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GOLF COURSE

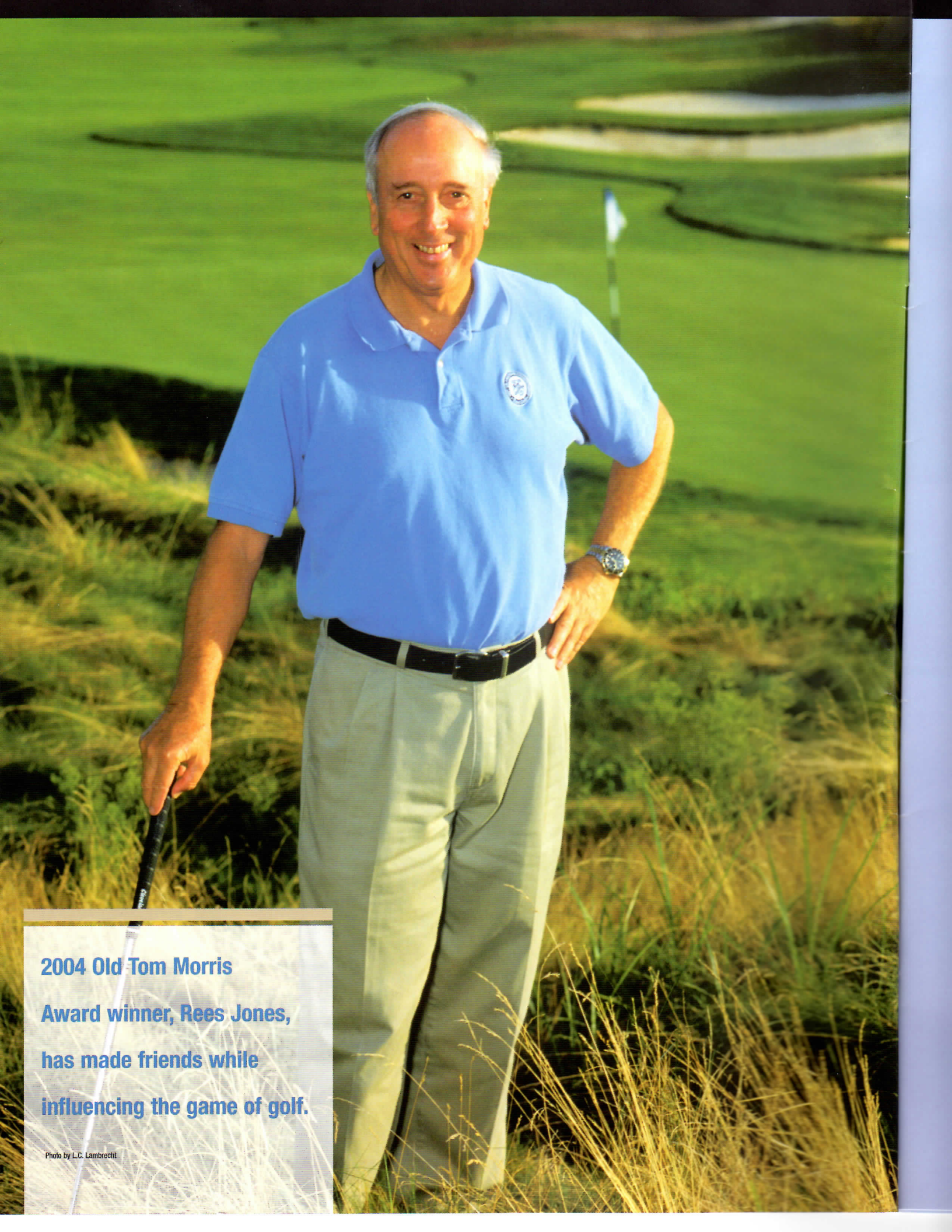
a n a g e m e n t

Golf Course Superintendents Association of America



Rees Jones
2004 Old Tom Morris Award Winner





**2004 Old Tom Morris
Award winner, Rees Jones,
has made friends while
influencing the game of golf.**

Photo by L.C. Lambrecht

Nice guy finishes first

Terry Ostmeyer

A lot of prominent golf course architecture is in very friendly hands these days. And, by no coincidence, so is the 2004 Old Tom Morris Award.

