

at Meadowlands Country Club was designed by the notable father-and-son team of Bill and David Gordon. The result: a course characterized not by long yardage but by rolling greens and the strategic use of land- and water-based hazards. The walking course has more than its share of deceptive holes, including No. 12, which measures less than 200 yards. This hole offers plenty of sand and slope, making it one of the more daunting par-3 holes on the course. 711 Boehms Church Road, Blue Bell, meadowlandsc.com

Merion Golf Club (East Course)

PRIVATE

Merion's place in golf history is more than secure, yet its legend continues to grow. Merion's Hugh Wilson-designed East Course has provided a more than worthy stage for some of golf's most defining moments. In fact, Merion has hosted more U.S. Golf Association championships—including the 2013 U.S. Open—than any other course in the nation. Merion's grounds have earned a reputation for their well-tended fairways and carefully kept greens, not to mention their formidable bunkers and ball-stealing water hazards. In particular, the imposition of Cobbs Creek early into the back nine can make or break a round. 450 Ardmore Ave., Ardmore, meriongolfclub.com

Philadelphia Country Club (Spring Mill Course)

PRIVATE

A William Flynn design, the Spring Mill course at Philadelphia Country Club is a treasure tucked away in Gladwyne with a rich history in professional and amateur golf. It has earned its place in history, of course, for its prime conditions and challenging routing. Of particular note is No. 5. At well short of 200 yards, this par-3 is far more imposing than its yardage suggests. Sawmill Run, which lurks at the green's edge, is a notorious hazard. 1601 Spring Mill Road, Gladwyne, philadelphiacc.net

White Clay Creek Country Club

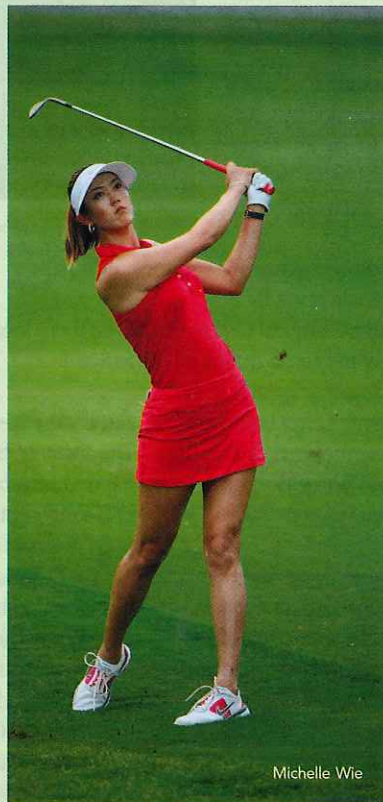
SEMI-PRIVATE

Wetlands specialist Arthur Hills had plenty to work with when he designed the course here—namely, White Clay Creek and Mill Creek, both of which cut through the property and impose themselves on unwary golfers. Opened for play in 2005, the course gives golfers the distinct feeling that it's been in use for much longer, as the course brings into play the water hazards and other natural obstacles. Developed as a complement to nearby Delaware Park, White Clay Creek Country Club has a lot going for it besides its excellent 18-hole course with five sets of tee boxes. The club is also known for its excellent practice tees and short-game facility, the use of which is included in the greens fees. 777 Delaware Park Blvd., Wilmington, Del., whiteclaycreekgolfcourse.com



This summer, nearly 160 of the world's best professional and amateur female golfers will descend upon an area about an hour's drive from Philadelphia. From July 6 to 10, Lancaster Country Club will host the 70th U.S. Women's Open, one of 13 national championships hosted by the United States Golf Association.

"Go to any men's golf event and ask anyone in the field what tournament they want to win and you'll get varied responses; some will say the U.S. Open, some will say the Masters, some will say the British Open," says Matt Sawicki, director of championships for the USGA. "Ask any woman pro golfer, and she'll say the U.S. Open is the only one they want to win because it has the best field with all the names people recognize."



The "who's who" include Michelle Wie—"possibly the most visible female athlete in the world," as Sawicki describes her—who will be defending her 2014 U.S. Women's Open title in Lancaster, as well as the likes of Paula Creamer, Stacy Lewis and Inbee Park. Perhaps the most compelling aspect about

the international lineup of players competing in the U.S. Women's Open, according to Sawicki, is the element of surprise.

"What's so unique about the U.S. Open is that the field is not set right now," he says. "From May through June you have qualifiers in the U.S., Europe and Asia, where you might see someone like 11-year-old Lucy Li qualify. You have these players who get hot—even an amateur player, even an 11-year-old—and all of a sudden she's playing against people whose posters she has on her wall. You have all these unique background stories that, for four or five days, will captivate the nation."

In fact, the event has "surpassed nearly every ticket record we have to date," Sawicki suggests. Also, the local community has embraced the event fully, with 80 percent of participating vendors having close ties to the Lancaster area; planners suggest the event will inject as much as \$30 million into the local economy. Here, the spotlight will fall on not only some of golf's biggest names but also on a fabulously challenging course dreamed up by the late William Flynn, a legendary golf course architect and also the longtime superintendent at Merion Golf Club.

"Flynn was involved with [Lancaster Country Club] from 1919 till his death, and he probably did more work on our course than anywhere else except Merion," says Rory Connaughton, Lancaster Country Club's course historian and a member of the executive committee that has been organizing the upcoming event since 2008. "The Conestoga River runs through the course, and it wasn't till the 1940s that the course crossed the Conestoga. The four holes he built on the other side of the river are among the most memorable on the course, and they have all the hallmarks of a classic Flynn golf course: great routing, great use of the subtle land features and great use of the water features."

The subtleties of the course will pressure the U.S. Open players to "attack the greens from the proper angle" and "place the ball not just on the fairway but on the right part of the fairway," Connaughton says. While the first six holes of the course will provide their share of birdie opportunities, the middle of the course is where long hitters can take over. After hole No. 12, which Connaughton describes as "the beginning of the 'amen' corner of the course," it's anybody's game.

Lancaster Country Club (lancastercc.com) is slightly more than an hour's drive from the Philadelphia area. For ticket options and more information, visit 2015uswomensopen.com. —Bill Donahue ■