

Caledon golf courses reopen in time for Victoria Day long weekend

Written By ALYSSA PARKHILL

Just in time for this past long weekend, the provincial government gave the green light for recreational centres, such as boathouses, marinas, private parks and playgrounds, and golf courses, to reopen.

Caledon golf clubs were finally able to open their doors after being temporarily closed amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and what great timing to do so.

The Ontario government announced last Thursday (May 14), that selected businesses were able to reopen to the public, with specific guidelines put in place to ensure residents continue practising safety precautions, such as physical distancing. As of Saturday (May 16), all golf courses allowed players to enjoy their first game of the season.

Management at the Devil's Pulpit Golf Course in Caledon East said the time they were temporarily closed gave them the opportunity to prepare and make necessary changes to the popular local course. As strange as it may sound, the timing around being forced to close actually worked in their favour.

"This pandemic couldn't have fallen at a better time for the golf courses sake. It generally isn't until almost April 1, when outdoor routine property maintenance is started in this part of Ontario. I have a winter staff of seven people and, up until May 4, we were able to keep our golf courses in pretty decent shape with just us. Regular mowing, irrigation and general upkeep didn't ramp up before then and I have mother nature to thank for that," said Rob Wright, Golf Course Superintendent.

He added, "If this happened in the middle of July, things could have looked a lot different. Many golf courses around the world had to battle much more extreme conditions and stresses than we did. My hat goes off to all of them."

Several changes have had to be made regarding tee times, scheduled groups, screening processes and flow of players and staff.

"Our management team has been diligently preparing for what reopening may look like well before the government announced we could prepare for opening back on May 4. From an overall service perspective, we have adjusted everything, from how members arrive at our facility with a screening process at our front gate, specific flow into the property, to physically distancing from one another. We've even adjusted our hole layout for better flow on and off the golf course," explained Wright.

He added, "Our service towards members is still far from where we would typically be, but to ensure their and our employees' safety, we have to provide a very limited amount of amenities above and beyond their round of golf."

The pandemic has changed the 2020 season for golf clubs and players alike, and it seems several operational changes will likely stick around for the long-term to protect players and staff.

"Many aspects of what has changed are probably here to stay," said Wright. "The new options for ball retrieval from the cup, I believe, will become a new normal. Our tee times being farther apart to provide physical distancing will probably be around for a while. We will all have to learn and embrace these changes instead of complaining about them. They are for everyone's safety."

Mayfield Golf Club have faced similar challenges to their business and agreed that, during the time of being temporarily closed, staff were able to appropriately plan and prepare for eventual reopening.

"Everything has changed. The biggest thing that we've done is we changed our tee times, so they're expanded and create more space on the golf course," said Christopher Delaat, Director of Golf and Food Services at Mayfield Golf Club. "We've had to make sure that the bookings are all pre-paid, so we reduce the risk at check-in. We put staff in key positions to coordinate people more

efficiently. We basically moved our entire operation outside to reduce the risk of being in a building. My job is to make sure people have a safe environment, so that they can work and play.?

Delaat has been in the golf industry for 43 years, following in his father's footsteps, who played the game professionally. Not once has he come across a situation such as the COVID-19 pandemic but is strict in his word to keep people safe, and the golf course functioning at its best. With the several challenges he has faced along the way, he has found a silver lining in it all.

?I find myself very fortunate to be among the few businesses that are allowed to reopen. I never want to lose sight of the fact that some friends of mine that are in restaurants or fitness clubs, don't have the same opportunities. So, I try to make sure that is front and centre in my mind as I go through the day,? he explained.

This past long weekend usually involves family outings, participating in different activities or simply getting together with friends to enjoy Victoria Day. With the COVID-19 pandemic and Ontario's state of emergency still in place across the province, many have had to celebrate while at home. As the provincial government made the decision to slowly open up some activities in light of the long weekend, Mayfield Golf Club was a little surprised to see how relaxed and well-mannered residents were when attending the course.

?Back in January when it started to shift, I started making plans and thinking how these situations would play out. It was a lot of work trying to figure out the schematics of what was going to be needed,? explained Delaat. ?We really went to town on the planning, and it worked out really well. Yes, there's hiccups, there's problems, but they were so small, and people were so well-behaved, it was actually a lot of fun.?

To view the list of businesses that have been reopened by the provincial government, please visit [Ontario.ca](#).