When GCSAA leaders tabbed Rees Jones for the association's highest honor, they not only recognized one of the most influential designers of the last dozen or more years, but also one of the industry's genuine good guys. In an era of intense competition in golf development, Jones' business relationships inevitably become lifelong friendships. Indeed, he is a friend of golf by all accounts, which is what the Old Tom Morris Award is all about.



Photo by Jim Krajcek/www.krajcekgolfphoto.com

Rees Jones' renovation work at Bethpage Black, host of the wildly successful 2002 U.S. Open, further solidified his reputation as the "Open Doctor."

Significant selection

"I consider Rees a close, personal friend, so obviously I'm pleased for him," says David Fay, executive director of the USGA, which has held the U.S. Open on seven courses remodeled by Jones since 1988. "This is an award with a distinguished group of winners, and I think that Rees fits comfortably with that illustrious group. It's always nice to see someone who has done so much for the game of golf so honored. I know he has a very high regard for golf course superintendents individually, so to receive such an award collectively from the people he holds in such high esteem must be very pleasing to him."

The 62-year-old Jones is more than the 22nd recipient of the Old Tom Morris Award. His selection represents a special milestone — he's the first second-generation winner, following his father,

the late Robert Trent Jones Sr., the patriarch of modern golf architecture who won the award in 1987. Fittingly, it's not the first time Rees has filled RTJ's shoes.

"I guess it's like Old Tom Morris and Young Tom Morris ... the son following in the father's footsteps," Rees says. "So many people do that, including, I imagine, thousands of superintendents in this country. As famous as my father was and to take his mantle as the "Open Doctor" and now to be recognized by GCSAA with the same award he got is quite a great feeling. It tells me that my peers and my associates feel I've done pretty well behind the man who made American golf architecture what it is today."

Jones wears his father's mantle proudly, having "doctored" those seven Open venues in varying degrees, but he is just as proud of his singular successes — his nearly 100 original designs since he

formed his own company in 1974, his passionate promotion of public golf in America and his outspoken conviction that his profession must pursue combining the past with the present in creating golf venues for the future.

Destiny fulfilled

A descendent of those who traveled on the Mayflower on his mother's side and an immigrant son on his father's, Jones has been on a beeline to this point in time nearly all his life. Virtually born into the game of golf, he learned at the knee of RTJ, who did some of his most significant work in the decade after World War II. Rees had summer jobs on his father's projects and once worked on a maintenance crew. He also developed into a talented player.

"I traveled around with my dad and the people who worked for him and built

his golf courses. I assimilated into the business, I guess," Jones says, noting that high among his mentors along with his father would be Bill Baldwin, RTJ's chief contractor who imparted to Rees the ins and outs of course construction.

"I have always cared about quality," Jones says. "You have to know how to build a golf course before you can design them. Bill Baldwin taught me that. He also told me that the measure of success is to return to a course you designed and built and if you've achieved your goal, they're going to be very happy to see you."

Jones earned a bachelor of arts degree from Yale and did graduate study at Harvard in design and landscape architecture. After a stint in the Army Reserves, he joined RTJ's firm full time in the mid-1960s. For the next decade he ran the company's East Coast office and had a hand in designing courses.

But by 1974, Jones was ready to go out on his own and formed Rees Jones Inc. As big a step as it was, he still never ventured far from his roots. His office today remains a converted Victorian house not far from downtown Montclair, N.J., his hometown. He lives close by with his wife of 35 years, Susan, when they aren't at their summer digs on Long Island. They have two daughters, Alden, a writer and faculty member at Emerson College in Boston, and Amy, a social worker in New York City.

Purposeful teamwork

Jones has very strong feelings about his craft, and it says a lot that the four associate architects on his company's design team — Keith Evans, Greg Muirhead, Steve Weisser and Bryce Swanson — have been with him almost a combined 60 years. All join Jones in a fervent quest to create classic venues that blend traditional design and innovative style. Invariably, their work is dictated by the contours of the land and what nature has to offer, emphasizing visual impact.

"I've been very fortunate to have the folks I have," Jones says. "We're all on the same wavelength, we're all very client-oriented, we're very maintenance-oriented, we're all very cognizant of whether a course is going to host a U.S. Open or is a public course for the everyday golfer. It's a great team."

