

All In A Day's Sports

A Decade Of Success

August 10, 2013

By Jim Riggs - Sports Editor, The Post-Journal

Time flies when you're having fun.

The members of the McDonald's Senior Golf Tour know that.

The organization is in its 10th year and it has become larger and more popular each year.



The McDonald's Senior Tour committee members are, from left, Art Asquith, Harry Trippett, Merle Elkin, Jim Fincher, Randy Carlson, Tuck Underwood, Ted Parren, Jim Rissel and Pat Heppinger.

P-J photo by Jim Riggs

It was the brainstorm of Art Asquith, who started the Senior Tour in 2004. It became the McDonald's Senior Tour in the third or fourth year when the restaurant chain became a sponsor. But did he ever think his idea would still be going 10 years later?

"Not really," Asquith said. "I thought it was a good idea."

He quickly added, "The only mistake I made was I thought about this five years before I did it."

He wanted golfers in their 60s, 70s and 80s to have a chance to play more than nine holes of golf in a league and thought an 18-hole tournament once a week would be the answer. So for \$23 a week every Monday, and sometimes on Tuesday, the golfers receive their greens fees, a cart and a light meal. That's a great deal and it attracted 40 golfers the first year. Then it went to 60, then to 90, then to 100-plus and now there can be 160 players a week.

It's also a good deal for the golf courses that play host to the McDonald's Senior Tour. It brings in \$2,000 to \$3,000 on a Monday, which is usually a slow day for many courses.

Some courses charge the McDonald's Senior Tour as high as \$26 and others as low as \$21, but the price

is always \$23 for the golfers. The committee pays the extra at the higher-priced courses with the surplus gained from the lower-priced courses.

In the early years, the McDonald's Senior Tour competed mainly on local courses, but now it has expanded into Pennsylvania at places as far away as Kane, Tionesta and Venango.

"I wanted to keep the money in Chautauqua County as much as I could and it made for shorter trips," Asquith said. "But I found out as the years went by that I could deal with courses in Pennsylvania easier than I could in New York."

He added with a smile, "The better I got at negotiating, the braver I got."

With the additional courses, the schedule now runs from late April to early October.

A big reason for the McDonald's Senior Tour's success is the use of a modified Stableford scoring system that awards one point for bogey, two for a par, four for a birdie and six for an eagle. Using it was suggested by former Chautauqua Golf Club director of golf Stan Marshaus when Asquith was getting the wheels in motion.

"That was one of the gray areas," he said. "I was trying to think about some kind of format that would accommodate everybody. And it does, it accommodates everyone in our group."

There are six flights and golfers are placed in a flight according to their handicap established from play only in the tour. And the handicaps are updated after every three matches.

"We have some guys that still have fire in their guts and are still shooting in the 70s, but we've got a ton of guys that are shooting in the 90s and 100s and having a ball," Asquith said. "That's because we put the emphasis not on your gross score, but are you having fun."

And that's why Tom Harte is a member. He began playing when he was 75.

"I was recruited by Rick Brown (one of the first committee members)," he said. "I gave up golf for about 10 or 15 years for tennis. I used to shoot in the 80s consistently and I got into tennis and I forgot how to play golf. I wasn't playing at all."

So why did Harte join the McDonald's Senior Tour?

"He (Brown) made it sound interesting, I bit and I've been there for 10 years," he said.

Harte added, "The one thing I would emphasize is the camaraderie that exists. We've been together for 10 years and you look forward to seeing them."

Asquith recalled his grandmother, who was an excellent cook, said, "Cooking is easy if you have the right ingredients. We've got the right ingredients. We've got farmers and plumbers and bricklayers and lawyers and doctors all in the same pot getting along and rubbing elbows."

And Asquith is just one of the "chefs" for the McDonald's Senior Tour.

"My committee should get a lot of accolades," Asquith said. "Everyone of those guys does their job without any complaining. It's 'What can I do next?'"

Helping him make the McDonald's Senior Tour a success were original committee members Jim Sorg, Charlie Avery, Tony Barone and Brown. Now the committee roster includes Harry Trippett, Merle Elkin, Jim Fincher, Randy Carlson, Tuck Underwood, Ted Parren, Jim Rissel and Pat Heppinger.

They have made the McDonald's Senior Tour grow in its first decade. And they wonder what the next 10 years will bring.