

Sketch of a West Pointer: Norm Thiessen

Norm was born in Borden, Saskatchewan and has spent time in Saskatoon, Moose Jaw, Marville (France), Nanaimo, Kitimat, Port Alberni, Victoria and Vancouver. A life-time educator, Norm served as teacher, counsellor, vice principal, principal, Superintendent of Schools and as the Ministry of Education's liaison to all 75 school districts in BC. Norm is the youngest of four brothers; he and his wife, Marion, have four children and six grandchildren.

While attending university in Saskatoon, a group of friends took up the game of golf, just to try it out. At age 20, they all would have liked to play more, but were always too broke during those early years. Norm admits to once playing to a 7 handicap, but when asked if he had shot his age, he replied, "Not yet, but I have shot my IQ on numerous occasions!" In response to the question if he had ever been lucky or good enough to have a hole in one, he recalled two: the first at the Qualicum Golf Club in front of a large group of family and friends and the second at the Lost Tracks Golf Club in Bend, Oregon, as part of an annual golf tournament with friends, called the Puke City Open (you can ask him about that). On each occasion, he doubled the next hole, indicating how the achievement impacted him. Both, however, led to pretty good parties!

One memorable golfing occasion was when he played at the Ushuaia Golf Club in Argentina. The sign at the club described it as the "southeast golf course in the world". This was one day after having played the Falkland Islands Golf Club which his group had thought was the southern-most course in the world. When they discovered that Ushuaia was further south than the Falklands, they quickly made arrangements to play there. West Point member Bill McNichol and his wife Liz were with the Thiessens for both games. As an aside, Norm reports that the McNichols have now played both the most northern and most southern courses in the world.

When asked for a favourite golf story, he said that the Falklands course was unique. It was little more than a hillside sheep pasture of sparse wispy grass, rocks of every size, and small ravines created by run-offs. There were 18 tee-off locations to nine postage-stamp sized greens. Fairways were indicated by different-coloured stakes; the trick was to pick out the correct stakes from the many stakes visible all over the course. On several occasions, their hosts raced out of the one-room club house to re-orient them to the proper direction. Their hosts were the club captain and ladies' club champion, the couple they had contacted by email to arrange the game. They graciously picked the foursome up at the cruise ship terminal, drove them to the course, provided clubs owned by friends and family, and had a case of cold beer ready at the club house, prior to returning the visiting golfers to the cruise ship! The Club had 50 members and was run entirely by volunteers. While the course was minimal at best, this West Point group left admiring and envious of, the sense of spirit and hospitality so evident in this charming golf location, and all for the price of \$25.

Norm lists 3 favourite golf courses: (1) Torrey Pines in San Diego for its quality and tradition; (2) Islamabad Golf Club in Pakistan because of where it was and the fact that he was encouraged to hire two fore caddies, a caddy and a swing coach before teeing off. His playing partner did the same, so they had quite an entourage at every hole – for a total cost, including golf, of \$20; (3) Ocotilla Golf Course in Chandler, Arizona, for its lakes resulting in water in play on 16 holes and a generally beautiful layout. He gives an honourable mention to Abu Dhabi where he played just before the European Tour Stop, and thinks he may have shot his IQ that day.

Norm and Marion have been fortunate to have had many extraordinary vacations. Their first visit to South Africa, Zambia and Botswana – complete with him hanging over Victoria Falls with Marion holding him by his ankles while he swam in the Devil's Swimming Pool - and then taking three safaris where they saw the Big Five, does get one's attention. They had a fabulous tour of the South and North Islands of New Zealand where Norm played all kinds of great golf courses, and visited Christchurch just two weeks before the devastating earthquake. Their most recent trip was to South America, including Rio, Buenos Aires (where he was mugged but not injured) and Iguassu Falls, where they walked

the vast 2 ½ kilometre expanse of cascading waters and then did a 29-day cruise around Cape Horn. Norm and Marion have also visited southeast Asia and China on three different occasions.

Initially, Arnold Palmer was the golfer he most admired, for his flair in playing the game, but his choice today is Tiger, because "he is simply the best to ever play the game, with apologies to Jack!"

Norm has been a member of West Point since 1998 and was Club Champion in 2003. In closing, Norm expressed his opinion that we are fortunate to have so many volunteers who make our membership in the West Point Golf Club so enjoyable, and asks if anyone knows how we can slow the aging process!!

*Prepared by Lorne Lindsay
July 2013*