Jones also has formed his own construction outfit, Calgolf Inc., from his



Photo courtesy of Rees Jones

Jones and his team during the 1999 construction of The Bridge near Sag Harbor, N.Y. From left, Jones; Joe Raynor, project civil engineer and land surveyor; Josh Keith, shaper for Calgolf Inc.; and Clyde Hall, Calgolf supervisor.

father's crew run by Baldwin (who died in 1979). Calgolf, headed by supervisors Austin Gibson, Clyde Hall and Phil Mitchell, works in tandem with major building contractors, specializing in grading, framing and shaping, and tees and greens construction.

"Having our own building crew is a huge advantage, especially in the high-profile jobs. We're able to maintain quality because of intimate communications," says Jones.

Embracing tradition

Jones didn't come to his neoclassic design style without first acknowledging the influence of RTJ and his famed prolific use of bunkers and water to counter the game's accelerating talent curve during the 1960s and '70s. But Rees gradually leaned toward giving golfers more to think about, multiple shot options by mixing up hole-by-hole designs in the old-school sense.

"Early in my career I was very influenced by my dad, but as I've come to do work at some of the great old classic courses I've become more influenced by (A.W.) Tillinghast's style and to a lesser extent by (C.B.) MacDonald, (Donald) Ross and (Alister) Mackenzie," he says. "I think we've got to return to using contours as a hazard on smaller, low-profile greens, provide open entrances to greens, yet continue to fortify them with sand and water.

"We've got to throttle the drive down a little, whether it's the average golfer or



Photo by L.C. Lambrecht

Jones has very strong feelings about his craft, and it says a lot that the four associate architects on his company's design team ... have been with him almost a combined 60 years.



A talented player as well as a talented architect, Jones will be in the U.S. Open spotlight again in 2008 when Torrey Pines South in San Diego, another course Jones remodeled, hosts the championship.

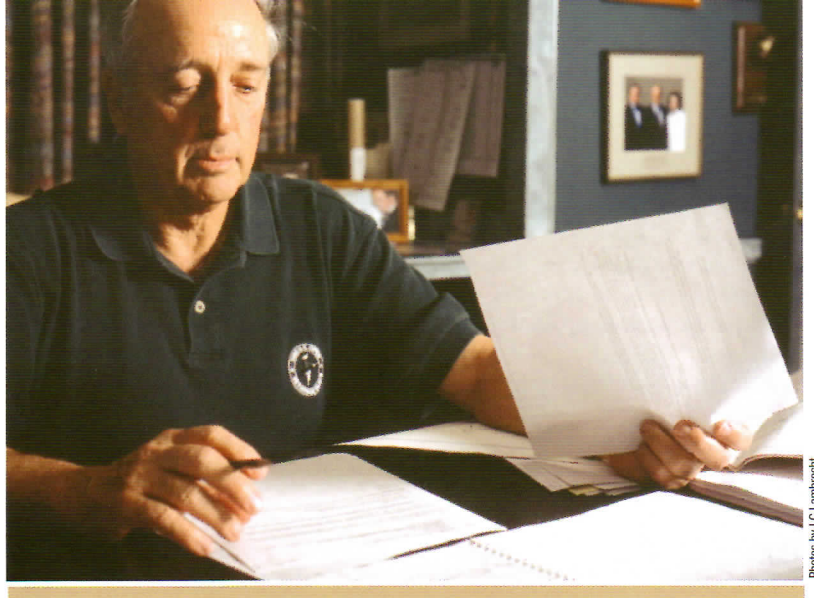
Jones believes his design style, coupled with multiple teeing areas, accommodates golfers of all levels.

the professional. Make it a premium off the tee by designing angled greens and give the player choices going into a green. There are many different ways to maintain interest hole in and hole out so that each can be approached differently on any given day, any given season, any given length."

Jones believes his design style, coupled with multiple teeing areas, accommodates golfers of all levels. He favors routings that are tough but fair, that pique interest early with easy to moderate holes and then reach a "crescendo" at the end.

One for all

His style also addresses the game's



Photos by LC Lambrecht

wide gap between average or high-handicap golfers and the proficient, low-handicap player. Both are challenged, sometimes in vastly divergent ways.

