

## Drew Rogers begins work at ‘extraordinary’ Pine Hills in Wisconsin

By Richard Humphreys  
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**Drew Rogers has been appointed as consulting architect to Pine Hills Country Club in Sheboygan, Wisconsin.**



PINE HILLS COUNTRY CLUB

“I was contacted by Keith Robel [club president] and Rod Johnson [course superintendent] back in March 2019 with the notion that they really wanted to examine options for the future – perhaps a fresh new set of eyes and a spirited perspective to help carry on their tradition of great golf,” said Rogers. “It was quickly obvious to me that the course is beyond special already – it just requires light hands moving forward to make it better – bit by bit.”

Work will begin on the eighteenth hole, which currently has the most opportunity for immediate improvement and impact.

“Phase one is probably the most important because it is being seen as the momentum builder for the longer-term improvements,” said Robel. “The eighteenth doglegs around a fabulous ridge plateau whose inside turn is completely obscured by trees.

“With some repositioning of the tee boxes and some substantial tree removal, the bones of a dramatic Cape hole exist to deliver an incredible risk-reward hole to finish the course. It highlights one of the great land features of the course, opening views to the river valley below, and it fits more with the character of the rest of the course.”

“The great thing about this concept is that the hole is already there – the natural features, the drama of elevation, the innate strategic values – we just have to expose them,” said Rogers. “While the work is rather light and simple, the effect will be exceedingly dramatic – really a new hole in terms of classic architectural principles and providing inspired playing options. We’ll go from a ho-hum finish to one with undeniable memorability.”

Robel and Rogers hope to complete this opening project this autumn, but the club is being cautious given the uncertainty caused by coronavirus. Some very small refinements are already under way, including mowing lines and tree removal.

“The most dramatic work will open up the ridge on the eighteenth hole and a ravine that dissects the fifteenth and sixteenth,” said Robel. “What will get the most attention overall on the course is simply the details. There are some details that needed to be addressed to make the course really shine. That includes some bunker placement, tee locations, drainage, trees, and green surrounds, but most of that work is just tweaking the current environment versus getting a bulldozer involved.”

“Because the course is already extraordinary, it is really important that our work is effective and appropriate, but almost undistinguishable at the same time,” said Rogers. “The old adage, ‘we don’t want anyone to know we’ve been here’ approach. It’s really important for me to ensure that our work honours the course, Harry Smead’s design, and the natural landscape that makes it so special to begin with – and that is actually a very important responsibility for me.”

Robel adds establishing the relationship with Rogers was important as at some point superintendent Rod Johnson will retire.

“This was especially important as much of the work will be handled in-house and the knowledge base between the superintendent and architect in such a scenario is critically important,” said Robel. “Our relationship with Drew is long term in perspective with Drew as the link to keep the club in this constant improvement process, not the superintendent, not me, not the next president. We’re building this relationship when we have great stability at the club in terms of leadership so that it will transfer to the next generation of leadership.

“We think the most important part of this first project is getting the details correct. It has transitioned into the thought that the only way we get the next project done is when we get the current project done right. Inertia is a strong force in our club and getting this improvement started is literally over 20 years in the making, with the vocal minority keeping things as they were. If we can transition into a mentality of improvement and investment in the property, we feel that new momentum can be even more powerful for the next 20 years.”

Rogers’ opportunity to work with the club was a result of both the positive response to his work at nearby Kenosha Country Club, and a chance meeting with Johnson at Lawsonia Links in Wisconsin.

“When I saw Pine Hills for the first time, I was absolutely blown away,” exclaimed Rogers. “I can only liken it to Lawsonia, but really, that doesn’t do it justice, either. It is more natural than Lawsonia, but every bit as bold. In complement to little-known Harry Smead, Pine Hills truly embodies the ‘Greater by God, lesser by Man’ mantra, and his green surfaces are some of the most playful I have ever seen.

“My appointment here is not to re-do this course. My responsibility is to shine it, to fully expose its grandeur beyond what was previously thinkable. Sure, there will be a few adjustments here and there, but this work is not what I would coin as ‘renovation’, it is more of a very careful, well-guided, on-going evolution.

“As we go along, it is without question that the golfing world will become more familiar with this exceptional layout. Frankly, I don’t know how they’ve managed to stay under the radar for so long as they have!”

