pandemic. That said, I never thought we would see a

boom like this again. It's not as big as the early 2000s, but it's what the industry needed. Now, I think we will retain new players introduced to the game because of the pandemic," Rees says.

"I can't believe how busy the golf course is at Lambton," he adds. "Because of the short

window available for golf, the club hosts a lot of rounds in a short period of time. When you add in the increased play as the result of the pandemic, the current renovation of the bunkers and tees couldn't have come at a better time. I believe the course is ready to take its place among the best in the Greater Toronto Area."

The club retained Jones and his team in 2007 when the Board of Governors decided it was time to develop a new long-range plan with the understanding that a new reservoir for irrigating the course needed to be in place by 2010. It took five years to work through the process of developing a plan to seeing it through construction with the re-opening of No. 17 and 18 in June 2011. At a total cost of nearly \$10 million, it was a period of significant change to the course that left Lambton with a strong foundation to continue to build on today and into the future.

- The new par-3 5th hole was built at the north end of the property adjacent to the reservoir.
- Holes No. 1 and 2 were combined into a single starting hole that plays to the original second green.
- Construction of all championship greens to USGA standards to allow for more pin

locations and less wear and tear on the putting surface.

- The championship course was lengthened by nearly 500 yards, while several forward tees were added to complete five sets of tees ranging from 5,291 to 7,137 yards.

- Perhaps most significantly, the tennis clubhouse was relocated to allow Holes No. 17 and 18 to be reversed, so the course could finish with a strong par-4 dogleg that plays 460 yards.

"When we first started working at Lambton, I'd say we inherited a golf course with a mix of different styles from a variety of golf course architects. In consultation with the membership we decided to create a uniform style by superimposing a new course on top of the club's original layout," says Jones, who has done renovation work in Canada at Royal Montreal GC and London Hunt Club over the years. "I love the creek, the river, the changing topography. The old architects from the early 1900s went down into these areas and looked for those natural features to incorporate them into classic layouts. The creek is strategic. It's one of the strengths you have at Lambton. It's essential to the classic look and embellishes the entire Lambton experience."

"I think Lambton is a very good walking course. It's an old-fashioned classic golf

design where the greens and tees are not separated by long walks or distances," Jones adds. "Holes 16,17 and 18 provide a really wonderful and memorable finish to the round. I think that is why Lambton should be considered on par with all of the other celebrated classic golf courses in the Greater Toronto Area. In my mind, it's a championship course that could host any event with only a few minor changes."

Jones and his team returned to make a couple of minor changes in the fall of 2014, but everything remained quiet until starting the strategic bunker and tee renovation project this fall. The way bunkers are built today has changed dramatically from a decade ago, so the bunkers are being rebuilt to help with maintenance and playability.

While this is going on, Swanson, who visited the club several times this fall, says it has given them the opportunity to re-evaluate some of the existing fairway and greenside bunkers and make improvements. They have also added and increased the size of several tee surfaces.

"Given how busy the course is we are fine-tuning and tweaking the course here and there to keep up with the times and to ensure that the infrastructure is solid for years to come," Swanson says.



Bryce Swanson from Rees Jones Inc. at Lambton in the fall of 2021.