"I think that along with all the instruction that's out there today we ought to really work hard at teaching average golfers how to manage their games better," says Jones, who authored the article, "How to Read a Golf Course," published in the November 1990 issue of *Golf Magazine*.

"A well-designed course tells you how to play each shot, be it a drive, approach or around or on a green," he wrote. "When a course is built, an architect routes each hole and builds each green with an eye to how each shot can and should be played, as well as the reward for hitting a good shot and the punishment for the bad. You may not be able to read his mind, but you certainly can read his course."

The same is true for the talented player, although more so physically: "Creating choices, decision-making, is asking the golfer that if he wants to be sub-par he's going to have to play to the flagstick. Otherwise, he is going to have a tough time achieving that."

Voice of concern

Jones' strong convictions concerning his work carry over to his profession overall and, for that matter, also to golf course management.

The youngest president of the

American Society of Golf Course Architects — at age 37 in 1978 — Jones says he has long been wary of the dramatic increases in the last couple of decades in the number of golf course designers and the money to be made in the business.

"We've got lot of people now who are on the periphery of the business who haven't dedicated their lives to it or even to the game itself," he says. "It seems everyone is trying to find a niche, like making a golf course too difficult to play. Instead, we should be making sure we've got courses that are economically viable — maintainable, playable and enjoyable on a continuing basis. Architects should not be building monuments to themselves or striving to get into the top 100 list or be recognized by the highest slope rating."

Jones, ever the neoclassicist, says stylized bunkers, for instance, are often over-emphasized in today's designs and become maintenance and playability problems when instead they should be properly sculpted and properly located hazards.

"We architects have got to remember we're in a very subjective business. All we should ultimately care about, whether it's a public, resort or private course, is that people come away wanting to play it again."

Superintendents' champion

There also are maintenance issues that

House calls

What Rees Jones is all about can best be told in the stories of three golf courses — the man and his work and how they touched the professional lives of those up close and personal, from management to maintenance.

1 A defining work

Bethpage Black, Farmingdale, N.Y.



Photos by Jim Krajicek/www.krajicekgolfphoto.com

Jones says the remodeling of Bethpage Black to host the 2002 U.S. Open turned out to be probably the most gratifying task of his career. For one thing, it was an A.W. Tillinghast gem (1936). For another, it represented pretty much the epitome of public golf — for \$31 (\$39 on weekends) and the perseverance to secure a tee time, anyone can play the Black. For yet another, there were many reputable golf industry folks who said it couldn't be done.

USGA's executive director, David Fay, made his first entreaty to Jones in 1995, inviting him to check out the course as a possible Open site. Jones, who believes that the Black, with its sandy, rolling terrain, was Tillinghast's answer to revered Pine Valley, the world's perennially top-rated venue, was willing and in turn was retained by the USGA to restore and remodel the pride of New York's Bethpage State Park.

At first glance, the job was daunting to say the least. The course, overrun by decades of relentless player traffic, had fallen into disrepair. Yet, as Jones saw it, that was better than misguided repair. On the contrary, Bethpage had been unencumbered by green committees or management intent on making changes.

"We found Tillinghast's original design — a splendid, big, long, difficult, ingeniously designed course — could, with a major facelift, be a true test of golf for the game's best players," Jones wrote in his "Field Notes," a unique and comprehensive anatomy of sorts of the rebirth of Bethpage Black.

Since no changes had been made to

the superb routing and, most importantly, to the greens, Jones thus only altered the sizes of some of the putting surfaces and concentrated instead on restoring the layout's bunkers, which were wasted by years of erosion. Nearly every bunker on the course was rebuilt according to Tillinghast's elegant sculptured style. Fairway bunkers were moved ahead to accommodate today's distances off the tee, and most greenside bunkers were moved closer to the greens and swept up at steeper angles to restore the penal character the original architect had intended. And, all in all, only about 300 yards were added to the big layout for the Open.

By the advent of the 21st century, the results at Bethpage were stunning for all concerned.

"The best way I could characterize the project is that it was absolutely brilliant," recalls David Catalano, director of the Bethpage State Park the past eight years. "The golf course has received accolades not only from our regular, everyday golfers, but also from some of the world's greatest players. And you can attribute all of that to Rees Jones. Working with him was inspirational and awe-inspiring. Plus, I've never met a finer gentleman in my life."

