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*Cover: Photo of Tiger Woods at the 2006 Buick Open, by Carter Sherline / Frog Prince Studios.*

Photo by Bob Keyes



# 50 Years of the Buick Open

By Jack Berry

**Dave Hill, 1969 Buick Open Champion  
and Member, Michigan Golf Hall of Fame**

I hate to think of this being the 50th anniversary of the Buick Open. A half century! It's a little disconcerting because I was a 26-year-old sports writer for the

United Press wire service and that means I'm 76 going on 77.

It also means I've seen and covered some great golf at Warwick

Hills, known some great characters like Waldo McNaught, the Buick public relations director who came up with the idea of Buick sponsoring a golf tournament which since then has brought the best golfers in the world to Michigan year after year, inaugural winner Billy Casper to Arnold Palmer, Gary Player, Sam Snead, Champagne Tony Lema, Tom Weiskopf, Lee Trevino and Jack Nicklaus to today's Tiger Woods and Vijay Singh.

McNaught was one of a small group who bought a residential plot on land in Grand Blanc formerly owned by a GM vice president. McNaught suggested a golf club and then tournament to the other investors and they bought into. The home McNaught built at Warwick Hills is the first one on the left side of the first fairway.

McNaught was a perfect PR man – friendly and funny. The Buick attracted swarms of people, not just golf fans, because of incredibly low prices. When writers asked McNaught what the crowd count was, it became a joke. There aren't turnstiles at golf tournaments and he had no idea but he always came up with a number. And it got printed.

The Buick changed the face of tournament golf. It was the first major corporation to put its name on a tournament. Until then, tournaments were known by city names – the Motor City Open was a fixture in Detroit. There was the Los Angeles Open, the Texas Open, Phoenix Open, Portland Open and the Insurance City in Hartford. And tournaments were



Photo: Michigan Golfer archives

Arnold Palmer, The King, finished 2nd in the first Open, 1958.

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Photo by Mark Arpin

Dan Pohl uncorks one of his massive drives on the 17th hole at the 1987 Buick Open. He finished 2nd to Robert Wrenn who shot an amazing 262.

named after the host club, the Colonial in Fort Worth, the Inverness Four Ball in Toledo, or an association like the Western Golf Association.

At United Press I used the tournament name – the Buick Open. The other wire service, the Associated Press, called it the Flint Open even though it never was played in the city of Flint. The A.P. loftily said it didn't use commercial names. Eventually it ran a little line at the end of the story and said "The commercial name of the tournament is the Buick Open." The A.P. eventually gave in to the proliferation of commercial sponsors that followed Buick's lead.

The first Buick raised the bar for professional golf by offering the unheard of purse of \$52,000 and first prize of \$9,000 plus a new Buick. That was double the size of most other purses. The Motor City Open that year, at Red Run Golf Club in Royal Oak, had a purse of \$25,000 and Doug Sanders earned \$5,000 for winning.

**W**arwick Hills was the longest course on the PGA Tour at 7,280 yards and Snead called it a long, boring walk but said for the money Buick was offering, he'd play it on the Dort Highway. It wasn't the tree-lined course it is now. Trees didn't divide the first, ninth, 10th and 18th fairways as they do now and the eight southernmost holes had been laid out in a former farm field. Now they're fairly heavily treed. And there wasn't a pond at the par 5 13th green.



**Fred Couples' smooth swing launched thousands of balls before his back problems. He was really into his "Boom Boom" days when he won the Buick in 1994.**

Initially every green looked the same, basically Y-shaped with a sand trap on each side. Joe Lee, one of the game's top designers, worked on it in 1969, took out much of the sameness and cut then yardage to 7,000. Some modifications since have it at 7,127 yards. The first Buick started what seems to be a tradition – a rainy day. It cost Palmer the tournament. He rallied from a first round 76 with a five-under-par 67 on the morning of the second round. But rain pre-

vented the afternoon half of the field from finishing and, unlike today, all scores were washed out. Palmer then shot 71 the next day and the four strokes cost him the championship. Casper beat him by one shot.

Unfortunately that rainy day carried lightning too and a spectator was killed. There have been some monsoon-like rains since and once water flowed through the press tent and everyone rushed to

pull plugs and turn off computers.

The cars flowed too. Buick was the first to give players complimentary cars for the week and, full disclosure, writers got them too. It was a little perk that, as Ernie Harwell might say, is "long gone." Now there are 10 pages of "Media Regulations" in the media guide. Buick brought in writers from across the country, San Francisco, Atlanta and New York. Jerry Rideout, who succeeded McNaught as Buick PR director, was a United Press alumnus, and convinced Leo H. Petersen, U.P.'s national sports editor, and columnist Oscar Fraley to come out. They were legendary characters, inveterate gin rummy players in post-round gatherings and Fraley was a "star" for his book, "The Untouchables." He had bumped into Eliot Ness, the federal agent who nailed Al Capone, in a bar at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York and they collaborated on the book. The book sold 1.5 million copies and led to a movie and then a TV series.

Doug Ford was in those early Buick fields and Rideout took care of that with a touch that brought publicity and pictures across the country. Instead of FORD on the back of Doug's caddie, Rideout made it BUICK. Doug Buick.

Also in the early press corps, although his golf outshone his writing, was Gary Player. In his early days on Tour Player would finish his round and go to the press center where he'd type a story on his play and send it via Western Union to a South African newspaper. Another star in the making



Photo: Michigan Golfer Archives

Payne Stewart finished second in 1984

was Chi Chi Rodriguez who holed his 6-iron second shot on the par five 13th for a double eagle. The shot by the virtual unknown Chi Chi was met with some skepticism and unfortunately never was officially recorded because the round was washed out by rain.

