



Member Profile

Dennis Joy

Charlevoix, Mich., USA

Dennis “Marty” Joy’s family moved around a bit during his very wee years, but since 1973, he has lived in Charlevoix, Mich.

“My dad was a doctor, a general practitioner, and we moved a lot early, but since 1973, we’ve been right here,” Joy says.

Though he has a younger brother and sister, Joy is the only one in the family to play golf; except for his grandparents who taught him the game.

“We lived right across the street from the Charlevoix Golf Club, at one time an 18-hole layout and one of the best in the country,” Joy says. “But my grandparents played all the time at the Holland Lake golf club in Sheridan, Mich. It was a little 9-hole mom-and-pop course that sold beer and sodas and bad hats. They got me started on that course.”

Joy recalls he was only about 3 or 4 when he started hitting balls in the back yard. “My grandparents gave me some knock-down persimmon woods and when I could get to around 85 yards they took me to Holland Lake. As I got better and could finally hit over some ponds, they would move me back.”

It was on the Charlevoix course that, about 10 years old, Joy first bested his grandmother. “Then, about two years later I got my first birdie and beat my grandpa in the same round,” he says.

Joy is especially fond of the Charlevoix municipal course, now just nine holes, largely because William Watson, who designed the Belvedere Golf Club where Joy is now the pro, was the professional at the Charlevoix club from 1914-1935.

After high school, Joy entered MSU, but left after two years to pursue a career in golf. “I spent three years in Arizona on the mini-tours and then accepted a position as an assistant at the Merion Golf Club in Ardmore, Pa., working for Bill Kittleman.”

Kittleman, by the way, is the one who designed Merion’s logo, which incorporates the famous wicker baskets that surmount each flagstick on the course.

After a time at Merion, Joy took a position at Innisbrook in Tarpon Springs, Fla., then home of the J.C. Penney Classic on the Copperhead Course. The Wendy’s Three-Tour Challenge was also held there, from the mid- to late-’90s.

In 1998 Joy took one more stab at the mini-tours, this time in San Diego, Calif. “I won a few dollars, but that was about it.”

By this time, Charlevoix was on his mind and Joy returned home in 1999, taking up his current position at the Belvedere Golf Club. He’s been there since.

“I got into hickories about 10 years ago,” he says. “Ralph Livingston, Chuck McMullin, and Roger Hill got me into it. One of the first events I attended was the Mid Pines Hickory Open. Out of the blue I tied with Jay Harris for the title, but lost on the first playoff hole when Jay birdied it. That particular hickory outing had a big trade show and I must have spent \$2,500 on clubs. Since then, I’ve only played hickories.”

For the past 12 years, Joy took a winter job in Naples, Fla., but he’s put the winter work on hold to pursue no less than three books.

“One is on William Watson. He was born in 1860 in Scotland and was a one time a member at St Andrews when Old Tom Morris was the professional. All three Foulis brothers, and Donald Ross, were all there at the same time, too.”

A second book is in the works on Herbert Tweedie. Born in Bombay, India, Tweedie was a founder of Royal Liverpool Golf Club. In 1886, he immigrated to the U.S. and later settled in the Chicago area where he worked with Charles Blair Macdonald to design several of that area’s famous clubs including Exmoor, Flossmoor, La Grange and Midlothian. He also happened to design the Charlevoix Golf Club and that is where Joy’s interest was piqued.

Joy’s third book project is a centennial on the Belvedere Golf Club, but he has until 2025 to get that one done.

The Belvedere Golf Club and Joy seem well matched and he loves the work there. He says he has 48 days of golf events scheduled for 2016 – pro-ams, member-guests, hickory events – all of which he must organize. Many include such details as food, beverages, and awards. On top of all this, he is a newlywed, having married in June 2015. He and his wife, Allison, live in Charlevoix.

How often do you play hickories?

Whenever I play it is with hickories. I’m the only PGA professional in Michigan who doesn’t own modern clubs. My modern clubs are now part of my rental bag fleet.



Dennis “Marty” Joy is the head professional the Belvedere Golf Club in Charlevoix, Mich.

What’s in your play set?

I’ve resisted using replicas because half the fun of the hickory clubs is the search for what works for you. So, the following are all originals:

G. Sayers Driver
Jack Stait Bulldog
George Nicoll driving iron
George Nicoll Cleek iron
Tom Stewart Mashie
Tom Stewart Spade Mashie
Tom Stewart Mashie/Niblick
Tom Stewart Niblick
George Nicholl pitcher
Tom Stewart Sand Niblick
RWH Buckrabal Putter

Favorite club?

27 Degree Bulldog bought from Ken Holtz.

What ball do you play?

Titleist ProV1 – not the softest ball out there but still the best feeling ball around the greens.

Favorite course for hickories?

Belvedere Golf Club is a perfect hickory course. Really enjoyed Baltustrol last fall and would love to return to Merion Golf Club. [Joy played in the Hickory Grail, a British Golf Collectors Society fixture that was held at Baltustrol last year. He was a member on the U.S. team.]

Favorite hickory tournament?

Belvedere Hickory Open. I love to run this event and I really try to make it a very special event not only for the contestants but also for their spouses. Besides, being my home course and town, I can sleep in my own bed at night.

Any particular player or aspect of golf history you especially enjoy?

That would have to be the guys I’m researching for the books I’m working on – William Watson and Herbert Tweedie. Each has ties to Charlevoix.

Best thing about hickory golf?

The pure authentic aspect of it – hitting clubs that maybe a Sarazen a Hagen or a Willie Watson would have played. It helps your golf game. If you can play these you can play anything. I mean, there is no heel-toe weighting or anything like that, it is all feel, just go out and swing the club and find the right set with the right shafts for you. It is a hunt and very rewarding when you find the right club. Hunting for them, finding them, fixing and repairing them, then playing them and hitting that one pure shot, it’s all part of it. It’s gotten for me that playing with modern clubs would be like cheating.

Ideas to promote hickory golf?

We have done a great job at our club. Here at Belvedere there are 31 members, including four women, who are all into original clubs. They love playing them. We must have built more playsets for our members than any other club in the country. So, it’s a matter of introducing it to people, getting the clubs in their hands and letting them enjoy the feeling. It’s a new challenge for them, something different.

Most recent book on golf that you read?

It’s been mostly reference books for the projects I’m working on. There’s about 75 books spread around my office. One of the most recent was a centennial book on the Minikahda Golf Club, one of Watson’s designs (1899, re-worked by Donald Ross in 1917).