

Sleepy Hollow Country Club

New management and many improvements to one of the first golf courses built in Whitchurch-Stouffville



Gary Betts, General Manager of Sleepy Hollow Country Club, tees off on the 11th hole.

As the story goes, two fellows stood at the back of what is now the 9th green on a summer's day in 1958 overlooking the meadow which we now know as the 18th fairway. One turned to the other and commented, "that is a nice sleepy little hollow". Their golf club had a name, Sleepy Hollow, designed by Ontario Golf Hall of Fame member James Johnstone Sr., and opened for play in the spring of 1960.

There are sixteen 18-hole courses in Whitchurch-Stouffville, plus two executive 9-hole courses, within 9 golf clubs. Our

courses represent varying ages of development, from 1960 to 1999, with the majority being built in the 1970s. For those that favour "heritage courses" with mature landscape settings - Meadowbrook Golf Club and Sleepy Hollow Country Club were the first two courses built in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

Most of our golf courses are designed in the "Parkland" style. A parkland course is one that is lushly manicured with plenty of trees, verdant fairways and fast greens. Sleepy Hollow fits this description, except the trees are older

and larger than most, and the fairway lush. Similarly, these older courses tend to be shorter on yards, as Rolling Hills and Meadowbrook are our shortest (both built by local philanthropist Arthur Latham), with Sleepy Hollow being next in line on (short) yards. However, don't let the yardage fool you, Sleepy Hollow has the highest stroke difference between bogey and scratch golfers of all courses in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

The course "Rating" is a number that indicates the probable score for a "scratch golfer"



Gary Betts with Head Chef James Brook and Food & Beverage Manager Lindsey Wright. They have ramped up the menu to ensure that Sleepy Hollow becomes a destination for lunch and dinner. Now, the restaurant is open to the public.

– one whose average game is close to the par for the course. The men's white tee ratings at Sleepy Hollow is 68.5 for 18 holes. This is a middle-of-the-road level of difficulty for a scratch golfer. Whereas a "bogey golfer" averages more swings than a scratch golfer. A "Slope" rating is used to assess the average performance of bogey golfers, or how many more swings will be required above par. At Sleepy Hollow, the slope is 130, which is 61.5 additional strokes for bogey golfers. This much challenge can hardly be found elsewhere.

The property is one of Sleepy Hollow's strongest features. Set in a natural east-west valley, the course has numerous elevation changes and some beautiful topography for golf. Many of the holes take advantage of the rolling land, working their way up and downhill, across small valleys or even through natural valley corridors. Golfer reviews speak often of mature scenic setting, elevations and good layout.

In speaking with Gary Betts, General Manager at Sleepy Hollow, he said that he has always favoured older courses. "I like narrow and curvy fairways, there's less emphasis on distance. This is a gentle course with some challenging holes. I like the smaller undulating greens."

Gary has been with Sleepy Hollow since 1996, originally starting as the Golf Pro. He is warm and friendly, almost like an uncle

or nephew, depending upon the perspective. Gary decided to retire in 2018, but he was brought back 5 months later as the General Manager. Gary has only had two 'real' jobs in his life – 20 years as the Golf Pro at Carrying Place Golf & Country Club in Kettleby, then 22 years at Sleepy Hollow. "I'm probably the longest serving pro at two golf clubs," he said. He has a passion for the game, and a passion for Sleepy Hollow.

Sleepy Hollow has made many improvements in recent years, and these are just the beginning. Over the last few years the bunkers have all been redone, and recently the club restaurant and banquet hall have seen major improvements – new flooring, lighting, ceiling tiles, and furniture. The club looks great; it is much brighter and more modern. The upgraded banquet hall is sure to make many wedding and reception planners happy. The next phase of improvements is slated for the façade, parking lot and cart storage. The last renovation to the outside was 1991, a new look is needed.

"I like the sense of community amongst the membership," said Gary, "there are men's and ladies' leagues. No one is left out. These are local businesspeople and residents." The pace on the course is an acceptable average around four hours.

Although the club had good bones to begin with, progress is kind to business growth. The management group led by Gary and Gord

Chilton (Head Professional) relaxed the dress code and provided some new exciting membership options. There is a new "Green Card" where members pay a reduced annual fee and a daily fee when playing. There are also affordable membership levels to suit all golfers - Pre-Juniors (ages 9-11), Junior Memberships (12-19), Career Builders (12-24), Intermediates (24-40), Weekday Memberships, and Social Memberships - where the full clubhouse and social privileges can be enjoyed at all times, and the social member can play golf up to six times per season with the payment of applicable guest fee. Finally, the initiation fee, overall, has been waived to boost membership.

Head Chef James Brook and Food & Beverage Manager Lindsey Wright have ramped up the menu in the restaurant to ensure that Sleepy Hollow becomes a destination for lunch and dinner for members, and now open to the public as well.

Next year, Sleepy Hollow will celebrate 60 years in business. We look forward to seeing the results of the new look and membership boost. [\[1\]](#)

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