



Golfers play the 16th green at Montague Golf Club in Randolph, VT. On the hill overlooking the course is the Three Stallion Inn.

photo by Bob Eddy

New Era for Montague Golf Club

by Charles Sutton

Golfers playing that tough back nine at Randolph, VT's Montague Golf Club may not realize it but they are enjoying a new phase in the history of one of Vermont's oldest golf courses. If it weren't for a set of happy circumstance the fairways today might still be pasturing cows, or even be under a small lake!

Changes taking place today are the handiwork of the club's new owners, Sam and Jinny Sammis, whose Three Stallion Inn overlooks the course, and who have been involved in the development of the course for many years.

"The beauty of the land—its hills, valleys and river views make this course a very special place," Sammis said. "You can see the Third Branch of the White River from nine of its holes." Sammis especially likes the back nine because they are the Scottish style links noted for uneven fairways, wind-blown natural terrain, and deep bunkers.

A Sammis gift of 90 acres of land to Montague Golf Club enabled the course to expand from 9 to 18 holes in 1992. Five years ago Sammis also gave the club a loan to put in new greens, upgrade the bunkers with a new kind of white sand that drains water off quickly, and new tee boxes. The course was lengthened to make two par-five holes.

The course owes its beginnings in 1897 to a Randolph philanthropist, Robert J. Kimball, who laid out some links so his children could play golf next to his summer home, The Montague House, which today is home to the White River Craft Center. These are the second oldest links in Vermont next to the Dorset Field Club.

The Kimball family let visitors play on the 1,844 yard-long course until it became the membership-owned Montague Golf Club in 1913. The Kimball sisters gave the club an additional 15 acres in 1925. An additional 65 acres of land was obtained in 1965 from the Robert L. Knight estate on the west side of the river extending the course to 2,764 yards.

A golfer himself since the age of eight and whose family members are all avid golfers, Sammis felt owning the course would be a tremendous asset to the family-run inn, putting it into a four seasons resort category. Presently, golfing guests have to drive several miles into downtown Randolph to get to the club house. Soon guests will be able to tee off right outside the inn, and begin and end their game there.

After purchasing the club, Sammis wasted no time getting the course ready for a mid-April opening. The driveway to the clubhouse has always been a challenge to golfers, so this was one of the first things that was fixed, with a coating of "stay-mat," a substance that provides a hard, non-slippery surface. The cart paths also got a coating of stay-mat. The clubhouse was painted and 36 new golf carts and Amish-built swing benches for the men's and ladies tees were purchased.

Veteran golfers at Montague were pleased to learn that golf pro Bob Hanlon would continue on as director of golf. For many years he was a teacher at Deerfield Academy in Massachusetts where his golf teams amassed an amazing record of 70 wins and only five losses. He is modest about his own golf accomplishments, but told us about the only time in all his years of playing that he hit a hole-in-one. He never saw his shot land at the National Cash Register course in Columbus, Ohio, as the green was out of sight over a little ridge. When he got up to the green, he searched for his ball. And there it was in the cup!

Hanlon had a friendship with the Claude Harmon golf family and took lessons from Claude's son Butch who was

famous for deliberately hitting into a bunker before the tee. He found a sand shot with a wedge more accurate." He'd also hit only with his right hand and he'd put his left behind his back," Hanlon recalled. Butch told golfers the sand shot was the only shot in the game where you didn't "hit" the ball.

Hanlon remembers the days when all golf courses had caddies but they were replaced by golf carts starting in the 1970s. He said today 76 percent of the players use the carts.

One thing that hasn't changed are golfers working up an appetite and thirst after their rounds. The Three Stallion Inn's pastry chef Lisa Wirth is now also the clubhouse manager where she oversees the food, the full-service bar, and private functions and outings. You'll be surprised to find her freshly baked cookies, muffins and donuts in addition to salads and sandwiches. Lisa said her grandmother got her started in baking. Two years ago she won first place at Tunbridge Fair's Best Baked Goods competition.

One group at the Montague Golf Club that is especially pleased with Sammis taking over is the grounds crew, working under course superintendent Garry Crothers. He is pleased about getting good clean gravity-flow water from the inn for the course's new tee-to-green irrigation system.

Sammis's main goal for golf club is to make it a family-friendly fun place. To attract new members he has not increased membership dues this year and members bringing in a new member can save \$100 from their membership, for each new member signed. Early dues payers were given free use of the Three Stallion Inn driving range on Rt. 66 for the entire season. Sammis said membership had been declining in recent years, but is now on its way up again. The improvements have made a difference.

The acreage used for the second nine holes historically was used for farming and for pasturing Morgan horses by the previous owners of the Green Mountain Stock Farm.

After Sammis bought the 1,300 acre farm in 1971, in addition to beginning work on the inn, he began developing building sites of 10 to 100 acres back in the woods leaving large open areas intact, an environmentally sound and forward idea for that time. It has worked out well. The front of the inn overlooks a long carpet of green peopled by a steady stream of happy golfers.

Visitors to the inn and residents of Green Mountain Stock Farm have long enjoyed the beautiful valley stretched out below and the mountains beyond. Over the years, Sammis's relationship with that valley has grown, with his donation of land to expand Montague Golf Club, followed by his loan to improve the greens and bunkers.

The purchase and upgrade of the club this year are just the most recent steps in a continuing plan for recreational development in the area, one that provides enjoyment for visitors and residents while keeping the beauty of the open spaces intact.

Montague Golf Club is located in Randolph, VT. The rate for 18 holes is \$45 including golf cart, and the public is welcome. For information about memberships and tee times call the club house at (802) 728-3806 or visit the website at www.montaguegolf.com.

Play and Stay and Golf Outing packages are available at the Three Stallion Inn. The inn has full recreational facilities and exceptional dining. For rates and more information call (800) 424-5575 or visit www.3stallioninn.com.



Sam Sammis has enjoyed playing at Montague Golf Club for years. In this foursome he is joined by Al Giebel (far left), former manager of The Three Stallion Inn, unidentified player (2nd from left), and the late Sheldon Dimick (far right), former president of Randolph National Bank.

photo courtesy of The Herald of Randolph