

# HICKORY NUT

*Playing with 100-year-old equipment gets Pete Georgiady back to everything good about the game*

by Bill Fields



**D**evotees of the hickory-shafted game are a small but dedicated group—probably fewer than 20,000 enthusiasts globally—and no one might love it more than Pete Georgiady. He played with antique clubs for the first time in 1980, at a gathering of The Golf Collectors' Society, and was hooked.

"That was my first hickory golf, and I just kept playing and playing," Georgiady says. "There weren't many folks doing it those days. People would say, 'Who's that nut out there?'"

The recently retired Georgiady, who turns 69 during Masters week, spent his career in sales for technology companies such as IBM and Xerox, but is decidedly old school when it comes to his favorite sport. This June, for the 20th time, he will conduct the National Hickory Championship at Oakhurst Links in White Sulphur Springs, W.Va. Participants in the two-day event compete on the 2,250-yard, nine-hole course, founded in 1884, with pre-1900 clubs (or copies) and replica gutta percha balls while wearing period clothing.

"You have to wear a long-sleeve shirt and tie, not because it's a costume party but because that's what they played in back then," says Ross Snellings, who has played in every NHC. "For years, people have been wanting

to use golf bags, too, but Pete is staunchly against that because they weren't commonly used at that time. Pete insists on as much authenticity as possible."

Georgiady was a three-sport athlete (cross country, wrestling, track) in high school outside East Lansing, Mich., but has been a golfer since he was 10. He started to gain an appreciation for golf history while attending law school at Dundee University, not far from St. Andrews, where, in 1971, he played the Old Course for one pound. "They had three tee times an hour reserved for residents of the town, and if no residents showed up, you could go off," Georgiady says. "We never had to wait more than 20 minutes."

In the 1970s, Georgiady stopped collecting Civil War carbines in favor of P.G. Wodehouse books and soon developed an interest in the equipment used by golfers many years ago. His golf collection, which started when a friend in Scotland gave him a 1915 aluminum-headed putter, is highlighted by about half a dozen pre-1870 irons.

Collecting antique clubs was a gateway to playing with them and, in 1998, starting the National Hickory Championship. "We get compared to vintage car enthusiasts, people who drive Model As," says Georgiady, "or to those who re-enact Civil War battles. The crux of golf has not changed in 700 years. You swing the club, you hit the ball, you put it in the hole. Equipment has changed, courses have changed, and the rules have changed, but essentially it's the same damn game."

By founding the NHC, Georgiady created the template for serious hickory golf events. "I set rules and equipment requirements that many other events copied and have become the norm," he says. "We attempted to make it the U.S. Open of hickory golf, a stern test with specific guidelines."

A longtime member of the USGA's Museum Committee, Georgiady has written more than a dozen books, most about vintage clubs and the people who made them. It's at Oakhurst, however, where the history comes alive in the NHC, that he is most in his element.

Georgiady is affectionately known as "The Czar" by the NHC regulars who annually tackle the demands of Oakhurst—the rough can be knee-high—with unforgiving clubs and a ball that travels 140 to 160 yards when struck purely. "He is what Clifford Roberts was to the Masters," Snellings says. "But he's a most benevolent dictator." 