Rideout was Buick tournament director during good times and then during the bad times when the then-chairman of General Motors thought Buick was getting too much publicity so he pulled the plug after the 1969 tournament which was won by Jackson native Dave Hill.

Buick dealers across the country were shocked – they loved the tournament and many played in the Wednesday pro-am which included Hollywood stars recruited by Bing Crosby’s recruiters for his Pebble Beach tournament.

Flint PGA pro Larry Mancour tried to keep the Buick alive with a pro-am but it wasn’t until 1977, with a new chairman at the GM helm, that Rideout was able to convince the corporation to renew the Buick. It had a two-division name for a few years, the Buick-Goodwrench, and South African Bobby Cole won the renewal at the Flint Elks, where Mancour was pro. Two of today’s TV golf voices, Peter Oosterhuis and Gary McCord, finished in the top ten. The tournament went “home,” to Warwick Hills in 1978 and has been there since.

Julius Boros and Tony Lema were the early days favorites and Boros’s 1963 victory was especially delightful for Buick. The Big Three – Palmer, Nicklaus and



Player – skipped the Buick to prepare the U.S. Open which was the next week at The Country Club in Brookline, Mass. Boros beat Palmer and Jacky Cupit in a playoff, Nicklaus, the defending champion, missed the cut and Player wasn't a contender.

It was the first of two Buick victories for Boros whose swing was as easy and smooth as a rocking chair, and Lema followed Julie's 1963 Buick by winning the next two. When Lema won, he sent champagne to the press tent. Lema had a chance to make it three in a row but lost by three shots to fellow Californian Phil Rodgers. Lema had champagne iced, however, and sent it to Rodgers with his compliments.

There wasn't a more popular Buick champion than Lema who was killed, with his wife, later that summer in a small plane crash when he was going from the PGA Championship in Akron to a Buick dealers outing in Illinois.

After Boros and Lema the Buick didn't have any multiple champions until Singh won three times, in 1997 and 2004-05 and Woods in 2002 and 2006.

But there were plenty of other



Photo by Carter Sherline / Frog Prince Studios

**Jim Furyk - crazy swing, but sane results. Furyk won in 2003.**

major championship winners who added the Buick to their resume – Art Wall, Weiskopf, Hale Irwin, Lanny Wadkins, Ben Crenshaw (with one of the greatest Buick shots, a turned-over 9-iron, played left-handed from next to a pine tree by the 13th green that resulted in a birdie), Larry Mize, Fred Couples and Jim Furyk.

Ironically, the Buick 72-hole record of 26-under-par 262 was set

by Robert Wrenn in 1987. It was the only victory of his Tour career.

While other sponsors came and went around the Tour, Buick increased its presence, signing on as the Tour's "official car" and sponsoring the San Diego tournament at Torrey Pines and, for a time tournaments in New York and the Deep South. Instead of the Buick division public relations director acting as tournament director, as was so well done by McNaught, Rideout and then Tom Pond, the additional tournaments required year-round attention and Larry Peck has served that role since 2002.

Buick signed Tiger Woods, golf's No. 1 star to a long contract, one that has been extended, and he's been the com-

pany's spokesman in its television commercials, BUICK is on his golf bag and since he's a contender in every tournament he plays, the Buick name always appears on television. And Woods has won two Buick Opens and six Buick Invitationals at Torrey Pines.

That's the Buick. For a half century it's rolled out one victory after another. **MG**

# Berklich on the Buick

By Jack Berry



Photo: Michigan Golfer Archives

**Nick Berklich was a long-time Warwick Hills CC Professional.**

*This interview with Nick Berklich was first published in the August, 1998 issue of the Michigan Golfer.*

**M**ichigan's big-time PGA Tour championship, the Buick Open, celebrates the 40th anniversary of its rollout at Warwick Hills Golf & Country Club, August 6-9, and only three courses have been a part of the professional tour longer than Warwick Hills.

The Augusta National began hosting the Masters Tournament in 1934, Colonial Country Club in Fort Worth, Texas, began hosting the Colonial National Invitation (now Mastercard Colonial) in 1946, and Pebble Beach began hosting the Bing Crosby Clambake (now AT&T National Pro-Am) in 1947.

Feeling Flint needed another private club besides Flint Golf

Club, five formed Warwick Realty in 1955. Those five — Chuck Kelly, Homer Strahle, Bill Gregor, Ed Titus and Vic Ryden — put down \$2,500 each and convinced 60 others to invest the same amount. They bought 320 acres of mainly farm land south of Flint, in Grand Blanc and most of the 65 bought a lot for another \$3,000.

Then they sold memberships for \$1,650 and hired James Gilmore

Harrison, a Pennsylvanian who worked as a teamster and then as a foreman for Donald Ross from 1921-27. Warwick Hills is the only course Harrison designed in Michigan and it opened in June, 1957.

Nick Berklich, Warwick's golf professional ever since the 1965 model Buick and honored by Warwick members with a lifetime membership in the club, sat down with Michigan Golfer's contributing editor Jack Berry to talk about the Michigan "home" for the world's best golfers.

**Michigan Golfer:** Size up Warwick Hills as a tournament test.

**Berklich:** It's great for competition. Even if a player has a four shot lead going into the back nine, he's not safe. If he doesn't play aggressively, someone could shoot 30, 31 back there, maybe even 29 — that's been done seven times on the back. (The non-tournament record for the back nine is 28 by Denis Watson in the 1988 pro-am)

A lot of guys have lost the tournament because they didn't

play aggressively back there. It's probably one of the biggest swings on the Tour, where a player can make up a lot of ground in nine holes. A lot of people around the country I talk to say it's one of the most interesting to watch because of that. And the television ratings reflect it; it's one of the highest rated outside of the majors.

