

# Hamilton Farm Golf Club: 'Really

By Fred Behringer

**T**he designer of Hamilton Farm Golf Club says, "Even if you don't play golf, it's just a beautiful place to walk around. It's just an experience being on the property. It really is a spectacular place."

While driving along the tree-lined entranceway, one immediately understands the description by Dana Fry of the Hurdzan/Fry golf design firm is not exaggerated. The 640 acres in Gladstone, Somerset County, served as the estate of James Cox Brady early in the 20th Century, and buildings from the estate remain as part of the foundation of the club, which labels itself "one of the country's most exclusive private golf clubs."

The Georgian brick mansion Brady built in the 1920s with sixty-four rooms and eleven fireplaces now is the clubhouse. There are 10 opulent suites for overnight guests.

Hamilton Farm once spanned 5,000 acres spread over three counties and produced prize-winning livestock. The stable, considered the largest in the United States at the time, now houses the U.S. Equestrian team. A bull barn sits right at the edge of the sixth green, and a creamery remains as the backdrop for the stunning seventh hole.

Oh, yes, the golf.

Fry designed not only the large-scale Highlands Course through the fields, streams, equestrian trails and woods but produced, at the same time, the par-3 Hickory Course, which is so challenging the United States Golf Association gave it a course rating (57.5) and slope rating (98). "That tells you it's not a little chip-and-putt course," says Ted Kohler, membership director of Hamilton Farm.

The Highlands site, notes Fry, "is just a tremendous piece of topography with a lot of contour, some holes open and some densely wooded. The size of each individual golf hole is just almost larger than life. There's a lot of room on those golf holes."

While landing areas for tee shots are ample, Kathy Hart Wood, the director of women's golf at Hamilton Farm, cautions golfers not to stray into the fescue or the gaping sand bunkers. "You've got to keep it in play," she says.

The golfer's reward for playing the Highlands Course is to finish on the mag-



*Above: The Highlands 18th hole leading to the Hamilton Farm clubhouse. Below: The Highlands 7th hole featuring the former creamery.*



nificent 18th hole with the clubhouse just behind the green. The long par 4 features a bunker in the center of the fairway to collect approaches which fall short.

The Highlands Course stretches to 7,117 yards from the rear tee boxes with a 74.7 rating and 139 slope.

The companion Hickory Course covers 3,080 yards of equally beautiful terrain with four holes exceeding 200 yards and steep sand bunkers just as imposing as those at the Highlands. Kohler reports Tiger Woods has played the Hickory Course several times without breaking par.

"The worry with the par-3 course," recalls Dana Fry, "was that if we didn't make something strong enough, something that really looked good, nobody

would play it. It is quite possibly one of the best par-3 courses in the world. You hit everything from wedge to 3-wood there. You pretty much use every club in your bag.

"You could take almost every single hole on the par-3 course and take it out and plop it on the big course, and it would fit. It's a stern test of golf. It's not only visually dramatic but a real test of shot-making."

Yet Fry acknowledges the Hamilton Farm experience "goes way beyond playing golf."

"What makes it unique," he says, "is not only the golf course but the experience of being there – the history of the place, the buildings, the topography, just the beauty of everything, the attention to

PHOTOS BY ROBERT BRUSHNI COURTESY OF HAMILTON FARM GOLF CLUB



# Spectacular Place'

detail, the service, the conditioning. Everything is just at its highest level."

Mark Wood, who came with his wife, Kathy, to Hamilton Farm this year as executive director of golf, echoes Fry's feelings about the club.

"When I compare Hamilton Farm and the total experience from when you walk in the door, from the valet to the outside assistants to the golf course, I've never been any place that's nicer than this," says Wood, noting he has traveled to golf clubs around the world. "There's nobody that's got this, soup to nuts. I think the underlying factor is the friendli-

ness of the staff, top to bottom, and the professionalism of the management team, top to bottom. Nobody gets their ego in the way."



The Hamilton Farm club, originally the property of Lucent Technology, is owned by Dennis Townsend, a commercial real estate developer.

The club plans to sell eighteen sites for cottages to members.

Membership is by invitation. Information: 908-901-4000.



*The Hickory 10th hole – "Brady's Pond."*

## Woods Bring National Reputation to Hamilton Farm

The husband-and-wife team of Mark Wood and Kathy Hart Wood brings two nationally ranked golf instructors to the Hamilton Farm Golf Club.

Mark Wood, Hamilton Farm's executive director of golf, is ranked among Golf Digest's Top 50 Instructors. Kathy, the director of women's golf, has the same ranking with Golf for Women.

They moved from Florida to New Jersey this year to provide instruction to club members, which soon will take place in a large teaching and practice complex Mark has designed.

Owner Dennis Townsend became familiar with a facility Mark designed in Florida and lured the Woods to the private club in Gladstone.

The new Hamilton Farm facility will include an extensive short-game area, a range with tees at both ends, and what Mark calls "a pretty advanced, state-of-the-art learning facility" featuring video analysis. The outdoor area is expected to open next spring and the building, which will add months to the instruction season, next fall.

Mark has spent most of his golf career in teaching. He worked for about ten years at Golf Digest Instruction Schools, then started schools in Japan for Jack Nicklaus and Jim Flick and continued

part-time with the Nicklaus-Flick operation. In 1997, he opened the Mark Wood Golf Academy in Florida.

"I'm a teacher," he says.

Calling himself the "director of fun," Mark plays with three different Hamilton

She played on tours in Europe, Asia and South Africa before she became involved in teaching. She and Mark met at a Golf Digest School, then lost contact for about nine years, got together again and were married in 1991. They have three daughters, Charlee, 7; Sammie, 6; and Riley, 5.

Along with teaching women and some men at Hamilton Farm, Kathy is developing a junior program with Mark.

She avoids a philosophy of teaching. "I try to teach everybody individually," she says, "and make sure that they understand what the club is supposed to do in the golf swing and understand what they're supposed to do to get the ball to go where they want."

She finds her biggest challenge is working with the expectation level of beginners. "A lot of golfers," she notes, "expect that they're going to pick up golf quite easily."

Mark Wood believes people don't stay with golf because they find it difficult and quit if they don't improve.

The Woods and the new learning academy at Hamilton Farm will have something to say about that.

*Fred Behringer*



Mark Wood and Kathy Hart Wood.

Farm members every Sunday morning. "I'm the guy creating excitement about golf," he says.

Kathy Hart Wood comes from a golfing family with her father working as a professional and her brother, Dudley Hart, playing on the PGA Tour.