

Progressive Golf Vision Bearing Fruit

It is said that all progress stems from the unreasonable man.

Jason Way is an unreasonable man.

A self-proclaimed golf geek, Way lives in Evanston, Ill., in the shadow of Northwestern University, a half-mile from a course called Canal Shores.

Canal Shores is a 40-acre, 18-hole, par-60, public-access course that meanders through two villages and several residential blocks. A winding drainage canal that connects Lake Michigan with the Chicago River bisects it. The 3,900-yard course is probably best known locally as the course where actor Bill Murray and his brother, Joel, caddied and worked concessions in the 1970s.

The land is owned by the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago. Through subleases, the nonprofit Evanston Wilmette Golf Course Association manages Canal Shores. To call the course hard-scrabble does not accurately capture its challenged history. As recently as 2012, closure of Canal Shores was a

real possibility. A new board of energized volunteers hired superintendent Tom Tully and rescued the course from going over the cliff forever. But despite increased play and diversified revenue from unlikely sources such as tailgating fees for Northwestern football games, they were left searching for a sustainable future.

Enter Way, co-visionary Pat Goss (Northwestern's director of golf) and a dedicated group of people who simply did not want to see the course disappear. Way volunteered to be on the association's grounds committee, and together with Goss created a master plan to turn 18 holes into a highly unusual, very creative facility.

When completed, Canal Shores will consist of:

- ▶ A 12-hole course designed for players of moderate to advanced skill, laid out in a clockwise loop.
- ▶ A "Kids Links," which will include a five-hole short course as well as a practice facility designed specifically for youngsters.

- ▶ A 25,000-square-foot putting clock, modeled after the Himalayas putting clock in St. Andrews, Scotland.

- ▶ The "Back Lot," a six-hole par-3 course and practice area.

The Back Lot portion of the complex will serve as an outdoor practice facility for better players and those who hope to become so. Goss hopes Northwestern's men's and women's golf teams will be able to use it alongside residents and visitors. An active supporter of the local First Tee chapter, Goss also hopes to house its operation at Canal Shores.

With the plan in development, Way and Tully began implementing small parts of it in 2014, deciding to ask for forgiveness rather than permission. They gathered friends and neighbors, upward of 25 people altogether, to



Canal Shores' prospective redevelopment would bring a highly unusual, creative facility to Evanston, Ill.



begin clearing out overgrown bush and cleaning up the course. Throughout 2015, Way conducted a bit of a skunkworks, rebuilding bunkers, planting grasses and generally improving the property.

With enthusiasm for the transformation growing, the board launched the Canal Shores 100 Campaign to raise the estimated \$3 million necessary for the renovation. The campaign draws its name from the centennial of the course, which is in 2019 – the year that Way hopes Canal Shores will be reopened for play in its completely new form.

The USGA's Rand Jerris came out to tour the facility and hear the plan last summer, and he immediately was taken with what he saw and heard. Canal Shores checked many "sustainability" boxes for the USGA, and in short order it was named the first public-access course to be awarded a pro-bono evaluation under a new partnership of the USGA and the American Society of Golf Course Architects. Among those lending a hand in this effort is former Northwestern standout, PGA Tour stalwart and architecture buff Luke Donald, whom Goss has coached since 2001.



Donald is joined by lead architect David Zinkand and consultant Drew Rogers, who partnered to renovate the Old Elm Club in suburban Highland Park, Ill.

So why did Way undertake this effort? His overarching goal was to integrate the facility back into the community, in a way that golf has existed in the United Kingdom for decades upon decades. He acknowledges having a service bent in his DNA, but mostly he just wanted an inexpensive, convenient course where his kids could fall in love with the game, just as their father did long ago while caddying at Old Elm.

The plan is expected to be approved in early summer and work should begin in July if all goes well. Money still needs to be raised; although on public property, it receives no city funding and must rely on private support. A capital campaign will be announced shortly, and it is expected that it will launch with a half-million dollars already committed.

This past weekend was unseasonably mild in Evanston, so it was not surprising that Way was back at it. He worked on the surrounds of the 12th hole, focusing mostly on the bunkers while planting long-grass sod, all the while enjoying the labor. "It's good for the soul," he told me.

Progress. ●

Jason Way's journey has been well documented at his [geekedongolf blog](#). For information on how to contribute, go to [Canal Shores 100 Campaign](#).