**Michigan Golfer:** Where does the attack start? On the short par 4 12th (335 yards)?



Photo by Carter Sherline / Frog Prince Studios

Tiger Woods in the tournament was pure magic at the ticket office.

**Berklich:** No, it starts as soon as they make the turn. The 10th (401 yards) is there for the taking. The green faces the player and he has a relatively short iron in there. Our 11th (190 yards) is not a real tough par 3. I would say just about every hole on the back side is a birdie hole. That's why the numbers are so low. They can tuck the pins but if the players hit the shots and they're aggressive, the greens are so good that the players just marvel at their condition.

**Michigan Golfer:** At the time, Robert Wrenn's 26 under par 262 in 1987 was one shot off the all-time PGA Tour record for low score, held by Ben Hogan and Mike Souchak, and Wrenn won by seven shots. Low scores are a tradition at the Buick but how do you explain that?

**Berklich:** Those things happen. He was in a zone that particular week and that's how good these Tour players are. He played extremely aggressive from the get-go. He had a feel for the course and a feel for the game which has never been repeated in his career.

**Michigan Golfer:** What is the best single round you know of by one of your members?

**Berklich:** We have some young members who played on college teams but none have done better than 68 or 69. And that's in regular play, not championship play.

**Michigan Golfer:** What does that tell the golf fans?

**Berklich:** It tells them that professional golfers are so much better

than people give them credit for. We have pro-ams with the best pros in the state and if someone shoots 70 or 71, they usually win it. And I don't set the course even close to all the way back, it's 6600 to 6700 yards. The Tour players are typically playing 7100 yards, back to 7150. They are head and shoulders above everyone else. Comparing it to some other sports, we are kids among giants, we're like high school basketball players to the NBA.

**Michigan Golfer:** Early in the Buick history, Warwick Hills was known as a long boring walk. Now players like Fred Couples, the 1994 champion, and Peter Jacobsen, the 1980 champion, have compared Warwick Hills to the courses they grew up playing. What happened?

**Berklich:** It was in the later 1960s and we had a young aggressive board of directors. They were concerned because they'd heard through the grapevine that our golf course, even though the purse was right, needed a little tweaking. The condition of our greens wasn't real good. They were very, very hard and they were all shaped the same way — two bunkers in the front and a narrow entrance and then they fattened out like a pear with a bunker in the back.

Every one was the same and they were straightaway holes with no doglegs. It was a very, very long monotonous golf course and the greens wouldn't receive a ball. You had a lot of bad things going for you. The board decided changes were needed to not only improve the course for the tournament but for the club as well.

The board asked Mr. Kelly, who was a member at Pine Tree (in Florida and had a house on Warwick's 16th hole) to serve on the committee. He was a very good friend of Joe Lee and persuaded Joe to come up and look at our golf course.

I was the young pro at the time and went along with Mr. Kelly and Mr. Lee when they looked at the golf course. Chuck asked him if he could do anything with it and Joe said "Oh, this has fantastic possibilities. All it takes is money?" Chuck said "That's one thing we don't have."

But we proceeded to do everything and it cost \$180,000. I recently talked to Joe Lee and asked what it would cost today to do what he did then. He said you probably couldn't get out of it for \$4 million.

He built all the greens to USGA specifications, changed the location of some greens, expanded the tees, and put in big Augusta-type bunkers. Architecturally we have one of the real hidden gems in Michigan. It's not only good for PGA Tour play, it's good for member play. We have tees for ladies, seniors, juniors, regular membership and PGA Tour play and not many courses can say that.

Joe also has been back several times and told us where to plant trees and that's so much help. We're really happy with everything that Joe has done.

**Michigan Golfer:** What is your favorite hole?

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**John Daly** was super impressive in his first Buick, hitting a driver and a 5-iron to the 7th green, a par 5 584 yard hole.

**Berklich:** The 18th. I think it's one of the great finishing holes in golf. You can see everything from the tee, every possible problem you might have. You must drive the ball in the fairway and you get an extra 50 yards because it's so firm.

In the old days it was kept much softer. The new technology has given the players a lot of length and the grasses are much better than the old days and don't need as much water. Everything is better, much better. The ball and the clubs are so much better.

In the old days, before Joe Lee, a player could drive into the ninth fairway to stay away from the out of bounds on the left of the 18th. And there was only one splash bunker between the ninth and 18th. Now there's a big fairway bunkers and a lot of trees. The hole probably was 30 yards longer originally because the tee was back farther and so was the green and there weren't any pine trees. It's a much better hole now.

**Michigan Golfer:** The Buick and big galleries are synonymous. How did that begin?

**Berklich:** When Buick started the tournament, it wanted it to be a community event so tickets cost only \$1 and parking was free. We were one of the first tournaments to draw big, big galleries. Whole families came. And we had beer sales in cans, not in cups. I remember players saying they'd never seen anything like it; they were ankle-deep in cans going through the grove (where the 10th, 11th, eighth and 17th holes converge). The cans were constant noise but players learned to block that out. A lot of players said they'd played in National Opens and not seen that many people. I'd estimate we were drawing 20,000 to 25,000 people.

**Michigan Golfer:** How about Tiger Woods' crowds last year?

**Berklich:** I never thought we'd be able to handle the crowds that Tiger brought. I'd seen big crowds with Greg Norman but they were nothing like Tiger Woods. We had a different type gallery. We had people who wanted to see Tiger

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The 18th is Berklich's favorite hole and one of Jim Furyk's as he putts out for his 2003 win.

