

Archives

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Manatt brings disc golf to area park // California transplant Jeff Manatt creates a disc golf course in East Pennsboro Twp. that is embraced by midstate enthusiasts.

At first glance, the sport of **disc golf** may seem like a curious thing.

Founded in southern California in 1970, the object of this hybrid of golf and Frisbee is to throw small discs into large metal baskets. Just like golf, the fewest strokes -- or in this case, throws -- wins. But for the people who play, it's serious business.

Seriously fun, that is.

The West Shore boasts the Harrisburg area's lone **disc golf** course, the Creekside **Disc Golf** Course, at Ridley Park in East Pennsboro Twp. Placed hard along the banks of the Conodoguinet Creek, the course, open to all, is home of the Creekside **Disc Golf** Club.

Established in 2006, the club has 31 members who play in weekly matches on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. The course was built just a couple of months prior to the founding of the club by Jeff Manatt, a California transplant who lives along the creek.

Manatt first needed to get township approval to build the course. After a meticulously detailed plan was embraced by the township, it's been full speed ahead ever since.

"After we built the course, any vandalism went down," Manatt said. "Basically, the bad things went down, and the good things went up."

Manatt also gained local support for the course, literally going door to door in the Ridley Park neighborhood.

"Ninety percent of the people were supportive of the course," he said.

Manatt himself played the game briefly in 1989, while still living in California. But he didn't pick it up again until he had moved to Pennsylvania and accompanied a co-worker to another **disc golf** course at Gifford Pinchot State Park, near Lewisberry.

"I saw his bag full of discs, and said 'Hey, I know what you're doing,'" Manatt said.

And with that, Manatt threw himself back into the sport.

Just like in real golf -- or as disc golfers like to call it, ball golf -- there are different discs for different throws.

As a ball golfer has a driver, different irons and a putter, disc golfers carry small shoulder bags with up to a dozen discs that are smaller than traditional Frisbees, with different beveled edges. The edges allow the discs to fly longer or shorter distances.

A real plus to **disc golf**, though, is the cost. Discs usually cost anywhere from \$7 to \$15, much cheaper than golf clubs. And at Creekside, there's no cost to play.

"Why pay \$30 to \$60 for a green fee when you come out here and play this?" said Matt Hamilton on a recent sunny Saturday morning. Fifteen players gathered on that Saturday for league matches.

One of over 3,000 courses in the United States, the 18 holes at Creekside can be stretched to a total of 6,142 feet.

Just like ball golf, there's different tees for different skill levels. Sixteen of the holes play as par 3s, with distances roughly around 300 feet. But two of the holes can be stretched further, with one playing over 700 feet.

That may not sound impressive, but try threading a small, plastic disc 700 feet through groves of trees to a metal basket 32 inches off the ground that's a little over two feet in diameter.

And don't forget the creek, which gobbles up wayward throws, the downed trees that serve as natural hazards, and even the occasional out of bounds. Just like in ball golf, penalty strokes apply.

Manatt is an enthusiastic supporter and ambassador of the sport. In addition to constructing and -- with help of other club members, maintaining -- the course, he created tee signs that denote each hole and scorecards so you can keep track of how you're doing. His enthusiasm extends to the rest of the club.

"It gets me out in the open and gets me some exercise," Bob Eberly said. "It's better than just going for a walk, since you can actually do something while you're walking."

Known to the rest of the club by his nickname, Old Disc, Eberly's been playing the sport for five years. Accompanied in recent match by Steve Charron and Shaun Manatt, Jeff's son, the three threaded through the tall trees and narrow openings of what's known as Monster Alley, a harrowing section on the back nine of the course.

Twelve-year-old Shaun's been playing the game for three years. Something of a **disc golf** prodigy, he is known to other players as Coach since, in the words of his father, "he'll tell you what he did wrong on every shot."

"It's just fun," Shaun said. "It's something to occupy you and run around."

Drawing similarities to ball golf can be irresistible sometimes. There are course records (51 at Creekside from the lengthened par-56 layout), course pros (at Creekside, that's Paul Wojcik, who gets the pro designation for accepting money, just like a ball golf pro does), an association for the pros (the Professional **Disc Golf** Association, or PDGA), and competitive, high-level tournaments.

At Creekside, one of the biggest tournaments on the calendar will be held July 11. It's known as the Crawdad Cooker, due to propensity of crawfish in the Conodoguinet, which in turn gave Jeff Manatt his nickname, Crawdaddy. According to Manatt, it attracts players from all over the country. They come from as far away as New York, Ohio, West Virginia and Michigan.

In addition to the Cooker, there's the Ace Race in August, where the goal is to see how many holes-in-one you can get with every player using the same type of disc, and the Ice Bowl, a winter tournament held regardless of weather, even in snow.

That's another one of the distinct advantages to **disc golf** over ball golf -- bad weather doesn't get in the way.

Serious fun, indeed.

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