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The U.S. Women's Open Championship Comes to Lancaster Country Club

The best women golfers take center stage this July.

BY JIM FINNEGAN



LOCAL AMATEUR ALLISON WEAVER HOPES TO QUALIFY FOR THIS YEAR'S U.S. WOMEN'S OPEN.

With the luster of the 2013 Men's U.S. Open at the Merion Golf Club having barely worn off, our area gets to shine once again as the best women golfers in the world take center stage at the U.S. Women's Open at Lancaster Country Club this July.

Michelle Wie will return to defend her crown after her two-shot victory in last summer's event. Wie was the only player to post a red number (two under par) in the 2014 Open, but repeating won't be easy. She's facing some impressive challengers, including past Open winners Inbee Park and Paula Creamer, last year's runner-up Stacy Lewis, and LPGA tour-money leaders Karrie Webb, Lydia Ko and Anna Nordqvist.

This year's 70th U.S. Women's Open will mark the return to a unique golf course for the women: last year, the U.S. Men's Open and U.S. Women's Open Championships were played on Pinehurst No. 2, an experiment that was met with mixed reviews in golfing circles.

The 2015 championship marks the ninth time a Pennsylvania course has hosted a U.S. Women's Open, but it's the first time for Lancaster Country Club. For club members and the community, the excitement about hosting the top female athletes in the sport is evident. "When Lancaster Country Club was offered the chance to host the event, our membership voted overwhelmingly in favor of it," says Rory Connaughton, a member of both LCC and its 2015 U.S. Women's Open Executive Committee. "We knew it would be a great opportunity to showcase both the course and the whole Lancaster County community."

And the community has certainly responded, as 2,500 volunteers signed up to work the championship within the first four weeks, with an

additional wait list of 300 hoping to help out. Having Arnold Palmer as their honorary chairman at last summer's kickoff didn't hurt the excitement level, either. In addition to his Pennsylvania connection (born and raised in Latrobe), Palmer has a unique link to Lancaster Country Club: He played there in the 1948 Pennsylvania Amateur, where he lost to member and eventual champion Billy Haverstick.

One of the other ways the local community will be well represented at the U.S. Women's Open will be in the vendor marketplace.

"At a typical USGA event, 70-80 percent of the vendors are from outside the area," said Connaughton. "At the 2015 Open here, close to 70 percent of the vendors will be local, so people who attend are going to get a unique local flavor with all these offerings."

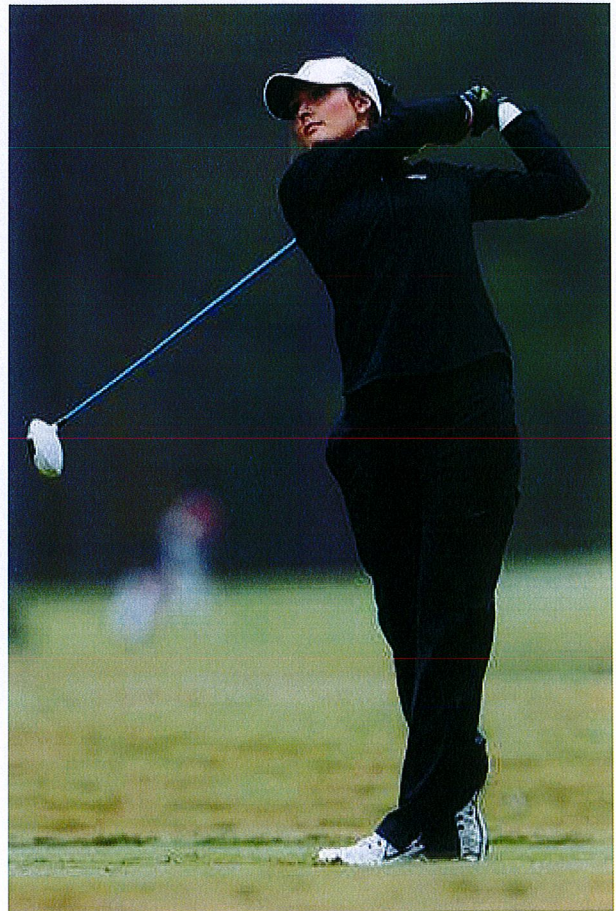
And what could be more representative of the Lancaster area community than an Amish connection? The typical large tent systems that are so common at other USGA events will make way for miniature houses built by local Amish and Mennonite carpenters.

These structures can be erected in a third of the time of a tent, and will be air-conditioned and decorated. In keeping with the USGA's sustainability program, the houses will be disassembled and made available to the public after the event.

The Trophy Club spectator area format will be replaced by the 1761 Club, which will utilize an original homestead on the 12th hole, which was part of the William Penn Land Grant of 1761. From there, spectators can watch the action on the 12th hole while sampling local food and brews unique to the Lancaster area.

One of the ways the event's organizers are planning to give back to the community that has supported them is with a special access day for area children.

"We're going to allow children to go inside the ropes during one of the practice rounds," Connaughton says. "We're still working on the final details as it is something the USGA has never done before, but it will be a great way for kids to follow the players, and allow us to give something back for the great support we have received locally."



LOCAL AMATEUR ERICA HERR HOPES TO QUALIFY FOR THIS YEAR'S U.S. WOMEN'S OPEN.