A Message from the Chair

As many of you know, the Stanley Thompson Society has undergone some significant changes over the past few months, largely precipitated by the unexpected death of our Executive Director, Bill Newton, last July.

We are fortunate that board director, Grant Forrest, has agreed to serve as interim Executive Director, providing the Society and the board of directors with very capable leadership as we organize and implement our plans for 2014 and beyond.

One of the goals of the Society is to ensure that we have effective communication with our members and an important component of our communication plan is the publication of our web-based magazine, Dormie.

Our plan is to issue the magazine on a quarterly basis, with publication dates of March, June, September and December.

As highlighted in this March Dormie, the Society accomplished a great deal in 2013 and has exciting plans for 2014. We look forward to a great year ahead.

Jay Peters | STS Chairman

Executive Director’s Update

A lot has happened since our last Dormie. Your Board of Directors has been working hard to build on our past success and position your Society well for the future. I’d like to share some of what we have been up to this very cold and snowy winter.

There were a number of highlights in 2013. To begin with, The Stanley Thompson Foundation awarded its first Stanley Thompson / Bill Newton Graduate Studies Scholarship. We were very fortunate to have our first recipient, Christine Fraser, at our Tournament in September where we were able to celebrate her success in person. I encourage you to read Kirsten Brown’s update on Christine’s activities in another section of this issue of Dormie.

The Society marked another first by awarding the first Stanley Thompson Media Award to Brian Bileski. Brian produced a wonderful video on Stanley Thompson for Score Media. If you have not yet had a chance to view it, you can find it on our website.

I hope that while you are on the website you will take some time to familiarize yourself with it. A lot of work has gone into updating its content and navigability. You can also follow your Society’s activities on Facebook.

As we look forward to 2014, we are delighted to announce that the 2014 Thompson Classic will be held at the Ladies’ Golf Club of Toronto on Monday, September 22nd. We are looking forward to sharing a great day with you.

Let’s hope we can soon trade in our snow shovels for golf clubs.

Grant Forrest | STS Executive Director

“Through education, the Society is dedicated to the conservation of all historic golf courses in Canada that exhibit the values embraced by Stanley Thompson and other Golden Era Architects.”
In September 2013, the first ever recipient of the Thompson / Newton Graduate Studies Scholarship was selected from the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development at the University of Guelph. This scholarship was developed by the Stanley Thompson Society to honour Thompson’s legacy and support future generations of students who exhibit a keen interest in the field of golf course architecture. Candidates for this award are students of the Master’s Degree in Landscape Architecture program who have a high academic standing, and who submit a thesis proposal related to Golf Course Architecture and/or Maintenance. The recipient is nominated by faculty within the School of Environmental Science and Rural Development, and then confirmed by the awards committee of the Ontario Agriculture College.

You might have been introduced to this year’s scholarship winner, Christine Fraser, at the 2013 STS Classic or through her thank-you letter to the society in late November. But for those of you who have not met her, here is a brief background.

Unlike many of us, Christine’s connection to golf is greater than a mere love of the game. A passion for the sport has been deeply rooted in her family for generations. In the 1970s, Christine’s grandparents, along with their three children, designed and built a golf course west of Kingston, Ont. called Camden Braes – a golf course still owned and operated by the family today.

As a youngster, Christine enjoyed summers at the golf course exploring the natural landscape, searching for golf balls and generally having the run of the place with her younger brother Bradley. Although the golf course presented a playground full of wonder and adventure, they were never completely out of sight, as club members kept a keen eye out for the pair, reporting their last known co-ordinates back to their mother in the pro shop at the end of their round.

Over time, her curiosity and competitive spirit inspired Christine to try her hand at the game. Eventually, with the encouragement of her family, she became quite proficient, so much so that she was able to pursue her Bachelor of Arts and Science at Stetson University (Florida) on a golf scholarship.

After a successful academic and competitive golf career at Stetson University, Christine found herself perplexed at the thought that she still hadn’t found “it.” Not until she encountered an article about the transformation of a gravel pit into the course that will become the 2015 U.S. Open site, did “it” suddenly become apparent. Christine had found her inspiration. It made perfect sense that she would refocus and pursue her dream of becoming a Golf Course Architect.

Christine now has one semester and a research thesis remaining for her three-year graduate degree. Her thesis research will attempt to identify and explain the major economic, social, and cultural factors that deter individuals from playing golf. Key factors will then be addressed, where possible, using creative alternative design solutions in order to make the game more convenient, inclusive, affordable and enjoyable.

To date, Christine’s research has led her on a tour of some of the most historic golf courses in the Scotland and has put her in contact with several of their most notable stewards. In December, she was fortunate enough to have spent an afternoon with her architectural idol – Martin Hawtree, on site at Toronto Golf Club. She describes her experience and what she learned in this way:

“We spent two hours on the golf course studying all of his “follies,” as he calls them. He is very aware of the property’s integrity and is able to rationalize every contour and green placement. Nothing is done without a purpose, whether it is tactical bunker alignment or breaking ground to create a consequence for arrant shots. Dr. Evil, as the Toronto Members have playfully dubbed him, is not afraid to use perception of views and risk-reward scenarios to engage
the golfer. His work is layered and complex, yet perfectly simple and justifiable. Being able to experience the architectural elements of a golf course with the resident architect himself was a wonderfully revealing experience. Martin has provided me with an invaluable understanding and knowledge that directly relates to the foundation of my thesis.”