Woods who knew nothing about golf. I had ladies coming through the golf shop wearing high heels and long skirts. I said where you going? "I'm going to see Tiger Woods." I told them they'd better get some different shoes or take off the high heels because they wouldn't be able to walk very far. And I'm not talking about a few people. A lot of people had never been to a golf tournament before. And we didn't cut off our gate sales.

We had the biggest galleries I had ever seen. In fact, we had the biggest galleries on Thursday and Friday that I'd ever seen for any weekend round. My sales (hats, caps, shirts and other souvenirs)

indicated that. I set a record Thursday and broke that record Friday and broke that record Saturday. Then I ran out of merchandise. That was fun.

**Michigan Golfer:** There was a dark period after Dave Hill won the 1969 Buick. General Motors ordered the Buick Division to drop the tournament and it didn't return until 1978. What was that time like?

**Berklich:** I don't know the politics but whoever was in charge didn't think they were getting their money's worth through golf and they dropped it. And we lost it. The Tour lost it, the club lost it and

the community lost it. It was very depressing for this club. We got down to 80 members.

It was a very, very tough period. We had 5-6 years where it was touch and go. We survived that and we're very, very strong today. When we came back, it was wonderful because Warwick Hills became a growth organization. We built a new clubhouse, we improved our greens, we improved our irrigation, we improved our practice area, we improved everything to do with golf and added a whole lot of capital improvements and there is such a demand today that we have 32 people on the waiting list with a \$25,000 mem-



bership fee and I never thought I'd see that.

**Michigan Golfer:** It takes behind-the-scenes people to make tournaments successful, too. Who have the major Buick players been?

**Berklich:** Jerry Rideout and Bob Coletta have been big. Jerry was Buick's Director of Public Relations and was the General Chairman of the tournament for years. He was a master at public relations and had the vision to bring in celebrities for the pro-am. The celebrities, like Perry Como, George Gobel, Ray Bolger, the Fan Fare cartoonist Walt Ditzen, Tom Harmon and Alan Hale Jr., attracted people other than golfers. Those people saw how much the stars loved the game and that in turn got those non-golfers interested in the game. Jerry got the Buick a lot of national publicity. When Doug Ford was in the field, Jerry had the caddie bib read DOUG BUICK and that picture got a lot of play.

When the tournament was transferred from Buick public relations to the sales department, Bob Coletta did a study as to what sports people watched on television and how that segment related to buying automobiles. It showed that 90 percent of the people who watched golf tournaments were candidates to buy Buicks. Buick was sponsoring different events then and decided to concentrate on golf. Now there are four Buick tournaments, in San Diego, New York, Callaway Gardens, Ga., and here. And Buick is the official car of the PGA Tour. It's done wonders for sales and Coletta has gone from sales to the head of Buick.

**Michigan Golfer:** Billy Casper collected \$9,000 from the then record \$52,000 purse for winning the first Buick. This year's winner will take \$324,000 from the \$1.8 million pot. How else have things changed?

**Berklich:** Everything is a business today. Players want to go out and have a quiet dinner. There are exceptions but in the old days everyone was out on Dort Highway. If they weren't at the Shorthorn of The Embers, they were over at the Karasel on Grand Traverse. Lionel Hebert used to play his horn there. George Karas would buy their dinners and everyone in Flint would try to be there that week. It was the players' second home and all the Buick people would be there too. The players went out in groups but today, if you see anyone out, they're by themselves or with their families. They want private dining; they don't want to be bothered. But in those days, they were just regular people.

**Michigan Golfer:** Are you sorry to see those days go?

**Berklich:** Yes and no. Nowadays the public is so demanding, not only in golf but other sports too and they need their quiet time. I think today's golfers are much better athletes than they used to be. They really work at it. They're in that fitness trailer, they have sound eating habits, no cigarettes or alcohol. They are trained athletes and they have to perform that way or they won't be out there that long. The difference between making the cut, making money and winning

isn't that far apart. The scores have gone down.

We've seen what's happened here. The course hasn't changed that much, maybe two shots. But I remember several times having a chance to make the cut myself back in the 60s if I broke 150. Now if you aren't under par, (144) you don't make the cut. That's what the quality of the field has gone to.

**Michigan Golfer:** Your thoughts on some players — Sam Snead, Tony Lema, Greg Norman, Fred Couples, Tiger Woods, David Duval, Justin Leonard, John Daly.

**Berklich:** Sam was always special to us here at Warwick. He is very good friends with one of the founders of our club, Chuck Kelly, and came here other than playing in the tournament, just to play with Mr. Kelly. You hear all these stories about being tight but Sam is very good to the club professionals and the tour players. He came here back in the 60s and a fellow who used to caddie for him in the North & South tournament at Pinehurst wired him here and said he had fallen on hard times, that he'd broken a leg, couldn't and wondered if Sam might be able to help him.

Sam came into the pro shop and said "Do you have anyone going down to Western Union. I have to wire some money." I took it down. It was \$250. And back in the 60s, \$250 was like \$1,000 today.

Another time his nephew, J.C. was on the putting green here before the Buick, complaining about his game. This was in the



**Tiger and his 50th win.**

60s and he'd just come out on Tour and wasn't doing good. He was barely making cuts and wasn't making enough to support his family. He was really down on himself. Sam said "C'mon, you have to keep playing and playing and playing. You're a good player, you're going to make it out here." And Sam reached in his pocket and pulled out a whole wad of money, gave it to J.C. and said "Keep playing."

