

Experienced hosts a major must

By Marty Budner
Staff writer

So here it is, Oakland Hills is hosting another major championship.

No big deal you might say. They're experienced at doing such things.

And you're right. Oakland Hills officials have tournament operations and preparations down to a tee. And they should, considering this is the 11th major golf championship the club has hosted since its founding in 1916.

Despite that ability to deliver successful golf majors, however, it is no easy task to play the gracious host.

Oakland Hills officials formally signed to accept the 12th annual U.S. Senior Open Championship of the United States Golf Association way back in October of 1987. They've been working steadfastly ever since preparing for the week-long list of official activities which begin today and end with the final round on Sunday.

But none of that would be possible without the tremendous dedication and sacrifice of the prestigious club's membership.

The tournament committee which is in charge of preparing for this annual event begins with the four-man executive committee of Robert G. Wood (general chairman), Robert S. Gigliotti (executive vice chairman), Alvin H. Mauss (executive vice chairman) and

E.M. (Bud) Erickson (tournament director).

BUT THAT'S just the start of the organizational chart. From there the list evolves into 44 different committees with more than 1,200 volunteers ranging from office workers to financial assistants to transportation coordinators.

It's an impressive display of service among club members. And, according to Wood, it's something the majority of members sincerely savor.

"The membership really enjoys these tournaments and I'll give you an example of how dedicated they really are," said Wood, who also was general chairman for the second annual U.S. Senior Open which Oakland Hills hosted 10 years ago.

"Back in 1981 a club in Pennsylvania had contracted to host the tournament. But late in the year of 1980 they canceled their contract with the USGA. That left the USGA with a situation where they had a tournament but no one to host it.

"So the USGA came to us, knowing that we had just completed the 1979 PGA and we had all the committee people in place and all the operational experience, and they asked us on short notice to take on the 1981 seniors. They said if you would do that we would also give you the 1985 Open.

"The only way the board of directors decided we would agree to do that is if the membership agreed. So we sent out a ballot to the membership asking them how they felt about it. Eighty-six percent of the membership voted in favor of hosting the '81 (senior) tournament and having the '85 (U.S. Open).

"The point of that being the membership likes golf tournaments and are very good at handling them," he said. "This will be our fifth tournament in 19 years, and we do quite well because we have that experience."

OAKLAND HILLS volunteers for such major projects for a number of reasons.

• The financial benefits are extremely rewarding. Wood said the club not only makes money directly from the tournament, but also indirectly through new memberships. Wood said there is a three-to-four year waiting list to gain an Oakland Hills membership.

• Oakland Hills officials feel committed to golf. The prestigious Bloomfield Township course has an outstanding national reputation for hosting tournaments, and members go all out to uphold that lofty tradition.

• Members believe Oakland Hills is simply a championship caliber course and are anxious to watch the

professionals challenge it. They believe the course has the main ingredients of a major test — from difficulty and stature to beauty and style.

• Finally — perhaps the biggest reason of all — by hosting the U.S. Senior Open the club hopes to land another professional golf major. For instance, Wood said the club has all but locked up the 1996 U.S. Open.

"When we decided to host the '91 Senior Open, we talked with the USGA about the possibilities of hosting the U.S. Open in '95 or '96," said Wood. "We never did think we would have a chance to get the '95 Open because it is going to be the centennial year for the Open. Although we still haven't signed a contract for the '96 Open, every indication is that we will get it."

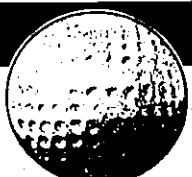
Yes, Oakland Hills indeed is ready for the challenge of hosting another major.

"The Senior Tour has grown in popularity to the point the galleries have grown and there is a great deal of interest," he said. "Particularly in the sense in the last few years you've had people like (Jack) Nicklaus, (Lee) Trevino and (Gary) Player become eligible."

"Hosting a U.S. Senior Open is not something we consider secondary," he said. "It's not. It's a major event for the club."

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Huntington Club activities: Members since the club began in 1983, the Landrys have traveled on club tours, including trips to San Francisco and Lake Tahoe. They plan to join the club's scheduled tour to Hawaii this October.

