



Traveling Man

Getting an overlapping grip on the world

BY LEE PACE

Greg Ohlendorf grew up in a small town less than an hour's drive south of Chicago and has lived in Beecher, Illinois, all of his 58 years. "Our world is heavily influenced by the hustle and bustle of one of the biggest cities in America," he says. "The world goes by very, very fast."

It was natural that the aesthetics and pace of Pinehurst and Southern Pines would be a comfortable counterbalance after his first visit in 1996.

"We drove into town and saw the pine trees, and your blood pressure drops 10 points," he says. "There's a peace and a calm about it. You slow down immediately. I love small town charm, and certainly the Sandhills has all you could want. I was complete-

ly smitten from that first visit."

He and wife Melissa stayed at the Carolina Hotel, and he played golf on Pinehurst Nos. 2, 6 and 7. He returned a decade later, this time bringing his son, Cam, and setting up a 14-round golf orgy over seven days that included a half-dozen courses at Pinehurst as well as Pine Needles, Mid Pines, and Forest Creek North and South.

"My wife fell in love with everything about Pinehurst and the Sandhills," Ohlendorf says. "She thought the climate was great. She's a Wisconsin girl and likes a sweatshirt-and-blue jeans kind of day. We'd been to Florida enough times, and I was not impressed with the golf. The golf in Pinehurst was compelling."

Then, in 2014, the Ohlendorfs decided to plant a stake in the Sandhills, purchasing a townhouse at Longleaf and moving in the Thursday of the U.S. Open on Pinehurst No. 2. Today they spend from three to four months in the area to supplement their permanent home in Illinois. Ohlendorf uses his memberships at Pine

PHOTOGRAPH BY MELISSA OHLENDORF

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Needles, Mid Pines and Pinehurst to get all the Donald Ross he wants — not to mention some Rees Jones, Jack Nicklaus, Tom Fazio, Ellis Maples and Gil Hanse, too.

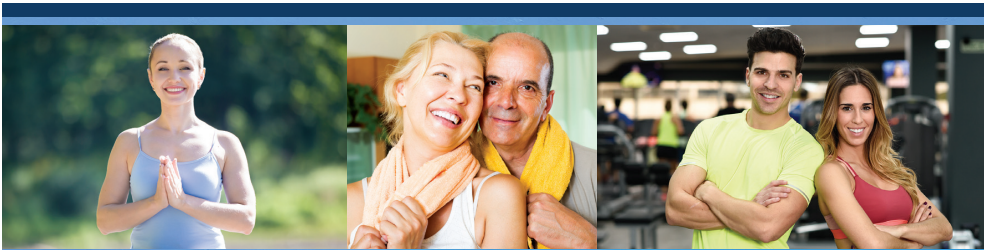
“I love all things Ross and all things Sandhills,” Ohlendorf says.

When the worlds of golf and travel merge, the man knows of what he speaks. As a member of the *Golfweek* course rating panel since 2004, he’s played over a thousand courses worldwide in 16 countries. His litany of lists includes playing *Golf Magazine’s* Top 100; *Golfweek’s* Top 100 Modern Courses; and *Golfweek’s* Top 100 Classic Courses. He recently published a memoir of his travels in a book, *Global Golf Travels*.

The volume spans nearly 400 pages and tells of Greg and Melissa’s trips to the British Isles, Hawaii, Australia, Thailand, South Korea, Africa and beyond. Often Cam and nephew Clint make the journeys as well. Ohlendorf was motivated to schlep his golf clubs around the world after his father, who had been tethered to a 24/7/365 family business, died of Alzheimer’s disease. He and Melissa juggle their travel with their “day jobs” of Greg running a community bank in Beecher, and Melissa working as an educational technologist for the local school district.

“*Carpe diem* became my motto after Dad died,” Ohlendorf says. “My book started as a memoir to my family, and specifically for my grandson or granddaughter, who at the time I began, wasn’t even a figment in my son and his wife’s imaginations. I realized, though, that I knew so little of my grandparents’ lives that I wanted to leave something in writing for a future generation to read. Whether or not they cared about golf was secondary, but I thought they might like the ‘wanderlust’ traveler part of my adventure.”

Ohlendorf’s perspective on evaluating a golf course has evolved over the years into a focus on the putting surfaces and their settings. “I’m an architecture junkie but particularly a greens guy,” he says. “My sense of golf is if you shoot 72, you have 36 putts. That’s a perfect round of golf. If half the round is so uninteresting because you have less-than-compelling green sites, that doesn’t do much for me. Pinehurst No. 2 is



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all about the greens. Pine Needles and Mid Pines have wonderful greens. Dornoch around the greens is wonderful.”

The cover image of his book is a view of Royal Dornoch. “My favorite course in the world,” he says. It was 20 years ago that Ohlendorf first played the course on the northeast coast of Scotland that spawned a young Donald Ross as a greenkeeper and clubmaker. Melissa captured the cover shot from the vicinity of the fifth tee, with the middle part of the frame showing a cluster of the greens of the fifth, sixth and 11th holes. In the background, the hillside and narrow walking path leading to the seventh tee loom, while vivid yellow gorse bushes bloom in the foreground.

“The way the course is routed, with each of the first half dozen holes going ‘out’ but at slightly different angles, made me realize that there was so much more to links golf and its associated wind,” he says. “The tight turf, the revetted bunkers, and the fantastic green sites just caught my imagination.”

Ohlendorf embraces the ambience of Ross’ hometown and the friendliness of the proprietors of the shops, inns and restaurants almost as much as he does the golf experience. Visiting Americans are sure to book a table with expat Chris Surmonte, who runs Luigi, a popular café on Castle Street in the heart of town.

“Dornoch is perfect for the cover for my book,” he says. “When Dornoch’s in full bloom with the gorse, it’s literally breathtaking. You come off the second green to the third tee and it’s spread out below you in full bloom, and you just don’t want to move. It’s the same with the town and the little shops. I’ve passed Chris on the golf course and he’ll yell to me confirming my dinner reservation. Where else can you find that?”

“Being a community banker, small towns and small businesses are my bread and butter,” he says. “It’s what I have done for a living. Pinehurst and Dornoch – these little places are meaningful to me.” **PS**

Greg Ohlendorf’s book, *Global Golf Travels*, is available locally at *Old Sport & Gallery* in the village of Pinehurst or by clicking globalgolftravels.com.