

Area Golfer Shoots For National Seniors Title

BY DOUG RUTTER

Walter Pennington has big plans for June, when he hopes to top off his strong finishes at local and state senior golf tournaments with a national title.

The Sunset Beach golfer will travel to Baton Rouge, La., this spring and represent Brunswick County and North Carolina in the U.S. National Senior Sports Classic IV.

Pennington, who works part-time as a starter and ranger at Sea Trail Plantation, will compete against some of the best seniors in the country in the men's bracket for ages 65 to 69.

"I'm really excited and I'm looking forward to it," the 68-year-old retiree said in a recent interview. "This'll be my last hurrah unless I feel pretty good when I reach 70."

Pennington, who doesn't look his age, says he does a lot of stretching and walking to keep in shape. "In the last 24 hours I've walked about four miles," he said.

The 36-hole national golf tournament will be played at The Bluffs, a course designed by the legendary Arnold Palmer. Men ages 55 to 69 will play the Palmer course, while women and older men play another club.

Most of the other events in the Senior Sports Classic, such as walking, basketball, shuffleboard and tennis, will be conducted on the Louisiana State University campus.

Pennington said the golf tournament gets underway June 14 with a practice round. The actual competition will be held June 15 and 16, with a shotgun start both days at 7:30 a.m.

The senior games will count gross scores only. Handicaps aren't used to determine winners. Pennington, a nine-handicapper, figures he'll have to shoot between 75 and 81 both days to have a shot at capturing the championship.

Pennington qualified for the national event by first winning his age group in the Brunswick County Parks and Recreation Senior Golf Tournament last May at Lockwood

Golf Links.

The top three local finishers in each age bracket qualified for the North Carolina Senior Games in Raleigh, where Pennington tied for second last year with an 81 on the Wildwood Greens course.

Pennington also competed in the state games in 1991, but he prefers to forget about that round. "I'm not going to tell you how I did the first time. It was bad. One hole killed me. I had a 10."

He competed against a field of about 40 golfers in the state games last year, and expects anywhere from 60 to 100 at the national event. Each state can send as many as three golfers in each age bracket.

Pennington says he's been golfing since he was 24, which gives him 44 years of experience on the links. Of course, that doesn't take into account his one extended lay-off.

"I quit golf for seven years when I had two sons in college at the same time," he said. "I didn't have a choice. I couldn't afford it."

Brunswick County Parks and Recreation recently held a senior tournament at the county's newest

course, Brunswick Plantation, to kick off the third year of organized senior golf events.

Kay Brannon, who coordinates the local tournaments, said the first one attracted just 36 golfers. Now, the popular events are usually limited to the first 144 players to register.

Pennington plays in most of the local senior tournaments, which are held every other month. "There's very few things around where you can be involved in competition like that. I like playing these fellas scratch."

Pennington, who was raised in Pennsylvania and worked in Syracuse, N.Y., said he chose the Sunset Beach area as a retirement spot because of the mild climate.

"Between here and Orlando, Florida, the weather's about the same," he said. "The weather was a big factor, and of course the golf."

WALTER PENNINGTON practices on the Sea Trail putting green. The local golfer will compete in the U.S. National Senior Sports Classic in June.

STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER




The Gauntlet
Golf & Country Club
at St. James Plantation
Hwy. 211 • Southport, NC 28461

Winter Special \$20⁰⁰
includes cart & green fees

Call for Tee Times
1-800-247-4806

©1992 THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

DID YOU KNOW? GOLF GROUPS UNLIMITED
can arrange your accommodations and tee-times in Myrtle Beach, Florida and Arizona

Call Jana Martin for more information
(919)579-7274
1-800-732-4854
Golf Groups Unlimited

©1993 THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

Winter Rates

Weekdays:
Before One \$12; After One \$9.00
Senior Citizens \$9.00 All Day

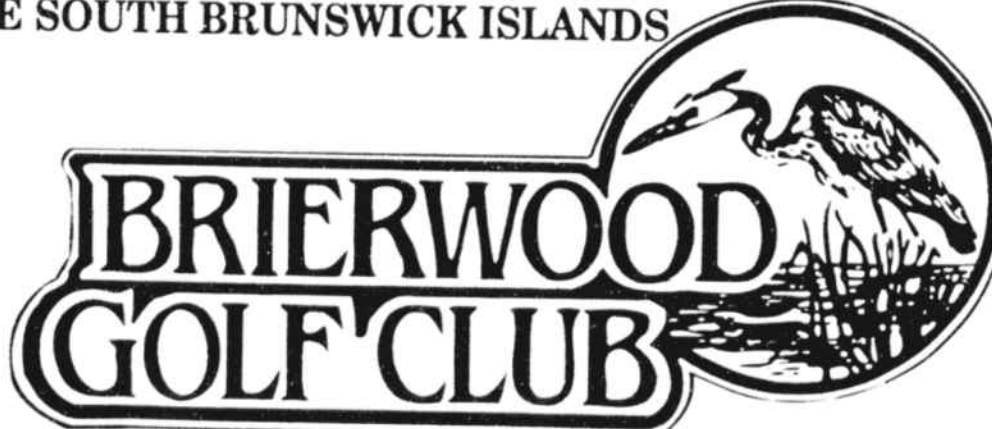
Weekends:
Before One \$16; After One \$12
Rates Available for Nine Holes
(Fees good until March 1)



OLDE FORT GOLF CLUB

Hwy. 133, 5 miles north of Orton Plantation, (919)371-9940

THE FIRST GOLF COURSE IN THE SOUTH BRUNSWICK ISLANDS



BRIERWOOD GOLF CLUB

A Golf Course Community
18 HOLE CHAMPIONSHIP COURSE

Welcome to...
BRIERWOOD GOLF COURSE
...with our new full-service clubhouse. BRIERWOOD—A place where we cater to old friends as well as new visitors, where locals and seniors are always welcome. A place to "hit the green" instead of a place to "spend the green."

919-754-4660
(Call for starting time 24 hrs. a day)
Hwy. 179 at Shallotte City Limit