

Florida's Quail Creek gets second chance to host USGA championship after having to back out of holding 2017 event due to Hurricane Irma

By
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Don Hunter calls it the most difficult phone call he has made in his professional life. After nearly two years of preparation, Quail Creek Country Club was less than a month away from becoming the first course in the Naples, Fla., area to host a USGA championship with the 2017 U.S. Women's Mid-Amateur set for Oct. 7-12. But when Hurricane Irma rolled through Florida that September, a Category 4 storm that flooded the 36-hole facility and clubhouse and leveled 4,000 mature trees, **the decision had been made for him.**

"To say the words we're not going to be able to do the championship was definitely the toughest thing I had to do," the club's chief operating officer told Golf Digest.

More than a year later, Hunter believes the course and community are ready again to host a championship event, and officials at the USGA agree, announcing on Tuesday that Quail Creek will be the host site for the 2020 U.S. Women's Amateur Four-Ball, set for April 25-29.

Rachel Sadowski, USGA championship director for both the Women's Mid-Am and Women's Four-Ball, empathized with Quail Creek's membership when faced last year with the need to focus on recovery efforts. The USGA, for just the third time in its history, found a new home for one of its events due to weather issues, moving it to Champions Golf Club in Houston, and from October to November, Kelsey Chugg taking the title.

"Since relocating the U.S. Women's Mid-Amateur, returning to Quail Creek has been a priority for the USGA," Sadowski said. "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."



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The announcement brings with it excitement, says Hunter.

“I know all those who are involved in the decision-making process and who are going to be involved in volunteering and on the staff, we really feel a sense of needing to complete a mission,” Hunter said. “I really believe this championship will be run in a way that no other championship we would run would have been run because we want this to be right. We want to kick this thing through the field goal, and we will.”

They’ll do it with a golf course that Hunter says has improved thanks to plenty of hard work from Kevin Leo, the director of golf courses and grounds. The Quail Creek team needed 60 days to get one course reopened after the storm and had both its courses back in mid-December.

“I’ve got to tell you, the course is better than it’s ever been,” Hunter said. “The reason for that is those 4,000 trees should have gone anyway. You know there is light in areas that were in the shade. There’s airflow everywhere. The playability is much better.”

Suffice it to say, Hunter was appreciative that the USGA staff proved as understanding of the circumstances as they did.

“When we made the call to cancel we did mention that we hoped they wouldn’t rule us out for the future,” Hunter said. “And they were amazing respectful through this whole process. They totally understood. I think more than understanding the circumstance, they understood the emotion that our team was going through. We had worked so hard on the championship. It was going to be the first championship in Collier County. I think they knew what that meant to not just the staff and volunteers, but the entire community. And I think they wanted to fix that as fast as they could as much as we did.”
