



Mattawang Club Offers Affordable Enjoyment

BY FRED BEHRINGER

Mattawang's picturesque 17th hole is a short par 4 of 330 yards with a cross hazard threatening long drives.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MATTAWANG GOLF CLUB

A round at Mattawang Golf Club in Belle Mead turns back the pages of golf history to the days before high-tech equipment, 7,500-yard courses and mammoth greens protected by walls of railroad ties and fieldstone.

THE WELL-CONDITIONED GOLF course at the semi-private club north of Princeton offers a very affordable no-frills experience to members and daily-fee golfers interested only in a good time playing golf.

They enjoy a straightforward layout with holes clearly presented from the tees, with four tee positions to serve all ages and abilities, with run-up opportunities on nearly every green and with a nice variety of long and short par 3s and par 4s. Recent tee extensions have boosted Mattawang to 6,805 yards from the blue tees, so long hitters and low handicappers are not denied a challenge.

Superintendent Tyson Karcher, a former assistant at Hamilton Farm, worked

wonders during the summer heat and humidity to keep the course playable with lush fairways and immaculate greens.

Mattawang numbers several excellent, high-end daily-fee courses among its fairly close neighbors, so it structures fees to compete effectively. Annual memberships cost \$2,450 for an individual and \$3,350 for a family with reductions for weekday members. Green fees range from \$20 to \$69, depending on day of week, time of day and whether a cart is used.

The club takes its name from a Native American tribe that once lived on the site of the club. Mattawang translates, appropriately enough, to “travel a difficult path,” as golfers who stray into the numerous woods bordering the holes can attest.

Mattawang opened in 1960 as a private club called Pike Brook Country Club. It is believed that one of the original members, Mike Myles, designed the course. His routing remains essentially unchanged. Jack Nicklaus, brought in for a one-day appearance, shot a 66 that still stands as the course record. Club lore has it that a playing partner finished with 67 just ahead of Nicklaus, who then bounced an approach shot off a women watching the play and onto the green to set up a birdie putt and a one-stroke advantage.

Developers bought the club in the 1980s, intending to turn the property into housing, but that didn’t happen, and present owners Ken Wang and partners purchased it in late 1993.

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They and Mahlon Dow, who came in early 1994 as head professional and manager, embarked on a master plan that involved rebuilding the clubhouse and improving the golf course. They have completed many aspects of the plan with others still in the works. “We’ve sort of been pecking away at it over the years,” says Dow. Priorities have included correcting drainage issues, extending tees, adding women’s tees and restoring, adding and subtracting bunkers.

Water is rarely in play on the course, and there is only one fairway bunker. “It’s a very tight, shotmaker’s golf course,” Dow notes. The very small greens are well bunkered. To me, it’s a 1920s design that was done in the 1960s.”

The site lent itself well to a golf course with noticeable but not steep elevations changes. It’s conducive to walking.



Mahlon Dow, Mattawang head professional and manager.

Mattawang’s Wagner Takes Women’s Public Links Title



Kristina Wagner of Mattawang Golf Club posted a four-stroke victory in the seventh New Jersey State Golf Association Women’s Public Links Championship in June at Valley Brook Golf Club. Her 4-over-par 75 left her one stroke ahead of runner-up Ellie Yum of Beaver Brook Country Club.

Wagner will be a sophomore at High Point University in High Point, N.C. A graduate of Hillsborough High School, she was named to the all-New Jersey team in 2008. She won the the 2008 and 2009 Skyland Conference Tournament, the 2008 East Brunswick Invitational and the 2009 Cougar Classic.

A former student of Mahlon Dow, Mattawang head professional and manager, Wagner is working this summer in the club’s golf shop and as an assistant instructor in junior clinics.

“This is a great win for Kristina,” said Dow. “Although, she is relatively new to tournament golf, Kristina has had a lot of early success. She possesses a very athletic swing and is just beginning to learn the mental side of the game. Her potential is that she is one of the very few gifted young golfers who can be as good as she wants to be.”


Wagner said, “Mattawang has always accommodated me as a player, and being able to play at such a nice facility has really helped my game. The New Jersey

Public Links tournament is the biggest tournament I have ever won. This win has opened a lot of doors for me, and I have proved to myself that I am capable of controlling my mental and physical being in big tournaments.”

Wagner also turned in the low-net score of 67 in the Women’s Public Links Championship, one shot lower than Yum.

NJSGA WOMEN’S PUBLIC LINKS CHAMPIONSHIP

Kristina Wagner, Mattawang GC.....	75
Ellie Yum, Beaver Brook CC.....	79
Sue Dahabsu, Suneagles GC	81
Julia Rappa, Darlington GC.....	83
Carolyn Cook, Pinch Brook GC.....	84
Gail Chwazik, Green Knoll GC	86
Lisa Dillon, Galloping Hill GC	86
Nancy Vasie, Paramus CC	86
Song Sungeun, Bey Lea GC	87
Robin Giordano, Colts Neck GC	88
Jacqueline Holle, Architects GC.....	88
Marge Zietchick, EWGA-North NJ	88
Courtney King, Hominy Hill GC.....	89
Karen Jones, Eagle Ridge GC	91
Anna Turner, WGA of NJ	91
Toniann Bergamini, Fairway Valley	92
Ruth Weil, EWGA-North NJ	94
Madeline Herbert, Paramus CC.....	95
Joy Ralston, Pinch Brook GC	96
Lillian Beretoldo, Suneagles GC.....	98
Abba Gareick, Plainfield West Nine	98




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The 14th hole at Mattawang is a demanding par 4 covering 462 yards.

The New Jersey Section of the PGA holds Playing Ability Tests at Mattawang, and players often comment about how well the course plays.

Junior golf gets special emphasis at the club with a wide variety of camps and other programs. Dow says, “I’ve been told, and I think it’s probably correct, that our junior program is the biggest in the state as far as camps and weekly activities go and just general opportunities for kids to play the game.” About 400 juniors participate each year.

Dow, a former assistant professional at Trenton Country Club, brought some of the noted junior concepts from Trenton as part of the Mattawang program. Most of the staff members at the club over the past decade have been graduates of the junior program.

Numerous women’s and family activities also are part of the club schedule. The club fees and programs are detailed on its Web site, www.mattawang-golf.com. 



This bunker arrangement guarding the green at Mattawang’s par-5 15th hole is typical of those throughout the course.