

# The London Free Press

**WOMEN'S GOLF:** They comprise one-third of all new golfers and a national list is being compiled of women-friendly courses

## **PAR FOR THE COURSE: Industry wise to attract growing market**

John Herbert  
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Tired of being treated like divots, an organization representing 20,000 women announced this week it is creating a list of women-friendly golf courses in Canada.

The Executive Women's Golf Association has unveiled its 10 criteria that make a course women-friendly and make women want to return.

Jane Watson, president of the group, says women account for a quarter of Canadian golfers, according to an Ipsos Reid Study, and more importantly, one-third of all new golfers are women. The women's group says there are barriers for women who want to enjoy golf that must be addressed by clubs if they want women golfers business in the future.



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Among the things women want include friendly pro shop staff, women's merchandise in shops, to be treated with respect by starters and on-course marshals, well-kept forward tee decks, golf leagues, nine-hole rates, more washrooms and good rental clubs.

"Our whole goal is for women to enjoy golf," Watson said. "Women travel, want to play and you want them to know they're welcome at a club."

The first two clubs on the list are North Halton in Georgetown and the Oakville Executive Golf Course. Some London clubs could soon join the list.

Joe van Koeverden, the manager responsible for operations at Fanshawe, Thames Valley and River Road, is confident most of the city's four public courses at three locations meet most of the criteria, especially Thames Valley. He doubts the Quarry Course at Fanshawe would make the list, saying to have washrooms every six holes is unrealistic and too expensive.

Neil Kapp, part of the group that owns East Park, Westminster Trails and Maple Ridge, believes they come close to meeting the criteria. Kapp said particularly at East Park, an executive length course, they have several women's leagues and they are geared to women golfers and families. Kapp said they will apply to be certified.

Patty Howard, director of golf at Sunningdale who has spent her whole working life in the business, sees merit to the group's demands, adding most of their requests are "common sense."

Howard remembers the days when clubs didn't throw out the welcome mat to women. She said today many clubs, especially private clubs such as Sunningdale, already meet most of the criteria but adds other clubs had better listen up.

"More and more women are making the majority of the decisions in households and golf courses need to realize that," she said. "Women may be making the decision for their family to join."

Watson has first-hand experience as a golfer who travels and is often looking for a place to play. Her travels include Southwestern Ontario and a bad experience last year in Chatham added fuel and urgency to compiling a list of courses keen to draw women.

Watson is still seething over her treatment in Chatham, at a course she has declined to name. As a result, when she visited Chatham a week ago she didn't bring her clubs.

Watson said she was snubbed in the pro shop and the club would not let her on the course for an hour because she was a single. She said she offered to join another group but "nobody wanted to play with me" or the pro shop staff didn't try to place her in a group.

Watson said once she got on the course, she was hassled by an over-aggressive ranger, who followed her for nine holes. She described the situation as "bizarre".

"So many women have bad experiences," she said.

One other thing.

Watson is coming to London next month and looking for a place to play golf.

*John Herbert is a London golf writer. Contact him at 519-667-4561 or e-mail (see link).*

E-MAIL: John Herbert