



## Its history

The Woodstock Open began three years before Gene Sarazen made his celebrated double eagle in the 1935 Masters. While the Masters has grown into one of the most popular and prestigious golf events in the world, the Woodstock Open has met the test of time to reach its 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. This year's milestone tournament will be played Sept. 8 at Woodstock Golf Club. The course opened its nine holes in 1929 just months before the stock market crashed.

Plans to build another nine were crushed by the Great Depression. Land was sold off to keep the club alive.

Head professional Warren Townley probably had no idea what he was starting on a Friday in late August of 1932. At his invitation, seven pros from area clubs in the Hudson Valley came to Woodstock for a day of friendly competition.

This informal Warren Townley Invitational grew steadily and eventually became the ***Woodstock Open***.

Sarazen, a friend of Townley's, was a frequent visitor to Woodstock beginning in 1942 with his first of several exhibitions at the club. At age 64 in 1966, Sarazen entered his first Woodstock Open.

It was a short jaunt to Woodstock for Columbia County resident Sarazen, who was affectionately called "The Germantown Squire." He placed fourth in 1966, finishing five shots behind winner Toby Lyons in what was then a 27-hole tournament.

Sarazen's double eagle came on the 15<sup>th</sup> hole at Augusta National during the Masters' final round. Tied with Craig Wood through 72 holes, Sarazen won the 36-hole playoff the next day.

The Masters was born a year prior in 1934 and called the Augusta National Invitational until 1939. World War II interrupted both the Masters (1943-45) and Woodstock Open (1943-46).

No records are available on the first 11 years of the Woodstock Open. Thanks to Charlie Tiano, sports editor of the Kingston Daily Freeman for 30 years following World War II, the event blossomed and was well chronicled.

Tiano became tournament director in the early 1960s. His devotion to promoting the event led to a golden era that saw the winner's purse grow from \$100 to \$2,500 during his reign.

Top professionals and amateurs from around the state competed in fields that reached a peak of 104 in 1977. Pros from the Northeastern New York and Metropolitan PGA sections found their way to the Catskills in fairly equal numbers.

Another former Masters winner, 1957 champ Doug Ford, played in the 1977 Woodstock Open. Bob Toski (1954 PGA Tour money leader), Tom Creavy (1931 national PGA champion) and Ken Green (five-time PGA Tour winner) also are part of tournament history.

Schenectady pro Armand Farina claimed his fourth victory in 1957, and no one has equaled the record in 57 years. Farina was low pro in 1950 before winning the next three years.

Three-time champs include Lyons (1966, 1968, 1974), Mel Baum (1989, 1996, 2003) and Trevor Jaycox (2005, 2010, 2011). Bobby Heins (1970, 1983) was the only player to win as both an amateur and professional.

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Woodstock Golf Club, Box 308 Woodstock, NY 12498

All-time Ulster County amateur great Leon Randall set the 27-hole tournament record with 96 in 1969 (last year for 27 holes).

Teenager Ethan DeForest demolished the course and 18-hole tournament records with 10-under-par 60 in 2012. While DeForest still holds the competitive course standard, Woodstock pro Judd Noto fired a 59 during a casual round in 2013.

DeForest, now playing collegiately at Bowling Green, was the third family member to wear the Woodstock Open crown. Dad John DeForest Sr., a PGA Tour regular in the late 1980s, won with 63 (then a course and tournament record) in 1991.

Chris DeForest, one of Ethan's four older brothers, became the youngest tournament champ ever at age 15 in 2004. After tying his father at 65, Chris DeForest won the playoff.

Papa DeForest, however, still walked away with the \$3,000 prize for low pro.

Frank Hannigan, former executive director of the USGA, brought a special brand of class and excitement to the 2007 Woodstock Open as honorary chairman. Until his death in 2014, Hannigan resided in nearby Saugerties and was a beloved Woodstock Golf Club member for 11 years.

"I had been past the course several times, and one day just drove in off the street and introduced myself," Hannigan said of joining Woodstock. "I decided this is what I need, a course I can reach some of the par-4s in two.

"I was impressed with the beauty of the course and how well it is maintained.

Using his professional contacts, Hannigan arranged for a USGA agronomist to evaluate Woodstock.

"The agronomist saw the course and told me this is how golf is supposed to be," Hannigan recalled.

Donald Treat

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