



Mackenzie Tour players past and present hold fond memories of time in Victoria

As one of the longest-running professional golf tournaments in Canada, the Bayview Place Cardtronics Open presented by Times Colonist has seen plenty of history take place on its fairways over the years.

Entering its 35th year, the tournament has hosted future PGA TOUR winners, Presidents and Ryder Cup competitors and some of Canada's best up-and-coming talents getting their start at the tournament, which returns to Uplands Golf Club June 5-11 for the second event of the 2017 Mackenzie Tour – PGA TOUR Canada season.

The tournament continues to hold a special place in the hearts of past competitors and remains a favourite week on the schedule among current Mackenzie Tour players, with Victoria's beautiful setting, typically pleasant spring weather and the tournament's readily apparent tradition appealing to competitors who come from all over the world to play each year.

Perhaps above all else, it's the friendly spirit embodied by the tournament's volunteers, spectators and organizers that endears the tournament to players.

"I've always felt like if and when I was going to win, it would be at this tournament. The support this city, this crowd and the volunteers have showed me over the years, it was chilling," says 2016 champion Adam Cornelson, who made the tournament his first Mackenzie Tour win on the way to a breakthrough season that saw him earn a spot in The Five and Web.com Tour status for this season. "I love this city so much, and I've never felt support like that in my life."

With the win, he added his name to a venerable list of past champions at the Mackenzie Tour's longest-running event, with PGA TOUR regulars Steve Stricker, David Hearn, Ken Duke, Jason Bohn and Dave Barr among them.

Stricker, who owns 12 PGA TOUR wins and will serve as the United States' Captain for the upcoming Presidents Cup, holds fond memories from his time in Victoria nearly 30 years ago. The 50-year old from Wisconsin began his now-storied career in Canada and captured the 1990 Victoria Open for his first of an eventual 22 professional wins, one that stays with the Wisconsin native to this day.

"It was my first professional win, and I think about that tournament quite a bit. It was a special time," said Stricker, who edged out eventual PGA TOUR winners Todd Hamilton and Stephen Ames at Gorge Vale Golf Club for the win. "It was my first pro win in a pretty area of the



country, and I still hold the Tour and the Victoria area as a special place for (Stricker's wife) Nicki and I. It still brings back great memories."

This year's event is part of a growing commitment to supporting golf on Vancouver Island by the event's co-title sponsor, Bayview Place, a condominium development along Victoria's beautiful Inner Harbour. Ken and Patricia Mariash, the developers behind Bayview Place, have thrown their support behind the tournament since 2007 and stepped up as co-title sponsors in 2013.

This year, they've increased their support of the game by assisting the various programs of the local Vikes Junior Golf Tour, which was created in 2008 in order to address a gap in the opportunities for local junior golfers, and also the newly formed Bayview Place Vikes Performance Tour, which provides a competitive environment for amateur, professional and junior golfers on Vancouver Island and helps promote the development of the game.

For Keith Dagg, director of the Bayview Place Cardtronics Open Society and one of the tournament's original founders in 1981, the Mariash family's support has been instrumental in not only sponsorship, but fostering the sense of community involvement that has made the event so special.

"I hope the Victoria community knows," says Dagg, "how lucky we are to have Ken & Patty living here and always giving back. After doing this for 36 years, I sure do."

The tournament also gives back to the community through charitable donations to the Children's Health Foundation of Vancouver Island, including a donation of more than \$40,000 last year.

For returning Mackenzie Tour players, the tournament has been eagerly anticipated for weeks leading up to the season. One such player is Puerto Rico's Edward Figueroa, who went as far to say coming back to Victoria was one of his motivations for attempting to regain his Mackenzie Tour status.

"I love being there – it's my favourite place in the world," said Figueroa during this year's Qualifying Tournament in Florida. The 23-year old shot a career-best score of 62 at Uplands during the second round last year, thanks in part to the warm vibes he felt as one of the tournament's competitors. "Even though I was 4-over there my first round, I just liked being there, and I think that was the mindset more than anything. I'm really looking forward to being back."



There's no shortage of similar sentiment shared among alumni of the tournament. And after this year, a whole new group of players will leave Vancouver Island with a common affection for one of the most special golf tournaments in Canada.