

## **River to Ridge**

*Inside the Safeway Classic's 2009 transition*

By Mark Ellis

Since 1972, one of the most prestigious stops on the LPGA tour has been Oregon's Safeway Classic — originally called the Portland Classic. For 26 of those 36 years, including the last 19 in a row, this storied contest between the finest players in women's golf has been held at the venerable Columbia Edgewater Country Club. There, alongside the sweep of the river, some of the most impressive moments in the history of Northwest golf have played out. Now, the tournament awaits a passing of the torch, a change of venue for this notable tournament.

This year, 2008, the Safeway Classic will have its final run at Columbia Edgewater. When the Ladies of August swing into town for 2009's Safeway showdown, those rounds on the mighty Columbia will be a wonderful memory.

Instead, the ladies will be hitting the links within shooting range of the Tualatin Mountains, at Pumpkin Ridge Golf Club.

From his office at Columbia Edgewater, General Manager Hall Wade recalls some highlights from the tournament's long run, even as his organization gears up for their final edition of the Classic. "As the tournament comes to the final holes on Sunday," Wade remembers, "it is an impressive sight to see tens of thousands of fans surrounding the 18th green to watch the final test of the weekend."

He recalls some of the milestones, including the advent of ESPN coverage, which beautifully showcased Columbia Edgewater's world-class greens, and the landmark 70,000 attendance record in 2007. "Many of our members have been integral in the event's organizing group, the nonprofit Tournament Golf Foundation Inc.," Wade says, "and it is a great testament to the volunteerism of our members to assist in the organization and production of such an event."

One legendary memory came the first year Columbia Edgewater hosted what would become the Safeway Classic. It was 1974, and Columbia Edgewater was also hosting its first national event, the USGA Junior Girls Championship. "Nancy Lopez won the championship that day, her third straight," says Wade, "and she would go on to win the Columbia Edgewater LPGA event four separate times."

Lopez was made an honorary member of the club in 2002.

"It's good to move these things around from time to time, especially in Oregon," says Pumpkin Ridge cofounder Gaylord Davis, speaking to the reality of how annual tournaments too regularly displace club members and lose a bit of edgy expectation to repetition. "August is a prime season for golf, and you want your members to be able to enjoy that nice weather as much as possible."

Davis notes how LPGA players have perennially voted Columbia Edgewater at the top or near the top of the best courses on the tour, and he predicts that top women golfers will be similarly impressed with Pumpkin Ridge. He explains that the best of the best have already sampled Pumpkin Ridge's spectacular views and magnificent greens, noting that the U.S. Women's Open was held at Pumpkin Ridge in 1997 and 2003. "I wouldn't be surprised to see as many as 18 of the top 20 women's golfers onboard in 2009."

Davis touts Pumpkin Ridge's suitability for the event, highlighting its two courses, Witch Hollow and Ghost Creek. "The Safeway Classic will be held on Ghost Creek exclusively," he says, a big plus in the sense that Witch Hollow will remain open for the Pro-Am part of the Safeway tourney and when that's finished, the course will be open for member play. Infrastructure elements such as parking, gallery room and Pumpkin Ridge's great driving range all contribute to the positive buzz growing around the Classic's near future.

"This club was designed for tournament play," Davis concludes, "and we're excited about the opportunity to showcase Pumpkin Ridge to the world."

Last to weigh in on the transition is Tom Maletis, Tournament Golf Foundation's president, in a message posted on the LPGA website. "We are delighted to work with Pumpkin Ridge Golf Club. This outstanding 36-hole property gives us the advantage of staging all of our tournament events at one facility."

But for Maletis and the entire Oregon golf community the move is bittersweet. "At the same time, this move comes with a sense of sadness."

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