

Senior Tour Readies For Another Season

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By Scott Kindberg, Post-Journal

LAKEWOOD - Art Asquith didn't think much of golf growing up in Little Valley.

When he did, well, it was hardly in glowing terms.

"I was so into baseball," said Asquith, who would later play minor league ball in the New York Yankees organization, "I thought guys who played golf were sissies."

By the time he was a senior at Little Valley High School in 1947, though, he became hooked on the game, caddying at Elkdale Country Club in Salamanca for \$1.75 a round.

"If you carried 'doubles,' which you tried to do, it was three dollars plus," he said. "I was down there every day."

Fast-forward seven decades or so, and Asquith's passion for golf is still going strong. For confirmation, all one had to do was pull into the Lakewood Rod & Gun Club's parking lot earlier this week. Not only was finding a parking space a challenge, but also getting in the door was just as daunting.

When I finally made my way to the dining room, I was greeted by Asquith, the 86-year-old retired teacher, who for the last 11 years has found an enjoyable way to occupy his time - coordinating the McDonald's Senior Golf Tour, which runs from April through October at 28 golf courses in Western New York and northwestern Pennsylvania. Monday was registration day and senior golfers from throughout the area turned out in droves, the line to sign up extending out the door.

"This is something I thought about for five years," Asquith said. "Then, I was just talking to my wife one day and I said, 'I'm going to do this.' I got up and called Stan Marshaus (then the professional at Chautauqua Golf Club). He was really positive about the whole thing. What it did was give us credibility when I called the other courses. I think that first year I had 16 courses signed up."

When the group, numbering about 150, tees it up next Monday at Chautauqua Point Golf Course in Dewittville and Pinehurst Golf Club in Westfield, it will be the start of another season for Asquith and his committee, which also includes Jim Rissel, Randy Carlson, Merle Elkin, Pat Heppinger, Harry Trippett, Tuck Underwood and Jim Fincher.

"What has happened," Asquith said, "it's brought guys out of the woodwork. The feedback has been so positive, so there was an absolute need for it."

Others have taken notice.

"Since we've done it, you can't believe what's happened," Asquith said. "There's a 30-man group in Dunkirk and eventually when the guys go to Florida (for the winter) they talk about it and then all of a sudden it's happening at other places.

"The more guys we get playing golf the better."

The benefits to playing extend beyond just teeing it up once a week.

"It's all about having fun, getting out of the house, out of the chair," Asquith said. "It's something to do. It's been great."

And, of course, the McDonald's Senior Tour takes extra precautions in order to ensure the health and safety of its members. For example, Asquith said that an automatic external defibrillator is at the ready in case of a medical emergency.

"We give everyone at the beginning of the match the cell phone number of Merle Elkin (who has the AED in his cart)," Asquith said. "One day, Merle gets a call."

Much to Elkin's relief, nobody had been stricken. The same couldn't be said, however, for some poor golfer's cart, which had a flat tire.

"Someone used the AED number to tell Merle he had a flat tire," Asquith said with a laugh.

Before he could finish the story, Asquith was interrupted by another golfing buddy, who had registered for another season.

"Hey, how you doing, pal," Asquith said. "Nice to see you. Thanks for coming."

Fittingly, as I left the Lakewood Rod & Gun Club, I noticed a sign that was on display just outside the front door. It read: "We're Back. McDonald's Senior Tour."

About 150 guys can't wait for their season to start.