Catalano, who oversees Bethpage's myriad assets — five golf courses (more than 275,000 rounds a year), a driving range, picnic areas, bridle trails, bike trails, hiking paths, a dozen tennis courts and a restaurant — says he remembers most the patient, supportive way Jones worked with park and golf course staff.

"To do the job with no fee is one



(Above) Rees Jones' many projects involving major-championship courses has inevitably led him to his father's work. Rees and Robert Trent Jones, winners of the Old Tom Morris Award 17 years apart, are shown at the 1991 U.S. Open at Hazeltine National GC in Chaska, Minn. RTJ designed and built the venue in 1962 and added an extensive redesign in 1978. In 1988, Rees remodeled selected holes in preparation for the Open. (Right) Rees and his wife, Susan, are flanked by their two daughters, Amy (left) and Alden.



Photos courtesy of Rees Jones

It's Jones' connection with superintendents across the country that causes him to believe the Old Tom Morris Award is the end-all validation to his work.

concern Jones, although he is quick to note that most are of superintendents' doing. Green speeds are overemphasized, he says, along with the recent rampant development of new grasses, which makes it difficult for those building golf courses to chart a cultivar's history.

"I really think we need more flexibility in mowing heights," he says. "Not only to reduce stress on the turf, but we need green contours to preserve par."

Jones, who has had integral involvement with the USGA's Turfgrass and Environmental Research Program, praises the leadership of GCSAA, along with the USGA and Audubon International, in meshing environmental awareness and golf development.

"The golf course industry is probably more environmentally correct than raising cattle, farming and lawn care, yet is constantly attacked in the approval process.

That's unfortunate for an industry that's taken more chemicals off the list than any other."

But it's the solitary superintendent to whom Jones says he relates best and has been impressed by the most during his career.

"The superintendent has become such a force within the framework of golf," he says. "They're so adept at dealing with different situations every day in their work — temperatures, climates, droughts, floods — and GCSAA has done a very good job of educating the public how important these people are to the industry. We can never say enough about that."

It's Jones' connection with superintendents across the country that causes him to believe the Old Tom Morris Award is the end-all validation to his work.

"This (award) means so much to me because I have been chosen by the people I've been working with for almost 40 years," he says. "It isn't just my reputation, it's my personal relationships with these people."

The doctor's touch

It's obvious that Jones' highly successful knack for remodeling courses to prepare them for major tournaments is the sum of his philosophies. He has proved, and continues to prove, that classic design features coupled with a modern awareness works — The Country Club, Baltusrol, Congressional, Hazeltine, Pinehurst, Torrey Pines South and, of

course, Bethpage Black, are but a handful of shining examples.

In all, Jones and his team have worked on 12 venues that have hosted U.S. Opens or PGA Championships in the last 15 years. Their expertise has extended to the sites of three Ryder Cup matches, two Walker Cups and the home of the Tour Championship, East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta. There are many others among his company's 55 redesigns or remodeling projects to date.

Jones notes that his high-profile remodels have not followed a set pattern. Many have involved scattered course changes of various levels, some more extensive than others. There have been projects more restorative in scope and there have been complete rebuilds from tee through green. He says he likes to "get in the heads" of the old masters and bring their courses up to today's standards while remaining true to their original design intent. Those "heads" have included RTJ himself more than once, most notably at Congressional, Hazeltine and Atlanta Athletic Club. (Robert Trent Jones Sr. died on June 14, 2000, at the age of 93.)

"My approach to remodeling a classic existing course is not unlike an art restorer with an old painting. After careful study, I strip away the accumulated effects of years of wear and tear ... it's bringing the golf course back to prominence," he said in an interview in the July 2002 issue of *Golf Business* magazine.

Pinpointing the prognosis

Jones has forged a strong relationship

thing. But I was most impressed with the way Rees dealt with everyone.”

The success and impact of that Open — won by the world’s top golfer, Tiger Woods, who was the only player under par in the championship — undoubtedly returned the Black to prominence and then some. Tillinghast’s gem is no longer unpolished.

“With Rees’ redesign, the USGA’s investment in the project (\$3 million) and the subsequent maintenance the superintendent, Craig Currier, and his staff applied to the course, I don’t think Bethpage Black is any longer considered an untested track,” Catalano says. “It’s indeed a world-class golf course. The day-in and day-out condition of the course is as good now as it was during the Open. I think that’s phenomenal.”

