

Desert Forest Golf Club Has Championship Pedigree

Club Will Host 2007 U.S. Women's Mid-Amateur Championship
September 29 through October 3

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Carefree, Ariz. (August 15, 2007) –Desert Forest Golf Club, scheduled to host the 2007 U.S. Women's Mid-Amateur Championship from September 29 through October 3, has a long history of hosting prestigious golf tournaments.

Designed by golf course architect Red Lawrence and opened in 1962, the country's most authentic "desert course," and also its most celebrated, has proven itself worthy of hosting big events.

Without question the biggest event in Desert Forest's history was also its first national major, the United States Golf Association's 36th Senior Amateur Championship, in October, 1990. The event, for contestants 55 years old and over, drew an initial applicant field of 1,658 entrants. Of that group, 160 golfers made it to Carefree for two 18-hole qualifying stroke play rounds to determine the match play field of 64.

Desert Forest proved to be a tough test.

Doug MacDonald, who recently retired, had an exciting first day as Desert Forest's PGA professional. He started his new job on October 15, the date set at the club for the opening round of stroke play to qualify competitors for the championship. Luckily for him, club staff and the U.S. Golf Association had already set things up for the event.

That didn't spare MacDonald the ire of contestants who had never before seen a true desert course.

There wasn't a single qualifying round played under or at level par. Of the 315 qualifying rounds contested at stroke play, there was only one 73, a single 74 and four 75s. This, along with 29 rounds in the 90s, including one beleaguered fellow whose card of 91-94 included a 13 at No. 15 on the first day and another 13, this time at No. 16, during the second round. The stroke play qualifying medal went to William E. Godden of Medford, Oregon, who shot a 75-75=150 (6 over par). The cutoff for the match play round of 64 was an incredible 163 (19 over par).

When the dust finally settled at the 1990 Senior Amateur, the trophy went to Jackie Cummings of Tuscaloosa, Alabama. In his 18-hole finals match with Bobby L. Clark of Asheville, North Carolina, Cummings made a 12-foot downhill putt for birdie on hole number 16 (the only birdie either made in the match) to win the championship, 3 and 2.

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At first glance, Desert Forest's layout is something of an oddity. There are no fairway bunkers. There's not a single white out-of-bounds stake on site. Nor, for that matter, will a golfer find any water hazard in play. There are no paved cart paths, either. And everywhere, there is the desert floor, threatening to humble even the best players.

In retrospect, former USGA championship director Tom Meeks admits to having underestimated how penal the course would play under stroke play conditions in 1990. To this day, he remains an admirer of Desert Forest, but acknowledges that its raw desert style poses unique demands to those seeking to turn in an 18-hole score.

"There's no question in my mind that Desert Forest is the No. 1 desert course in the country," Meeks has said. "It has tremendous contours, its greens are always firm and fast. But there's no reprieve for a ball hit into the desert."

The 2007 U.S. Women's Mid-Amateur will be the 14th national golf championship that the USGA conducts in the Grand Canyon State, which makes it a special honor. In fact, Desert Forest is one of only three Arizona clubs (Forest Highlands Golf Club and Tucson Country Club) to host two USGA championships. That's rare company indeed.

Desert Forest has maintained its presence in the national amateur golf scene by hosting a wide range of state and national events. It has, for example, served as a regional qualifying site for the 1999 U.S. Mid-Amateur and the 2002 U.S. Women's Mid-Amateur. It's also hosted the Annual Quail Cup Pro-Am, Dunlop Masters, Arizona Open and the Pacific Coast Amateur.

The Arizona Amateur, contested at Desert Forest in 1987 (won by Mark Sollenberger) and again in 1992 (won by Ken Kellaney, who beat John Olive, a two-time men's club champion at Desert Forest) is another prestigious championship.

The Goldwater Cup, named after Bob Goldwater, Sr., father of the Phoenix Open (now FBR Open) is a Ryder Cup-style event that features teams from the AGA and the Southwest Section PGA playing each other in a two-day event. Matches involving foursome, four-ball, and singles events pit amateurs for the AGA against professionals from the SWPGA, with both a senior and an open division for players of all ages. The event, held annually in the Phoenix area since 1961, has now been contested at Desert Forest five times.

Other prominent championships held at Desert Forest include the 2006 Trans-Mississippi Four Ball Championship, a four-day stroke play event involving the game's leading amateurs. Just over a year ago it was won by Chris Kessler of Scottsdale and Trent Brown of Ponca City, Okla.

Desert Forest remains open to the USGA and to amateur golf events of the highest character. More than four decades after it opened, Red Lawrence's design remains a relevant test for modern championship golf.

Tom Weiskopf, former PGA Tour player and British Open Champion, who is a prominent golf course architect and Desert Forest member since 1979, may have summed it up best. "The premium on driving and on second shots makes you a better player," Weiskopf said.

