

Raven's Claw: Public Plus in Montco

By Fred Behringer

Raven's Claw Golf Club promises to bring Montgomery County a truly high-end public golf course when it opens next spring on a huge, hilly site just east of Pottstown.

Ed Shearon of Shearon Golf designed the course, and his firm is building it on 185 acres of a 550-acre property that also will contain a residential development.

"This is an absolutely incredible natural site," Shearon says, "with creeks, ravines, marshes and mature trees. It has everything. We're fitting the golf holes around the natural features."

Raven's Claw, whose tee positions will range from about 5,100 to 6,900 yards, is scheduled to open by Memorial Day of 2005, just fourteen months after construction started. Much of the course had been grassed in by late September, and some of the holes were nearly ready for play.

Shearon, who designed Riverwinds Golf Club in West Deptford, New Jersey, and the new Vineyard Golf at Renault Winery in Egg Harbor, New Jersey, visits golf courses here and abroad and draws concepts from classic courses.

At Raven's Claw, he notes, the holes feature elements of holes from courses such as Merion, Pine Valley, Aronimink, Prestwick and Maidstone.

While homes will be placed on high ground for views of the course, the design emphasized separation so the homes do not intrude on the golf experience.

Large elevation changes on the property contribute to a wide variety of holes, while the acreage permits clear separation of each hole from the others.

The design takes full advantage of the special scenery. "We try to make sure there's a great view from every tee and every green," Shearon notes.

He stresses strategic design, placing hazards to solicit shot choices that reward bravery with more favorable approaches to the greens but give higher handicappers a good chance to make bogey.

He encourages players with friendly opening holes and tests them with the holes that decide matches, especially the ninth, 17th and 18th.

Fairway landing areas at Raven's Claw



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHEARON GOLF

Part of the foundation of a stone building is a landmark on the first hole.

are generous, but placement on the proper side of the fairway is important. Drives on some holes must carry waste areas, yet tees are positioned so the carries are manageable for all abilities.

Bunkers take inspiration from the Toomey-Flynn style at Shinnecock Hills with subtle movement in their shape.

Greens are large, averaging 7,000 square feet. The shape and style vary significantly. Donald Ross-style chipping areas are prevalent.

Let Shearon describe some of the holes, as he did during a recent tour of the course:

First hole (par 5, 545 yards from the back tees) – A welcoming hole, moving gently to the right with three options to play, it will get you warmed up and can produce a par or better.

Second hole (par 4, 349 yards) – This reachable, short birdie hole will reward the smart shot. (It is called "Hogback: for the crown in the bottleneck fairway, which gets progressively tighter.)

Third hole (par 3, 195 yards) – One of the prettiest holes at Raven's Claw, so relish the view as you hit over a pond into an amphitheatre green complex.

Seventh hole (par 5, 567 yards) – A demanding par 5 guaranteed to test every golfer. Three well-planned strategic shots are necessary to par this hole. (PECO's Limerick towers serve as a backdrop to the green.)


Ninth hole (par 4, 382 yards) – This dogleg right must be carefully played.

Don't miss left – or right. The second shot to a plateau green puts a premium on accuracy.

Eleventh hole (par 4, 419 yards) – A visually exciting hole that will reward a well-placed gamble. Beware the ravine on the right side and enjoy this classic cape-style hole. If you par it, you're going to be tickled to death.

Thirteenth hole (par 4, 422 yards) – A truly spectacular, downhill dogleg left that will challenge you to hit over the carry bunkers.

Seventeenth hole (par 3, 235 yards) – A long, uphill 3 par that will challenge each player to rise to the occasion. The bunker to the right looks greenside but it is actually twenty yards short of the green. A shot to the right will be a sure disaster. This is a very serious par 3 that can make – or break – your game.

Eighteenth hole (par 4, 3767 yards) – A truly special finishing hole that will test your physical and mental golfing skills. The entire right side will cause problems from tee to green. 

Construction of the Raven's Claw clubhouse was scheduled to start about October 1. The practice facility will include tees at both ends, four target greens and a large putting green.

Daily green fees are expected to top out under \$70 on weekends, less on weekdays. The club will offer non-equity annual memberships limiting play to Monday through Thursday plus Friday before 10 a.m. for \$2,200. Information: 610-828-5488 or www.shearongolf.com.