A couple years ago Greg

Norman was here and was signing autographs as he walked from the range to the putting green. He'd take a hat, sign it and hand it behind him as he kept walking. A man brought his grandson to the tournament and bought one of those Greg Norman hats. The grandson handed it to Norman but when Norman signed and handed it behind him, someone else grabbed it. The grandfather came in after the tournament and asked if we could do anything, that it wasn't the price of the hat as much as his

grandson wanted the memento. So I telephoned Greg's office in Florida and explained it to the woman who answered. She said to write a letter, that Greg liked to take care of that himself. I did and I didn't think anything of it after that and then one blustery fall day, this man came into the golf shop and introduced himself, introduced me his grandson and said Greg had written the nicest letter to him, sent him an autographed hat and said he'd see him at next year's Buick Open. All these players are like

that. They're very dedicated to golf and what the PGA Tour stands for.

Tony Lema (two-time winner) was a Damon Runyon character. He had the game to win many, many major tournaments and it was just tragic that he was killed. Everyone liked him.

Tiger Woods has probably done to the game what Bobby Jones said Nicklaus did — played a game with which he was not familiar. I've never seen anyone generate so much power in the golf swing. Will it hold up over time? I don't know. I've also watched David Duval, another of the Young Lions, and I'm very impressed with him. He gets the job done and he is sneaky long. And he has a little arc compared to Woods, a lot of rhythm and balance.

Justin Leonard has the heart of a lion — he's one guy you sure wouldn't want to get cornered by. More nerve than Willie Sutton — he could rob the bank. It's unfortunate that Steve Elkington has had so many physical ailments. There isn't much difference in the top players. It's who wants it more that week and it all boils down to putting.

John Daly played here and missed the cut the week before he won the PGA Championship in Indianapolis but he didn't leave without making a big impression. One of our members, Harvey Shaprow, came in the pro shop on Thursday or Friday and he says "Nick! You've got to see this! You won't believe it, He hit a driver and 5-iron to the seventh hole (par 5, 584 yards). He almost drove the



Photo by Carter Sherline / Frog Prince Studios

**Justin Leonard**

ball on the ninth green (413 yards)! C'mon, you gotta see it!"

So I got a cart and we went to the 13th hole (par 5, 548 yards). He hit the ball 40 or 50 yards by the tree and hit a 7-iron to the green. The next hole (322 yards) he takes out a driver and drives it

over the green and almost into the halfway house. I said I'm going in Harvey, I've seen enough.

**Michigan Golfer:** Nick, you've seen it all.

*Jack Berry has been covering the Buick Open since 1958. MG*

# Michigan Golf Hall of Fame Bestows First ‘Special Award’

The Buick Open – A Hall of Fame Member

By Susan Bairley



Photo: Michigan Golfer Archives

This shot was the brinchild of our editor, Terry Moore, and was one of our gratest “Buick” covers. Crenshaw, who won in 1986, was happy to do it and we are forever grateful.

In its 2008 class of honorees, the Michigan Golf Hall of Fame inducted one woman – Meriam Bailey Leeke, two men – Ken Janke and John Morgan, and

honored one combination of both. Representing thousands of men and women, and an iconic American car brand, the fourth ‘inductee’ was an event – the

Buick Open.

The 50-year-old Buick Open was honored “for its distinguished and steadfast commitments to golf,

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community service and charitable contributions,” and received the Michigan Golf Hall of Fame’s first-ever Special Award on May 18 at Indianwood Golf and Country Club.

As it celebrates its Golden Anniversary this year, the Buick Open was cited for many things.

It was General Motors Buick Division’s first foray into the world of professional golf sponsorship – and is recognized as the PGA Tour’s first corporate sponsor. Buick officials also believe the Buick Open was one of the first events in any sport to be named for a corporate sponsor as well.

Since 1982, it has raised \$9.4 million for charities, with local chapters of Easter Seals, the American Red Cross, the American Lung Association and Whaley Children’s Center in Flint, as primary recipients. While charities are said to have benefited since the tournament’s inception, contributions were not officially tallied and recorded until 1982.

It’s considered a bonafide Michigan tourist attraction. With its added ‘Tiger power’ in the late 1990s, the tourney attracts about 125,000 spectators annually.

And the Buick Open wouldn’t happen without the volunteer efforts of approximately 1,400 men and women, who each year donate their time and energy for the love of the game and their love of the ‘Buick.’

Veteran golf writer and Michigan Golf Hall of Famer Jack Berry was at the first Buick Open



Photo: Michigan Golfer Archives

**Tom Pond, one of many from Buick’s marketing department, represented the Open for a number of years. Here he is with former PGA Tour Commissioner, Deane Beaman.**

at its home tract, Warwick Hills Golf and Country Club in Grand Blanc, Mich.

“There are a few survivors from that 1958 tournament,” he laughed, as he introduced Buick’s award at the Hall of Fame induction ceremony and dinner. “With its \$52,000 purse, the first Buick Open doubled what others offered and raised the bar for professional golf,” he said.

Drawing the nation’s top names in professional golf, the first Buick Open’s \$1 admission and free parking made it an instant hit with spectators. Winner Billy Casper took home the \$9,000 first prize that year. Comparatively, this year’s winner will pocket \$900,000

from the tournament’s \$5 million purse.

Waldo McNaught, then Buick’s public relations director, is credited with selling the sponsorship idea to Buick after watching the 1957 Carling Open at the Flint Golf Club. The following year, the Carling Open became the Buick Open and was moved to the new Warwick Hills. In 1959, Buick signed a six-year agreement with the PGA Tour – making it the longest and largest single financial sponsorship deal in professional golf at the time.