The STS would like to wish Christine the best of luck with her thesis defence in April 2014 and in all of her future endeavours. In the words of Stanley Thompson “Make no small plans.”

The STS has committed to funding this scholarship for at least five years and hopes to be able to do so in perpetuity. We would like to thank all of the members for their generous support, in particular our Friends Members, as a portion of your annual fees fund this very important scholarship program; a program designed to honour Stanley Thompson’s legacy by inspiring the next generation of Golf Course Architects.

Kirsten Brown | STS Director

---

STS Alliances Program

Technology has changed the game of golf, and the fields on which we play. At the same time, there is a return to the philosophy of promoting, engaging and enjoying the classics created by the Golden Era architects, from the start of the twentieth century to the outset of World War II in 1939. This past year, 2013, the U.S. Open at Merion and The Open at Muirfield were examples of Golden Era courses that showed players and the public the true greatness of the old golf course layouts.

The Stanley Thompson Society feels very strongly that there should be an alliance of the societies and associations that represent the notable architects of the Golden Era. This alliance would be a lobby group working together to preserve the heritage value of these historic courses and the legacy of their architects.

The STS Alliances Program

Our societies are working together to frame what the alliance might look like and how to extend the alliance to other groups including the following:

The Tillinghast Association; Walter J. Travis Society; Alister Mackenzie Society; Harry S. Colt Association; James Braid Golfing Society; and possibly others.

Each member of the alliance would communicate with their own club members planning changes to their courses. The alliance would also communicate with the USGA, R&A, professionals and superintendents on the future of golf clubs and golf balls.

As an alliance, we will discuss our memberships and education in meetings. Through Dormie, we will keep STS members up to date on this important initiative.

Jim Fraser | STS Director
Stories By Dr. Jamie Harris

Many stories about Stanley Thompson were recorded by James Barclay in his book The Toronto Terror.

Over the next few issues of Dormie, Dr. James M. Harris will bring us a series of articles about Stanley’s career and some of the famous, visionary and eccentric people he met through his work.

Banff and the Harkin Legacy

The development of golf courses across Canada outside of Ontario and Quebec in the first half of the twentieth century owe a good measure of debt to a man named James Bernard Harkin.

Canada’s National Park System

In 1911 Harkin was appointed as the first ever Commissioner of what is now known as Parks Canada. It was James Harkin who defined and was responsible for the development of Canada’s National Park system. Harkin regarded a golf course as a required tourist offering in a national park.

During Harkin’s tenure, Jasper Park Lodge, Banff Springs, Waskesiu, Highlands Links and Anne of Green Gables (all Stanley Thompson golf courses) were built. Waterton Lakes, Elk Island and Clear Lake (Wasagaming) were also built during Harkin’s tenure, but the jury is still out regarding the extent of Stanley Thompson’s involvement in these courses.

James Harkin and deputy minister of the Interior, W.W. Cory, were golfers and members of the Rivermead Golf Club in Gatineau, Quebec, located just across the river from Ottawa.

Rivermead’s first nine holes were designed by Canadian Golf Hall of fame member Charles Murray in 1911 and expanded to 18 holes by George Cumming in 1915. Cumming would later become Stanley’s partner when Thompson Cumming and Thompson was established in 1919.

Only the Best

It was at Rivermead that Harkin learned the importance of great golf course architecture. Thus, in 1919, when Cory was able to secure $15,000 to expand the nine-hole golf course on the floor of the Bow River (designed by Scottish golf professional William E. Thomson eight years earlier) to 18 holes, Harkin insisted that the very best golf architect be hired.

Harkin stood his ground against criticism of what others considered to be the architect’s exorbitant fee of $1,000, and Donald Ross of Pinehurst, North Carolina was engaged to lay out the expansion. According to James Harkin: “I am advised that in the United States expert golfers will travel thousands of miles to reach a course which they know has been laid out by this man.”

Enter Stanley

The Donald Ross-designed course was not completed until 1924. It existed for only a few years before Edward Beatty, President of the CPR, gave Stanley Thompson carte blanche to build “the last word” in golf courses at Banff as a response to the publicity that the rival CNR had garnered when Thompson had built the Jasper Park Lodge course.

With the use of dynamite, trainloads of topsoil and brilliant vision, Stanley Thompson integrated parts of the mountainous valley walls into his design and he brought the first tee to the doorstep of the Banff Springs Hotel.

Sadly, the strikingly original Thompson setting for the opening shot at Banff is no longer in use.

Harkin was born in 1875 at Vankleek Hill in eastern Ontario. After a brief career as a reporter in the Parliamentary Press Gallery, he served for ten years as a secretary in the Department of Indian Affairs.

Original First Tee at Banff - Hitting over the Spray River