

Living & Leisure



Joe McIntyre/staff photographer

Martha Wells, Cortland Country Club manager and golf pro, stands April 27 on the golf course in Cortlandville.

At home on the green

Martha Wells takes reins at Cortland Country Club

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Martha Wells learned everything about golf at the Cortland Country Club.

"This was the start of it all," said the general manager and PGA head golf professional at the Cortlandville course. "I lived and grew up on the eleventh hole at the Cortland Country Club. My mom still lives there."

The daughter of Meredith and the late Donald Wells, the 46-year-old Wells learned to play golf first from her father, and then the golf professionals at the club: Aldor Jones, Bob McCarthy and Tony Saraceno.

Her brother, John, is the varsity girls golf coach at Westhill in Syracuse.

"This is absolutely the first time we've had a woman pro and a woman manager," said Ken Morey, president of the club's board of directors. "She is probably one of the best things that has happened to the club in many, many years."

The club has approximately 360 members, of which 130 are women.

"We have brought on close to 50 new members since she has come aboard," Morey said.

Wells said the men have accepted her. She knows 90 percent of them, she said. She was hired Nov. 2, replacing Eric Manning.

In her post: "I do everything," she said. She starts out mornings opening the golf shop, which she owns, then moves over to the restaurant.

"I work there till after dinner, doing reservations, party planning, menus, overseeing the staff," she said. She also manages the golf course and building and gives les-

sons. In total, about 35 people work under her management.

The job is time consuming, but fulfilling, Wells said. "It's great. It's home, you know?"

"Golf has changed. The country club mentality has changed. It used to be viewed as elitist. Now it's an anybody sport," she said. "It's more inclusive."

The club is member-owned, but a non-member can get a tee time, though members get the priority, she said. And people who are not members can arrange parties and weddings at the country club.

She has three goals: "Fill the golf course. Fill the dining hall. Fill the bar."

And she wants to play more this year, too. "I don't know how that's going to happen. I play a couple times a month."

"Martha is one of 23 female PGA members across the country that are general managers," said Ari Edelman, senior vice president at Mastro Communications, which has worked for the PGA of America for many years. She has 1,547 male counterparts.

She is one of 1,235 female PGA professionals in the 1990s, allowing her to be a club-level teaching professional.

Wells, a golfer for 42 years, started as a child, played on the men's team at Homer High and the women's team at Penn State University.

She went for her PGA professional status in the 1990s, allowing her to be a club-level teaching professional.

At the time, she had to pass a player ability test for a 36-hole event, which tested for shooting, target and score. Then there was a three-year training program that covered teaching, club repair, merchandise, customer service, driving range and golf course maintenance.

She passed her player ability test while living in Colorado, then moved to Scottsdale, Arizona, to become a class A professional at the Phoenician Resort. She also worked at Desert Forest Golf Club in Carefree, Arizona, before working at Phoenix Country Club, where she was assistant golf pro.

"Then I met my future ex-husband and moved to Alberta, Canada," Wells said. She joined the Canada PGA and worked as an assistant pro at the Medicine Hat Golf and Country Club for eight years, until her divorce and return to New York.

Her first head pro job was at Radisson Greens Golf Course in Baldwinsville, then the Ithaca Country Club, where she worked as head pro for six years.

"It was a fabulous job," she said. But then she heard about the Cortland Country Club. "This opportunity came up. It was very fast."

"She just has this total ability to get along with everybody. All ages," said Gretchen Abbott, who was at the club last week. "It's like a breath of fresh air."

Wells said she still takes a lesson when her game is stymied. She said she scores anywhere from 75 to 85, now that she doesn't play much.

"Being the head golf professional takes a lot of time," she said. "At top level, I would shoot 75 consistently."

What she loves about golf:

"You are outside. You are playing with friends for the most part. You can never be perfect. I am an extreme Type A personality, so it's challenging. It's time consuming, but it's addicting."

"To be a good golfer, you need to have patience first and foremost. And to not learn from spouses or significant others."