Gerald Rideout, who succeeded McNaught at Buick, served as general chairman of 12 Buick Opens,

starting in 1960 to his retirement in 1978. He is generally credited with keeping interest in the tournament alive throughout a hiatus that accompanied an industry downturn and suspended the tournament during most of the 1970s.

Today, the Buick Open's 'main man' is Buick Golf Marketing Manager Larry Peck. Serving in that role since May 2000, Peck is responsible for managing the Buick golf marketing program, including advertising and event management. He is the PGA Tour and PGA of America's contract negotiations point person for Buick and was instrumental in developing Buick's relationship with Tiger Woods, who was signed to a sponsorship agreement with Buick in December 1999.

It was Peck, who accepted the Michigan Golf Hall of Fame Special Award on behalf of the Buick Open.

"The tournament has hosted many all-time greats over the years, including Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, Gary Player, Ben Crenshaw, Chi Chi Rodriguez, Hale Irwin, Fred Couples, Vijay Singh, Jim Furyk and of course, Tiger Woods," Peck said. "It remains Michigan's only PGA Tour event and generates extensive regional, national and international media coverage, all focusing on the great state of Michigan."

While there are several individuals who may have had a greater impact than some over the years, Peck said giving the event the award is truly the best way to

honor 'so many different people throughout the years' who have contributed to the tournament's success.

His thoughts on accepting the Special Award from the Michigan Golf Hall of Fame on behalf of the Buick Open? Peck said it was a special moment and lasting memory. "I am truly honored to part of that history and tradition. It is very special."

This year, Buick Open Week begins Monday, June 23, with the Dealer Pro-Am. The tournament runs Thursday through Sunday, June 26-29, at Warwick Hills.

For Buick Open tickets, call 1-800-878-OPEN (6736) or go to [www.buickopen.com](http://www.buickopen.com)" *MG*



The infamous 17th hole at the Buick Open.

# Buick's 10 Most Memorable Players

By Jack Saylor

## JACK SAYLOR: BUICK'S 10 MOST MEMORABLE PLAYERS- AN ENCORE COLUMN

*As the Buick Open approaches each year, my mind turns toward the late great Jack Saylor. I remember tossing down a cold one at the Airport Bar in Waterford in the early 80's and telling him I was about to start a new golf publication, The Michigan Golfer. Since we were in the company of my father and Harold Horn, a life long friend of both, I knew his response would be tempered. He indicated that publishing was a tough business, but that there was room for a golf publication and let me know that he would be willing to help out the magazine got off the ground. Almost 30 years later the MG continues to motor on and part of its rich editorial heritage is the content that still lives on in our Michigan Golfer archives <http://www.michigangolfer.com/news.html>*

*We have run this a couple of other times in the past and always get some nice feedback. Please enjoy a Saylor classic.*

### 1. Tony Lema, 1964.

A latter-day Walter Hagen, who exuded good cheer and appreciated a good victory and was willing to share. Champagne corks popped in the pressroom, a nickname was celebrated and, best of all, he won again in '65. Alas, he left us far too soon.



Peter Jacobsen, 1980.

### 2. Peter Jacobsen, 1980.

It may have been the hybrid Buick-Goodwrench, but didn't lessen the impact on this talented, friendly competitor. The lasting memory was Jake holding month-old daughter Amy with one arm while accepting the trophy as Amy barfed all over Daddy's shirt.

### 3. Hale Irwin, 1981.

Although he usually prevailed on more difficult tracks (i.e. three



Hale Irwin, 1981

U.S. Opens, two Memorials, etc.), this all-time great showed he could go birdie-to-birdie in a shoot out, too. He emerged from one of the tightest Buick finishes from a four-



way playoff with defending champion Jacobsen, Gil Morgan and Bobby Clampett.

#### 4. Ben Crenshaw, 1986.



Photo by Mark Arpin

**Ben Crenshaw,  
1986**

Scored a popular victory by pulling off one of the best shots in Buick history. At the short, par-five 13th, where a par usually lost you ground to the field, his second shot nestled against the trunk on the wrong side of a little pine tree for the right-handed

Crenshaw. No problemo. Gentle Ben turned lefty, flipped his wedge to the reverse side and popped a shot within a couple of feet to save his birdie-and perhaps the title.

#### 5. Robert Wrenn, 1987.

This likeable Virginian picked Warwick Hills for his “15 minutes of fame,” which lasted a torrid four days in which shot an unbelievable 26-under par 262 and missing tying Ben Hogan’s record by a Sunday bogey at No. 14, one of the very easiest holes. The victory touched off seven financial-productive years, but no more wins before he exchanged clubs for microphone.

#### 6. Julius Boros, 1963.

Nobody tired of watching Big Jay’s rhythmic, easy-going, smooth swing, wondering how he generated such power, plus the equally effective work around and on the greens. A giant of the era, he beat perennial runner-up Dow Finsterwald by one shot. He loved fishing the ponds in his spare time so he returned and won again in ‘67.

#### 7. Dave Hill, 1969.

One of the hardest workers and greatest strikers of the ball ever to



Photo by Mark Arpin

**Robert Wrenn, 1987**



Photo: Michigan Golfer Archives

**Dave Hill, 1969**

trod the tour, Peck's Bad Boy avenged brother Mike Hill's loss of 1968 (to Tom Weiskopf), with a fine 11-under 277 that put him in the books as the last Buick Open champ as management pulled the plug on the event until cooler heads thankfully prevailed nine years later.

