



## JUST ASKING

BY MARY KLEST

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SUSAN MCCONNELL

### *Which is the longest golf course hole nearby?*

*We surveyed Barrington area golf courses to find out.*

THE SUN IS BRIGHT AND WAVING TREES line the fairway on the first hole at Barrington Hills Country Club. Stretching 595 yards, it is the longest golf hole in the area. The Club's golf pro Mark Esler (shown below) is kind enough to share his strategies for playing the hole.

Esler says that on a day like this a great golfer can reach the green in two strokes. The downwind offers an advantage by hurling the ball farther than usual. The first hole at Barrington Hills is a par five. "At the tee, there are two goals: get over the bunkers (sand traps) on the left and stay out of the rough. The rough is a killer," he says. "You need a 'rescue club' to get out of it." To pass the bunkers, we need to hit the ball straight about 200 yards off the tee.

Esler caddied at Biltmore Country Club when he was a kid and later took lessons with former golf pro Lee Milligan at Barrington Hills Country Club. This is his fifth year as the club's golf pro.



He teaches lessons and runs tournaments, but back problems have kept him from playing the course for several years. His son, Josh, a pro tournament player, is practicing at the putting green while his dad shows us the first tee.

On the second shot, Esler warns, "Stay away from the gaping right bunker." For some, a third shot puts them on or near the green. As we approach, there are two bunkers on the left approximately 30 yards shy of the green. He says, "If you land there, it's one of the hardest shots in golf."

More challenges await. The green appears to tilt toward the fairway, but up close it's actually sloping at different angles. We watch as Don Olson and George Moser, longtime members of the club, approach. George's ball

is over. But he recovers nicely by pitching it up onto the green about two feet short of the cup. "Good shot!" Esler congratulates him.

While the first hole introduces players to what lies ahead, it's important for another reason. When a tournament match is tied, the players do a playoff on this hole. "It can decide a match," says Esler.

He believes the hardest hole at Barrington Hills is 11, which features a scant but treacherous 222 yards. He steers us that way when we see some of the nine-hole ladies teeing up there. Peggy Moston and Darby Hills think differently from Esler. For them: "The first hole is harder. It's so long," they both say.

Maybe it's not so much how long the hole is, but how often you've played it. Ninety-four-year-old Tom White, with eyes bright like the day's sun, has been playing golf here since he was 14. "I've scored anywhere from 5 to 12 on the first hole," he laughs. He's setting up for his next shot on the third hole with 88-year-old Jim Crawford. The pair is waiting for 92-year-old Wilbur Edwards to meet up with them. He'll be skipping the first hole today.