With three great courses, a history of national championships and a strong membership, this eastern Pennsylvania club forged by Bethlehem Steel continues to thrive as it marches toward its 10th decade.
Saucon Valley has been a gathering place for generations of members, for whom the bonds forged here are as strong as the alloys produced by Bethlehem Steel.

Nestled in the Lehigh Valley, Saucon Valley lies an hour north of Philadelphia and 90 minutes west of New York City. Since its founding in 1920 by a group that included a number of Bethlehem Steel executives, the club has grown to encompass more than 800 acres that include three 18-hole championship golf courses, a six-hole course, nine indoor and outdoor dining venues, tennis, squash, platform tennis, swimming pools, a trout stream and an 18th-century guest house. More importantly, the club has been a gathering place for generations of members, for whom the friendships and memories forged at Saucon Valley are as strong as the steel once produced by Bethlehem Steel. There are now about 1,000 members who enjoy the club’s facilities, many of which have undergone improvements as part of a recent $8 million renovation program.

The combination of the golf and warm atmosphere has made Saucon Valley one of the most prestigious private golf clubs in the country.

“Of course, I love playing these great golf courses,” says longtime member Barry Treadwell, a former Bethlehem Steel executive who now heads the golf and green committee. “But what I enjoy the most is entertaining new guests when they realize that all three of our courses are of championship caliber, but each with its own special character. When I’m asked which course is my favorite, my answer is, ‘The one I am playing that day.’”

For all the activities, the golf remains the centerpiece of the club, not only for everyday play but also during special events, including interclub matches against regional heavyweights like Merion, Aronimink, Winged Foot and Baltusrol—all clubs to which Saucon Valley stands shoulder to shoulder. The members of those august clubs always enjoy coming to Saucon Valley to play its layouts, especially the original, the Old course. Herbert Strong routed the first 18 holes over an old farm, while a team from Bethlehem Steel constructed the arched bridges that cross meandering Saucon Creek, which runs through the course and gives the layout much of its character.

The grounds look much as they did at the club’s inception, a record of responsible environmental stewardship that has gained Saucon recognition from several conservation groups, most notably Audubon International.

The Old has undergone a number of changes over the years when a club has hosted six U.S. Golf Association championships, chances are it really doesn’t need an introduction, but some people might not realize the breadth and history of Saucon Valley Country Club, one of the largest and most distinguished private golf clubs in North America.
During its history, Saucon Valley has hosted six USGA championships on the Old course, most recently the 2009 U.S. Women’s Open.
years, including the redesign of three holes by Perry Maxwell in 1941. The most recent renovation was in 2008, when Tom Fazio and his design associate, Tom Marzolf, reconstructed some greens and all the bunkers while adding 325 yards. (It now measures 7,126 yards.) In addition, tree work greatly improved turf conditions and improved sight lines, giving the layout a spacious look and feel.

The course opens with a straightforward, elegant par 5 of 558 yards before Saucon Creek first comes into play in front of the sloping two-tiered green of the 368-yard 3rd. When the hole location is on the front of the green, it is easy to either come up short or spin the ball back into the water, as players did during the 2009 U.S. Women’s Open. The creek also comes into play on the 480-yard 5th, 215-yard 9th and the three finishing holes.

The club’s championships influenced one of the most significant course changes, on the 435-yard 12th. During the 2000 U.S. Senior Open, players routinely hooked 3-woods over the dogleg, leaving wedges into the green. So Fazio and Marzolf shifted the fairway right and added bunkers to guard the dogleg. The strategy worked, as the hole, which was the 18th for the Women’s Open, had a scoring average of 3.986.

Due to the club’s long tournament history, there is precedent for these types of alterations. During a practice round for the 1951 U.S. Amateur, the club’s first USGA championship, Bobby Nichols told Eugene Grace, the former president of Bethlehem Steel and the club’s chairman at the time, that the 13th hole was a “breather” on a demanding layout, citing all the room down the left side of the fairway. When the championship commenced the following morning, there were five new fairway bunkers on the hole, thanks to a call to arms by Grace to a hastily conscripted crew of Bethlehem Steel employees, who worked overnight under floodlights to dig the hazards.

In the 1950s Grace oversaw the building of Saucon Valley’s second course, designed by the father-son team of William and David Gordon. The Grace course has fewer elevation changes than the Old does, and the most notable design element is its massive bunkers like “Little Sahara,” which stretches for more than 60 yards in front of the green on the 429-yard 6th hole. Ron Forse renovated the Grace course in 2000, and the club is planning a renovation of all the bunkers over the next few years to improve both design and drainage.

The Gordons also designed the Weyhill course, arguably the club’s most scenic layout thanks to dramatic elevation changes that provide sweeping views. Opened in 1968 and traversing Saucon Creek, limekilns and an old quarry, the 7,071-yard course takes its name from the former dairy farm upon which the layout, acquired by the club in 1995, sits.

Marzolf just completed a sympathetic restoration of the course, rebuilding all the greens to reduce back-to-front pitches and recapture lost hole locations. He also revamped every bunker and repositioned them to make them true hazards for today’s long hitters. Finally, there are 12 new chipping areas that offer players numerous options for getting up and down after missing the putting surface.

“Our ‘new’ Weyhill is a true hidden gem,” says club president Andrew Warner. “The Fazio group did a tremendous job on the Old, but they exceeded expectations on Weyhill.”

Overlooking Weyhill’s 8th hole is a prized asset of the club, one that predates the Industrial Revolution. Originally built in 1790, the Weyhill Guest House has 13 unique guest rooms, each tastefully decorated.

Extremely popular among members and their guests, the charming lodging house offers one of American golf’s singular experiences: waking up and having breakfast in an 18th-century house before enjoying a round of golf on one of three classic courses that have remained a great test for the 21st-century game.

The popular Weyhill Guest House offers one of golf’s unique experiences: waking up in an 18th-century house before enjoying a 21st-century game.

LOCATION
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania
YEAR FOUNDED
1920
OLD COURSE
PAR 71
YARDAGE 7,126
ARCHITECT Herbert Strong
GRACE COURSE
PAR 72
YARDAGE 7,091
ARCHITECTS William Gordon and David Gordon
WEYHILL COURSE
PAR 72
YARDAGE 7,071
ARCHITECTS William Gordon and David Gordon
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