## 8. Fred Couples, 1994.



**Fred Couples, 1994**

Coming to Warwick after a long layoff and fighting back problems, Couples seemed like a poor bet even to make the cut. But with his lazy, effortless Boros-like swing

style, Couples ignored inclement weather, even endured a 36-hole day and won going away with a blazing 18-under 270.

## 9. Chip Beck, 1990.



**Chip Beck, 1990**

Never altering his smile whether making birdie or double-bogey and had the groove this week to win another exciting four-man playoff with another fan favorite, Fuzzy Zoeller, along with U.S. Open playoff rivals that year, Hale Irwin and Mike Donald. The company liked Beck, too, and signed him as a Buick spokesman.

## 10. Billy Casper, 1958.



**Billy Casper, 1958**

There was more chalk lines on Warwick Hills than on the local football field to mark unplayable, free-drop areas on the new and quite rough golf course, but the \$100,000 purse was crisp (Sam Snead said they'd play down Woodward Ave. for that money). The field was classy and so was the winner as Buffalo Billy nipped Arnold Palmer, along with Ted Kross, by one shot. It started a great Michigan tradition. [http://michigangolfer.com/aug00/buick\\_top10.html](http://michigangolfer.com/aug00/buick_top10.html)

**MG**

### Other Saylor Archives

“How low can they go?” 2002 article

by Jack Saylor

<http://www.michigangolfer.com/aug02/buickopen.html>

“Jack Saylor: Golf's Piano Man,

by Art McCafferty

<http://www.michigangolfer.com/jan04/index.html>

“A Tribute to Jack Saylor”

Michigan Golfer Television

<http://michigangolfer.tv/2004shows/saylor/>

# Gene Bone and His First Buick Open

**G**ene Bone's first head professional golf job was at Warwick Hills CC in 1959.

He was part of the team that put on the first Buick Open 50 years ago. At the time Bone was always in the sports pages of the Pontiac Press, Detroit News and Free Press because of the success he had in golf.

He would try out his skills by going on the PGA Tour in 1963 and while his game held promise, it was a tough grind and he missed his family.

He returned to Michigan and worked at the now extinct Lancaster Hills.

From there he moved to the new Bay Pointe Golf Club in 1966. He was the head professional there for 27 years until his retirement. He still gives lessons at the club and that is where Jack Berry and I caught up with him to record our interview.



Photo © Buick Photographic

Gene Bone tees it up with Buick representatives, Waldo McNaught and Ed Rollent, just prior to the first Buick Open.



Gene Bone had a television show on WJRT-TV in Flint for a couple of years.

However, our story really begins when you click onto Jack Berry's You Tube interview of Gene Bone <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMfLaoRqVa0>

Berry, the recipient of the PGA Lifetime Journalism Award for his golf writing, was also on hand at that first Buick Open. It is a great interview and captures that wonderful time and place in Michigan's golf history. **MG**



Gene Bone (r.) is pictured here with a caddy from the Buick Open.

**Gene Bone and  
The Buick Open**



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMfLaoRqVa0>

# SLICE OF LIFE



By Terry Moore

**A**s a few of my ear-weary golf cronies will attest, I love this quote from Walter Hagen: “I never wanted to be a millionaire; I just wanted to live like one.” Indeed through my various golf endeavors, I’ve been fortunate to travel around the country and overseas to play golf and to live at times like a millionaire. This is especially gratifying when one is, in publisher Art McCafferty’s patented phrase, “merely a thousandaire.” With that as an introduction, permit this wayfaring thousandaire your indulgence as he recalls some golf journeys from the past year.

## **Tucson, Arizona:**

What a break to have a good friend like Jack Berry now owning a winter home here. (“There’s only one thing better than owning a home in Tucson, that’s knowing someone....”) I’ve never been to Tucson before this winter but let me tell you it’s a beautiful, sunny, and most attractive area.

Besides golf, there’s plenty to do in terms of outdoor activities and interests. Jack introduced me to one of his favorite haunts, the Saguaro National Park (east district) located in the southeast part of Tucson. Coming out of wintry Michigan, a desert rookie hiker like me found the park particularly breathtaking. The park encompasses an aging saguaro (the renowned giant cactus) forest at the foot of the Rincon Mountains and offers an extraordinary variety of desert environments and panoramas. And in a bit of serendipity, I happened to strike up a written conversation with a fellow hiker boasting a Cypress Point logo on his pullover. With his voice impaired, this gentleman communicated with me by notepad. The two of us thus engaged in an historic first: two hikers on a desert trail exchanging notes about playing Cypress Point GC. (This is why I’m proud to be an American!)

Since I’ve now mentioned golf, let me report that Tucson is teeming with public, private and resort golf offerings. Local aficionados steered us toward two fine courses on this trip. One day we played Stone Canyon, a private development course designed by Jay Morrish. From a photographic standpoint, Stone Canyon ([www.stonecanyon.com](http://www.stonecanyon.com)) is a stunning layout as it weaves around and through some remarkably rocky and cacti-strewn terrain. Immaculately manicured and painstakingly constructed, it possesses a dazzling collection of holes.

On a more modest scale but equally enjoyable is the venerable and classic-minded Tucson Country Club. Designed by the father-son duo of William F & William P Bell in 1947, Tucson CC is a walker’s delight to play as the greens and next tees are close to one another and the terrain’s generally flat. Known for its conditioning and its large, quick greens, the layout has a variety of strong and sporting holes, many of which are tree-lined. In a classy homage to one of its revered members, the championship tees here are named the Updegraff Golds in honor of Dr. Ed Updegraff, three-time Walker Cup player, many-time Arizona Amateur winner, and the ‘81 USGA Senior Amateur champion.

