

# BOSTON'S FINEST

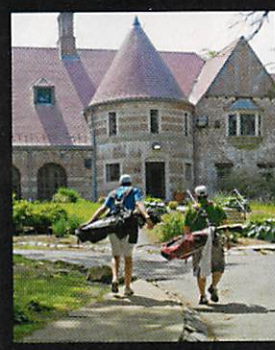
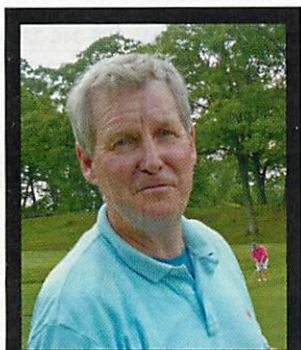
**S**TEVE HICKEY took up golf 40 years ago, when he was in his 20s, after being laid off as a truck driver. The game hooked him, and he evaluated subsequent employment opportunities partly on the basis of their compatibility with his development of an in-to-out swing path. On April 13, 1986, he was working as a bartender in a Boston tavern where the customers, all men, were watching the final round of the Masters. Jack Nicklaus, who was 46, was making one of the greatest last-day charges in the history of the game, and the tension in the bar was so great that the men spoke only to order refills, and then only during commercials. At one point, a woman came in, noticed golf on the TV, and loudly made derisive remarks about stupid boys and their stupid games. Hickey refused to serve her. When she persisted, he telephoned his boss, who came to the bar but declined to fire him (a resolution that Hickey suggested). Eventually, the woman stomped out, and the men went back to watching Nicklaus play the last six holes in five under par, beating Greg Norman and Tom Kite by a stroke.

Today, Hickey works for the Boston school system. He plays most of his rounds at George Wright Golf Course in Hyde Park. It was designed by Donald Ross and opened in 1938. Its clubhouse looks like a Norman fortress. In the late 1970s, Boston's then-mayor, Kevin White, got the idea of selling the course to a condominium developer, but a group of George Wright regulars fought him, and won. In the clubhouse

today, surviving members of the opposition are referred to as the Big Boys.

I played with Hickey and Scott Allen, who has been the head pro for a dozen years, and Jim Coleman, a caterer, who recently took over the grillroom concession. I loved the company and the course, which was in country-club condition. Coleman said that a visiting professional, who had grown up in the neighborhood but hadn't been back in years, played a round there recently and asked whether the course was being groomed for a big tournament. "I said, 'No, that's just the way they maintain it now,'" Coleman said. "The pro was amazed. He said, 'I've never felt so proud of something I had nothing to do with.'"

If you live in Boston, you qualify for what might be the best deal in American golf: \$1,100 a year for unlimited rounds at George Wright and its enchanting sister course, in



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**From top: head pro Scott Allen, the clubhouse, 10th-hole sign, Steve Hickey and Ted Avery.**

Dorchester: William J. Devine Golf Course in Franklin Park (next to the zoo). William Devine was founded in 1896. It's the second-oldest public course in the United States, after New York City's Van Cortlandt Park. It endured even worse neglect than George Wright did and, at one point, shrank to just four holes, which a band of diehards maintained with a push mower. Today, it has wider fairways and fewer blind shots than George Wright does, and it's

almost 500 yards shorter, but it's equally well maintained, and it's a real test. Bobby Jones played there often in the 1920s, when he was an undergraduate at Harvard, and was especially impressed by the 12th hole, a treacherous uphill par 4.

I played with the William Devine Men's Inner Club: no mulligans, no gimmies, no pick-ups, no foot wedges. We teed off behind the Fairway Ladies, in foursomes arranged by Malcolm Flynn, the assistant headmaster at Boston Latin School. Flynn grouped me with Tyrone Camper, a Boston detective; Ted Avery, a retired Boston detective; and John Wilcox, a welder employed by the city. Camper, whose specialties are ballistics and forensics, isn't involved in the investigation of the Marathon bombing but, like other members of the force, worked 12-hour shifts during its aftermath.

When our round was over, we hung out in the clubhouse waiting for the other groups to come in, and I ran into Jesse Rowell Sr., who had been the starter that morning. Rowell took up golf in the early 1970s, when he was in the Air Force Pararescue service. (He appeared in a photograph in *Time* in 1973 with a recently released POW named John McCain, and he took part in the evacuation of Da Nang, in 1975.) After Rowell's discharge, he spent 32 years at Verizon, and he volunteers in William Devine's youth program, which serves 200 beginning golfers. The program devotes nearly as much time to etiquette as it does to technique, and if you have the good fortune to follow one of its graduates out of the clubhouse—as I did an hour or so later—you just might have the door held open for you. ♣