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T2G BRIEF



Portmarnock festival was a hit

Portmarnock Links' €10m investment paying dividends

PORTMARNOCK Hotel and Golf Links plans to host a four-day Festival of Golf again next year following the massive success of the recent event held to celebrate the first anniversary of a €10 million investment in the hotel and golf links.

More than 400 golfers teed it up at the north Dublin links which hosted two Ladies Irish Opens, attracting all of Europe's top players, in 2008 and 2009.

Portmarnock Links recently appointed its first professional in Conor Russell who said that the recent four-day event has been such a success that they intend making it a regular date on the calendar.

"It was a terrific four days and the feedback has been so good we have already started looking at 2018," Russell said.

"While we were celebrating the first anniversary of the completion of the works on the course it also happily coincided with The Open when all the emphasis is on links golf. We will certainly look at a similar timing for next year."

Portmarnock also took the opportunity to announce details of its popular Winter Series, which will begin two weeks earlier than usual this year on October 3.

The event, which is aimed at low handicap amateurs and professionals, runs every Tuesday up until the end of March.

Top young professionals such as Paul Dunne and Gavin Moynihan have been regular entrants while former European Tour winner Damien McGrane had a record number of wins in last season's Winter Series.

As Russell is quick to point out, the major attraction of Portmarnock Links is not just the quality of the golf course but the playing conditions as there is no placing and the Rules of Golf apply.

This affords the low handicap player the opportunity to maintain a competitive handicap throughout the winter months.

Portmarnock will be hosting a one-day event on Tuesday, August 29 those intending to take part in this year's Winter Series

The time sheet is now open and bookings can be made by calling the professional's shop on 01-8666592.

T2G CLUB FOCUS

ASHBOURNE GOLF CLUB

IT'S only been open for 23 years but Ashbourne Golf Club in Co Meath is now at the cutting edge in more ways than one.

Life in Ireland has changed utterly since the founder members decided to go ahead and build a golf course in their small town in 1991.

Now, as the club approaches its 25th anniversary in 2019, this lovingly designed Des Smyth and Declan Branigan creation is very much at the heart of sporting activity in one of Ireland's fastest growing towns.

Not only that, the pristine parkland golf course is set to become one of the most innovative in terms of sustainability over the coming years with course maintenance providers Declan Branigan Design in the midst of a major fescue programme on the greens that will future-proof the course against future bans on pesticides from the powers in Brussels.

A member-owned club which draws its membership primarily from East Meath and North Co Dublin, the clubs had 520 adult members (of which 25% are female) and some 100 junior members at the start of this year.

And with Ashbourne now one of the fastest growing urban areas in the country — close to 200 new houses have just been built beside the golf club with further housing in the pipeline — it's become a crucial sports facility for the town.

While membership had fallen in recent years, due primarily to the recession, the club is now experiencing a positive growth in membership numbers, in particular in the adult categories.

In order to continue with this success, the club has introduced a number of initiatives including special offers for new homeowners in the area.

Thanks to its "Women in Golf" programme, a new Junior programme and the appointment of Ciaran Carroll as the new PGA professional with an emphasis on Junior club development, the club is now thriving and looking to the future with optimism.

In order to support its growth programme, the club has applied for grant funding to develop its practise area and install covered bays and floodlighting that will attract more locals to the club and potentially increase its membership.

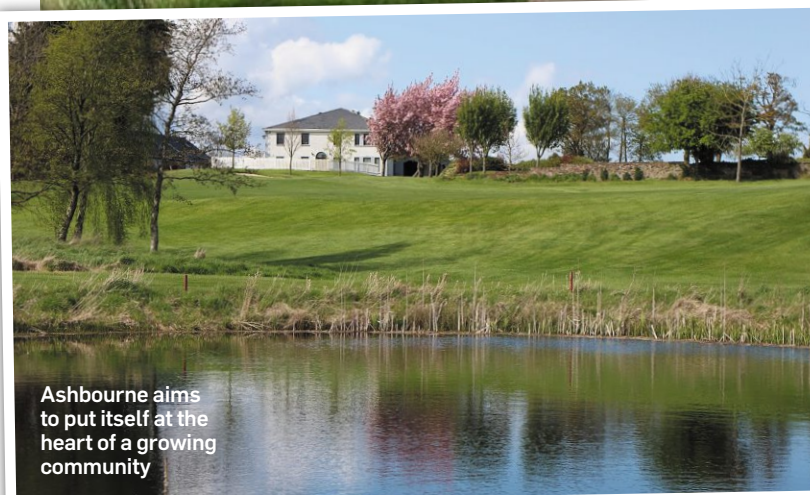
"We have already begun targeting new residents to the area through giving special offers and green fees to the new homeowners living near the course," explained vice-captain Brian Purcell.

"Many of these new residents have few links to the area, so we are keen that they feel welcomed and get to meet their neighbours through the golf club.

"We believe that if we can continue to develop our facilities, the social aspect of the club will increase as there would be more people around the club each evening, in particular in winter months.

"We hope that this would

HOME AND AWAY PLACES TO PLAY



Ashbourne aims to put itself at the heart of a growing community

you are talking €6-7,000 a bunker, and there are 53 bunkers on the golf course. So you want to make sure it is right before you go ahead."

Whether the club goes ahead with Sportsbond or opts for a more traditional bunker renovation programme, it's clear that Ashbourne is determined to improve its facilities as its popularity grows.

The greens are very much part of that plan and by promoting fescue greens they hope to protect themselves against changes in European legislation and future restrictions on the use of pesticides.

"The greens were originally an 80-20 fescue-bent mix," explained Branigan. "We have held on to a certain amount of fescue but around three or four years ago, looking at the potential changes in European legislation on pesticides, we discussed a fescue programme with the committee to future-proof the greens from any further restrictions on the use of pesticides. "Fescue is a much more

improve community cohesion, particularly in a satellite commuter town like Ashbourne, where people often never see each other during the week."

One of Ireland's friendliest clubs, Ashbourne draws huge support thanks to its cross-community appeal and with many members hailing from local GAA, rugby and soccer clubs, the atmosphere reflects this family feel.

It's also a stunning parkland course, and while it is now mature, work continues apace to make it one of the best-maintained clubs in the country.

Declan Branigan Design created the course and has remained

actively involved in the day-to-day maintenance of its USGA standard greens and tees since the first seeds were sown.

Playable all year round, it is consistently in excellent condition thanks to the club's ongoing investment in drainage and the sanding of its fairways.

And it will become even better over the next few years when the club decides which way to go with its bunker programme.

"They have embarked recently on a pilot scheme with bunker drainage and installed Sportsbond in one bunker," explained Ronan Branigan of Declan Branigan Designs. "It is quite expensive —