## **Orlando, Florida:**

I’ve been playing golf in Orlando every January since the PGA Merchandise Show made the move there in the ‘80s. This year our golf group sampled both the new and the old in terms of courses. The new sampling was at the Reunion Resort & Club of Orlando ([www.reunionresort.com](http://www.reunionresort.com)) which is located only a few exits past and southwest of Walt Disney World. For accommodations, there are smartly designed one- and three-bedroom Resort Villas each with kitchen and big living areas. For golf, you have two very solid and reputable layouts—the Tom Watson Independence Course and the Arnold Palmer Legacy Course. The Watson course has undulating

terrain and large, bold bunkering—especially in the fairways. The Palmer course is the more forgiving of the two but it offers quite the test as well. The overall course conditions and the quality of greens are top-notch. One item for the Reunion suggestion box: scrap the confusing “Independence” and “Legacy” titles for on-course signage (the courses overlap) and instead simply use “Watson” and “Palmer.”

Our appreciation of the old and the venerable was enhanced by our visit to the Mountain Lake golf course in Lake Wales. Not widely known except by those mavens who genuflect at the altar of designer Seth Raynor, Mountain

Camargo (OH) and the remodeled Chicago GC (IL).

In 2003, a renovation project by the noted Brian Silva was completed, deftly restoring many of the original features and signature Raynor holes. As such, the wonderful playing experience at Mountain Lake is compounded by a primer in classic golf course design. There’s the par-three Biarritz fifth hole with its namesake chasm in the middle of the green; the par-four seventh hole named “Road” in tribute to St. Andrews’ 17th hole; the par-three 11th hole named “Redan” for its imposing “kickback” contours in the green complex; and the par-three 17th hole named “Eden”

of pruning and clearing hundreds of trees in and around the course that were lost and/or damaged by the wicked hurricanes that raked through the area. But have no fear, Mountain Lake survived and in fact may have been even improved by Mother Nature’s forced tree-trimming project. Rest assured, Mountain Lake will continue to illuminate the legacy of its most admired architect.

### **Ireland:**

Arise from your slumber, this tale is nearly over. But before it ends, a few comments about some golf on the Emerald Isle, the host country of the 2006 Ryder Cup Matches. Last April, I played some stirring links courses in Ireland’s remote

“I never wanted to be a millionaire;  
I just wanted to live like one.”  
-- Walter Hagen

Lake is a (very) private club surrounded by a gated housing community that was founded in 1915 and landscaped by the world famous Frederick Law Olmstead, Jr. The course was designed in 1916 by Raynor who’s acclaimed for his work with C.B. MacDonald (Yale, National Golf Links, Piping Rock) and also for his own masterful handiwork at such traditional stalwarts as Shoreacres (IL),

inspired by the 11th hole at St. Andrews.

The superintendent of Mountain Lake is GCSSA member Scott Scamehorn (arriving this year from the well-regarded and nearby Southern Dunes) who has the course in excellent shape and with most slippery putting surfaces. Scamehorn also carries on the yeoman work, begun last fall,

northwest region not usually trafficked by Americans and the big golf travel companies.

Considered by some to be Ireland’s ultimate hidden gems, The Links of Ballyliffin—on County Donegal’s Inishowen Peninsula—include The Old Links, which was completed in 1968 by the legendary Irish designer Eddie Hackett and two British

designers; and Glashedy Links designed by Pat Ruddy and Tom Craddock and opened in 1995. The Olds Links is somewhat of a museum piece but it still delivers an invigorating golf experience with its magnificent views of the Atlantic and Glashedy Rock, an Irish Ailsa Craig, that sits two miles off shore.

Ruddy and Craddock meanwhile designed an exceptional test with Glashedy Links. The course winds its way effortlessly through rugged sand dunes and natural valleys, all the while imparting spectacular vistas. The bunkering (many of which are revetted or turf-stacked) is diabolical at times but ingeniously designed and placed. I could ramble on but simply put, Glashedy Links (<http://www.ballyliffingolfclub.com>) is a "must play" links course on anyone's itinerary.

Ruddy's reputation as Ireland's "modern day Eddie Hackett" will only grow as more players discover his links course in County Donegal located at the four-star Rosapenna Hotel and Golf Links ([www.rosapenna.ie](http://www.rosapenna.ie)). Overlooking an Old Tom Morris course (1891) and the gorgeous Sheephaven Bay, Ruddy's Sandy Hills course is nestled within some gigantic and towering dunes. Although the fairways are somewhat constricted and thus penal due to the natural and careful routing through this magnificent landscape, Sandy Hills affords a most

spirited and imaginative round of golf. (It's also quite physically taxing for walkers.) The views alone are priceless. Yet when the turf fully matures and a few tweaks are made, Sandy Hills will someday stand with the best links courses in the land. Kudos to Rosapenna Hotel owner Frank Casey for envisioning this project and hiring Ruddy who's a trusted steward and practitioner of authentic links design.

The quirkiest links course I've ever encountered was a little known and sadly neglected Eddie Hackett course called St. Patrick's in the nearby village of Carrigart and owned by Carrigart Hotel

owner Dermot Walsh (an eccentric and charming character). And get this: if you stay at his hotel, you play St. Pat's free! The only catch is the course is sorely lacking in regular upkeep, maintenance and equipment. Greens are mossy and abysmally slow, fairways are shabby and undefined, and many bunkers don't even have sand. Putting blinders on to these major shortcomings, one still feels lucky to have played here, awed by the majestic sights and moved once again by Hackett's genius buried and now overgrown here like some Celtic ruin. Oddly enough, playing St. Patrick's will make you feel like a millionaire. *MG*

