

Golf: Quail Creek hosting 2020 U.S. Women's Four-Ball, first USGA event in Collier County

Greg Hardwig, Naples Daily News Published 10:09 a.m. ET Oct. 2, 2018 | Updated 12:10 p.m. ET Oct. 2, 2018



(Photo: Jose Garcia/Quail Creek Country Club)

Let's try this again.

Quail Creek Country Club will host Collier County's first-ever United States Golf Association event. Tuesday, the USGA officially announced that the 2020 U.S. Women's Amateur Four-Ball Championship will be played at the North Naples club from April 25-29.

Quail Creek already was supposed to have hosted a USGA event last year, but Mother Nature had other ideas.

In late August last year, the course was flooded after torrential rains. Then a couple of weeks later, Hurricane Irma provided a blow that forced the USGA to eventually [move the 2017 U.S. Women's Mid-Amateur to Houston](#).

"I really think it just gives us a chance to mark a place in time when the recovery is done," Quail Creek general manager Don Hunter said. "It gives us a finish line to look at."

The day Hunter had to call the USGA and cancel -- which he's referred to as one of the most difficult things he's ever had to do -- also was the beginning of what led to Tuesday's announcement.

"We didn't want it leave it there," he said. "We immediately asked the USGA to consider for us for future championships. They've really stayed in contact with us on a regular basis through the recovery and came to us with this opportunity. They couldn't have been better to deal with."

"Since relocating the U.S. Women's Mid-Amateur, returning to Quail Creek has been a priority for the USGA," said Rachel Sadowski, championship director, in a release. "We're looking forward to continuing our relationship with the club, as well as the vibrant golf community in Naples, and know they will be a terrific host."



Quail Creek Country Club golf superintendent Kevin Leo (left) and general manager/COO Don Hunter pose in front of a downed tree on Oct. 9, 2017, after Hurricane Irma hit Naples on Sept. 10, 2017.

Quail Creek has recovered -- both courses were fully opened 2 1/2 months after Irma - and even embarked on a sweeping facilities upgrade incorporating a fitness center.

"We're in for permit with the county," Hunter said. "The planning stages, we've gotten very detailed. We feel like we've got it really dialed in. They'll break ground as soon as the county lets us. We will be complete 18 months from the start of the project, which will be done in plenty of time for the Women's Four-Ball.

More: [Golf: Naples' Quail Creek rebounds from Hurricane Irma, to host State Women's Open](#)

In August, the course hosted the Florida State Women's Open and Senior Women's Open.

"I think the Florida State Golf Association gave us an opportunity to highlight how far the golf course had come after the hurricane," Hunter said. "It really also highlights our mission as a club to be the best amateur facility in Southwest Florida -- the golf courses focused on amateur play at every level."

More: [Golf: Naples' Hiestand wins Florida Senior Women's Open in playoff; Minarro wins Open](#)

The Women's Amateur Four-Ball has only been played since 2015, but has a Naples connection.

Mary Jane Hiestand, a Hideout Golf Club member, hit the first-ever shot in the inaugural tournament at Bandon Dunes in Oregon that year. Of course, Hiestand has deep ties to the USGA, playing in 45 events, including 24 Women's Mid-Amateurs. Last year, Hiestand, then 58, made it all the way to the Women's Mid-Amateur final. She also won the Florida State Senior Women's Open at Quail Creek in August.

Designed in 1981 by Arthur Hills, Quail Creek features two 18-hole courses named Quail and Creek. The course for the Women's Amateur Four-Ball will be announced at a later date.

More: [Southwest Florida golf: Quail Creek one year out from 2017 U.S. Women's Mid-Amateur](#)

Both courses were renovated in 2013 by Kevin Leo, Quail Creek's director of golf courses and grounds, with Hills serving as a consultant.

After Irma, cleanup and renovation from the damage included the removal of more than 4,000 downed or damaged trees, as well as the complete rebuilding of all bunkers.

"The golf course is in better condition than it was in the weeks going into the Women's Mid-Amateur," Hunter said. "That's because, losing 4,000 trees has really opened up sunlight and air flow in areas that have been choked off. Those areas of turf are actually stronger than they have been in years."

The Women's Amateur Four-Ball is open to two-player teams of female amateurs with an individual handicap index not exceeding 14.4. There are no age restrictions, and partners are not required to be from the same club, state or country.

"We'll definitely have a lot of local players," Hunter said. "The great thing about the Four-Ball Championship is that the age demographic is going to be all over the chart, really.

"Every player that meets a minimum (handicap) without regard to their age can qualify. It's going to be the best players, period, whether they're 13 years or 80 years old. It's going to be really neat to see, much like the State Open was, the field and the level of play from every age group."

The championship begins with 18-hole sectional qualifying, which starts the previous August. A total of 64 teams advance to the national championship, where each player plays their own ball throughout the round. Each team's score is determined by using the lower score of the partners for each hole.

After 36 holes of stroke play, the field is reduced to the low 32 teams for the championship's match-play bracket, from which the eventual champion is determined.

Now hopefully Mother Nature is in a good mood.

"We're in an area of the country where it's paradise most of the time and when it gets bad, it can get real bad," Hunter said. "If we'd had had another 30 days, we wouldn't have had a problem (hosting the 2017 U.S. Women's Mid-Amateur). It really just comes down to timing and God's will."