Currier, who heads the maintenance of all five Bethpage venues, and course superintendent Garret Bodington worked closely with Jones during the 10-

month project, particularly concerning the bunkering and player traffic issues. Currier, a 12-year GCSAA member, was relatively new to Bethpage, as well as U.S. Open trappings, when in the late summer of 1997 he was suddenly in the middle of the likes of Jones and associate designer Greg Muirhead; Tim Moraghan, USGA’s director of championship agronomy; and the crews of McDonald & Sons, one of the country’s top golf course construction outfits.

“I’d only been on the job there a few months and I got in on something like that,” he says. “Working with Rees was especially an honor. There isn’t a nicer guy out there. He’s very down to earth and easy to talk to. He takes your ideas seriously. There wasn’t anything he wouldn’t let you try.”

Currier says everyone connected with Bethpage Black and everyone who plays it continues to praise the restoration. The course keeps moving up in all the appro-

priate rankings and, most of all, in the fastest turnaround ever by the USGA, the Open will return in 2009.

“Obviously, the work got done right, and now we’re keeping it in as good shape as we can every day,” says Currier, who adds that the Black is being managed differently now to preserve its quality. It’s open six days a week during an eight-month season and annual rounds have been curtailed to fewer than 40,000.

“We started with a very old, ragged golf course that many were very skeptical could be turned into a U.S. Open venue,” Jones says. “But with the help of people like David Fay and the USGA and David Catalano, Craig Currier and Garret Bodington, we made it into what some now think is the best U.S. Open venue ever. We also brought the public player into the mainstream of golf. That week at that Open was probably the most exciting time of my life.”

—T.O.

2 A blueprint for success

Torrey Pines South, San Diego

Spurred by the happenings at Bethpage Black, the South Course at Torrey Pines is golf’s “Field of Dreams.”

In true if-you-build-it-they-will-come fashion, civic- and golf-minded San Diego leaders persuaded Jones to renovate the South Course with the expressed purpose of persuading the USGA in turn to bring the U.S. Open to town. The picturesque, seaside Torrey Pines complex has hosted the PGA Tour’s Buick Invitational for the last half-century. The South Course was designed in the early 1950s by William Bell Sr., a classic Southern California architect.

In quick order, Jones was hired, \$3.5 million was raised and the project was completed in just 92 days, from August through October 2001. A year later, a very smitten USGA awarded Torrey Pines the 2008 Open.

“It wasn’t as easy as it seems, naturally, but we felt that the course had the beauty, terrain, character and space to host the national championship. It just needed to be redone to ultimately challenge today’s top players,” says Jones, who

describes the project as an amazing run from dream to reality.

The man most instrumental in bringing Jones to the project and, eventually, the Open to Torrey Pines, was San Diego attorney Jay Rains, a former president of the Century Club, which runs the Buick Invitational. Rains is a current member of the USGA’s executive committee.

Once Rains had Jones on board and accomplished the feat of raising more than \$3 million privately for a public golf course, he basically had all his ducks in a row. All that remained was the job, and Jones turned the trick.

“Torrey Pines South was a great golf course that had to be brought up to Open standards, and as far as we were concerned there was only one guy who fit the bill for that — Rees Jones,” Rains says. “The bottom line was, we had a lot of faith in his views that the course could be up to those standards. He provided us with a blueprint, and we pretty much did what he said. We gleaned Rees’ experience and expertise of the last decade or so along with his understanding of modern tech-



Photo by Larry Lambrecht

Jones brought his Open touch to the South Course at Torrey Pines in San Diego.



Photo by Larry Lambrecht

In all, Jones and his team have worked on 12 venues that have hosted U.S. Opens or PGA Championships in the last 15 years, including Torrey Pines (pictured above).

“My approach to remodeling a classic existing course is not unlike an art restorer with an old painting.”



Photo by L.C. Lambrecht

Jones acknowledges that an overriding issue he is confronted with at potential major tournament sites are the technological advances in players’ equipment and their improved physical conditioning, causing length to render many of the old classic courses helpless without changes. The issue is one of concern, he says, and has indeed taken its toll among some of America’s great venues.

