

A PEEK
INSIDE
THE

NATION'S OLDEST SPORTS MUSEUM

BY DEBRA STEVKO MILLER

A museum dedicated to golf. Boring, you might think? Far from it!

For anyone who enjoys the fairways, or knows someone who does, the United States Golf Association (USGA) Museum and Library in Liberty Corner, Somerset County, is a hole-in-one day trip for all ages.

Housed in a century-old historic residence designed by architect John Russell Pope, the 30,000-square-foot museum has maintained the home's original character as an attractive backdrop to the 2,000 displayed artifacts and outdoor 16,000-square-foot putting green.

Among the vast collection is the 6-iron that astronaut Alan B. Shepherd Jr. hit golf balls with while on the lunar surface in 1971; Patty Berg's Wilson Staff Dyna-Powered wedge from her victory at the inaugural U.S. Women's Open in 1946; and Ben Hogan's 1-iron from the 1950 U.S. Open. Recent stars like Tiger Woods, Rory McIlroy and Michelle

Wie West also have personal items showcased throughout, and avid golfer President Dwight D. Eisenhower's golf cart of old is parked in the west wing.

The centerpiece of the museum is the Hall of Champions presentation of 13 original USGA national championship trophies. The bronze paneled walls in this oval rotunda are inscribed with the names of every USGA winner since 1895.

Each of the galleries takes you on a journey through time, as do the named rooms that celebrate PGA legends Jack Nicklaus, Ben Hogan, Arnold Palmer and Bob Jones. LPGA Hall of Famer Mary Kathryn "Mickey" Wright, considered one of the top women players of all time, is commemorated as well.

Inside the Jack Nicklaus room there is an interesting interactive component which invites visitors to design a golf course. "The Golden Bear" encourages guests to use the touch screen to plan a challenging, yet visually pleasing, course layout. See if you're up to par on where to place the bunkers.

Along the museum's hallway walls are iconic and memorable photos as part of an exhibit called "An Eye for the Game: The Golf Photography of John Mummert." In addition, portrait paintings of notable golfers add to the decor in several rooms.

Planning to spend a couple of hours perusing the extensive exhibits and videos is advisable, but you may want to include an extra 30 minutes to play the picturesque Pynes Putting Course, tailored to be reminiscent of the golf greens of Scotland.

Golfers, and those with just a casual interest in the game, should enjoy their visit to this educational gem which brings nostalgia and historical moments seamlessly into the present traveling through the centuries courtesy of this, the nation's oldest sports museum.

Overall, the museum's archived collection includes more than 70,000 catalogued artifacts, 750,000 photographs, 100,000 library items, and 200,000 hours of footage.

The museum is open Tuesday through Sunday (except holidays) from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and entry fees vary by age. Call ahead to check the museum's hours at 908-326-1908. The research center is open weekdays by appointment only. For more information or to take an online tour, visit usga.org/content/usga/home-page/usga-golf-museum.html. ❖

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Photos courtesy of USGA/Jonathan Kolbe