The best solutions, according to Jones, are right up his alley — instead of creating 8,000-yard layouts, rejuvenate the classics and turn them once again into a balance between the cerebral and the physical.

“The game has changed because of the clubs and balls and stronger players today and we’ve just got to continue to tweak courses to accommodate that,” he says. “But adding length is not always the answer. I think what you do is narrow the targets with rough and bunkering and fortified pin positions. Still, you have to be careful not to make it too severe. You have to give the player a chance for recovery, otherwise then you’re just rewarding the straight hitter as you would the long hitter if you added too much length. The key is to make them have to think their way around the golf course.”

with both the USGA and the PGA of America over the years through his remodeling projects. Although nearly all of the jobs have come about because the golf facilities have contacted Jones either before or after a major tournament has been awarded, the two associations have basically come to expect working with the “doctor” and expect nothing less than the optimum diagnosis and treatment, so to speak.

“I think I work well with them — I’m a good listener and ultimately I really want the tournament to be a success,” Jones says. “We work very hard at making the course be a demanding test, yet a fair test. The key to our success, I suppose, is that we’ve learned what to do and what not to do after doing so many.”



Photo courtesy of Ken Mangum

Calgolf’s Clyde Hall and Jones consult while working on the renovation of the Riverside Course at the Atlanta Athletic Club in Duluth, Ga.

nology and how the best golfers in the world use it and what it means.”

The project overall underscores how adept Jones is in creating decisions for the golfer. While the renovation included extensive bunker work and new teeing areas, most telling are the new green complexes, which were typically done with a U.S. Open in mind — “little greens within big greens,” as Jones says.

“Everyone across the board — the city, the pros at last February’s Buick, the USGA — is happy with the results,” Rains says. “But most of all, our golfers who play the golf course every day are very proud.”

And that, he adds, may be what history will remember Jones for best — his role in bringing the U.S. Open to public access facilities. Jones himself admits that wouldn’t be bad at all.

“The success and acclaim of Bethpage was a catalyst for the Torrey Pines project and who knows what else,” he says. “It’s changing the face of the game for the better by encompassing every player in the game into championship golf. I hope that’s my legacy — what we’ve done for the public golfer at Bethpage and Torrey Pines.”

—T.O.



Photos courtesy of Ken Mangum

Ken Mangum, the director of golf courses and grounds at Atlanta Athletic Club; Don Scartz, a member of AAC’s board of directors; and Jones on the Riverside Course at AAC.

The common notion among many in the golf course industry is that if you work with Rees Jones you’ll more than likely have a friend for life. Ken Mangum, CGCS, counts himself in that company.

Mangum, director of golf courses and grounds at Atlanta Athletic Club, forged a formidable working relationship with Jones during the last several years as they teamed to rebuild AAC’s two championship layouts originally designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr. Their friendship was a given as they returned the sprawling, 500-acre club along the Chattahoochee River northeast of Atlanta to the forefront of the country’s major tournament sites.

Jones, shuttling between his renovation of nearby East Lake Golf Club and AAC during the mid-1990s, directed a complete remodeling of the latter’s Highlands Course. Then, about seven years later, he repeated the task at its Riverside layout. Mangum, who has been at AAC since 1988, has reaped the professional benefits from the projects. Highlands hosted the 2001 PGA Championship and the club has been awarded the 2011 tournament, although no firm decision has been made on which course it will be played.

Friendship by design

Atlanta Athletic Club, Duluth, Ga.

“The projects have been very rewarding to everyone at Atlanta Athletic Club,” Mangum says. “We rebuilt both courses tee through green, basically, at a cost of about \$8 million. It has represented a huge commitment by the club.”

It also represented the end of a long road back for AAC, which had hosted a U.S. Open in 1976, a PGA five years later and the U.S. Women’s Open in ’90. But in the midst of that heady span of years, the nearly 40-year-old Highlands Course also underwent two renovations involving four architects. Some of the work was controversial, and the low ebb came when the club was turned down for another PGA Championship in the late 1980s.

A handful of years later, Mangum helped persuade Jones to consider a complete remodeling of the Highlands to give it a consistency it was sadly lacking and to create a venue the club could be proud of. Mangum and Jones then went to the AAC membership to sell the idea. The ensuing vote was 78 percent in favor of the project.

“At the time, it was aimed at giving the members a great golf course to play every day and if it was good enough for a major tournament, that was just icing on the cake,” Mangum says. “The PGA visited during the project and they must have realized we had a great renovation in progress because the next year (1996), they gave us the 2001 tournament.”

After that, renovating the Riverside layout was a no-brainer. Jones began that project in October 2002, and the course was ready for play late this fall.

“We’ve become good, close friends through it all,” Mangum says of himself

and Jones. “The chemistry worked in ’94 and it’s still working. Rees is a great person, very good to work with. He left the agronomics and grass decisions to me because I’ve got to live with it. By the same token, all design aspects were left up to him. We relied on each other’s expertise.”

Jones believes his relationships with Mangum and others in golf course management are a result of how far the two professions, working together, have progressed.

“Superintendents today are as much on top of the needs and requirements of golf course development as the architects,” he says. “Both are equally important in the achievement of the final product. It’s essential to have that partnership. It’s one of the main reasons I’m successful. I may get the credit, but actually a lot of others do as much — if not more — to make it a successful project.”

Mangum, a former GCSAA board member who has been with the association 29 years, agrees that the chemistry between architect and superintendent is commonplace where Jones is concerned.

“To me, that’s why the Old Tom Morris Award is so fitting,” Mangum says. “From a superintendent’s standpoint, what Rees has done for our business and our profession has been outstanding. I can tell you he has been a tremendous help to me personally — not only with AAC, but he has helped me grow professionally and in working with people. He’s a great source of information in this industry. To work with him on two golf courses has been a special treat in my life.”

—T.O.



Collaboration, whether on a renovation project or a brand new course, has always been the hallmark of Rees Jones (center, white hat).

Black is beautiful

Noting that Jones' relationship with the USGA goes back to his remodeling of The Country Club in Brookline, Mass., for the 1988 Open, David Fay says the architect's reputation did indeed precede him as time went on. Word spread among both the aspiring venues and the USGA.

"We've always supported Rees' work and have always been pleased with the results," he says. "It's always appealed to me that when he deals with certain aspects of a hole, for instance, the work looks as if it's part of the hole and not something that doesn't fit."

Fay points out that when his longtime quest to bring the Open to a truly public golf course culminated in his persuading Jones to do his thing at New York's Bethpage Black for the 2002 championship, it was the only time the USGA has actually retained him for a pre-tournament project.

"We turned to Rees for the Open at Bethpage because he is a superb architect, he has a great eye, he's very flexible and goes into a job with an open mind," Fay says. "Plus, each of the courses for an Open that he has touched are, I believe, better golf courses than they were before."

Fay says the relationship is likely to go

on indefinitely because of Jones' popularity among potential USGA clients.

Jones doctored Bethpage, Fay's "people's course," for free. Other remodeling projects close to his heart have been done pro bono or for expenses, such as the Duke University Golf Club (where he played in the 1962 NCAA tourney), East Lake and the Charles Yates Golf Course in Atlanta and his hometown Montclair Golf Club.

"It's a chance to give back," he says. "When we can, we ought to do that."

Quality, first and foremost

At this point in his career, the reviews have been good for Jones, who is currently on the board of directors of the Metropolitan Golf Association and is a former board member of the New Jersey State Golf Association. Of his own designs, more than 20 are award-winning layouts. Counting his original work and the remodels, 29 venues he has laid his hands on are ranked among America's top 100. As much as anything, the recognition is testament to his work mantra of value instead of volume.

"We've managed to avoid being too busy and falling victim to the 'cookie-cutter' approach," Jones says of his firm's workload. "I think I've been very fortunate

to be able to keep our number of jobs down even in the boom of the 1990s. We didn't grow or expand with multiple designers. I've always made it a point to be involved in the work, to pick and choose what I do. I think that's why I've been so successful in redesigns or remodels — I put my mind in the heads of the original architects and didn't necessarily exhibit my own style."

As far as Jones is concerned, the future will be more of the same — picking and choosing, a new course here, continued tweaking of the great classics there. It's an act that never gets old.

"One thing about tournament courses: It's like going to Broadway," he says. "You're helping them get ready so they can showcase their facilities in an optimum way with the golf course unveiling the proper champion. You want the cream to rise to the top."

A major championship and the Old Tom Morris Award seem to have that in common.



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