

Olson lands dream job on Mackinac Island

By Mike Spencer
Of The Enterprise staff

Chuck Olson launched a dream career when he signed up for the new professional golf management curriculum at Ferris State University in 1976.

Now the 55-year-old Suttons Bay man has his "dream job" after nearly four decades in the golf business.

He's the new head golf professional and general manager of Mackinac Island's Wawashkamo Golf Club.

"It's an unique opportunity for me," said Olson, who is taking over the top job at one of Michigan's most historic golf courses. "The golf pro had retired and they needed a new influx of energy and they needed someone with experience."

"I am thrilled and honored."

The job requirements at the course, which opened in 1898, fit Olson to a "T." Olson was head professional at Traverse City Golf & Country Club for 13 years, partnered in the building of Bay Meadows Golf Course and The Leelanau Club at Bahle Farms and served as GM and head pro for King's Challenge Golf Club in Cedar for seven years.

"I really like to be real close to the customers and the neat thing is that I can be a general manager and golf pro," Olson said. "This is not a big place, so I'll have an opportunity to run the whole place."

"I think it's going to be a lot of fun."

"We're happy to have Chuck and his experience," said Gary Cousino, a

Wawashkamo Golf Club board member who was involved in hiring Olson. "I'm hopeful that he can make a difference in the club in tournaments and tournament participation and in getting new members."

Cousino, also a Ferris State grad, went through the PGM to find Olson.

"There were a couple others, but Chuck is from northern Michigan and he understands the market and that the industry is a bit slow right now," Cousino said.

Olson will start his new job on May 15, 2012. The course is open through Oct. 15. Olson will live in a cottage close to the clubhouse, which is located about a mile north of the island village and near the island airport.

Wawashkamo Golf Course is part of the Mackinac State Historic Park. It was designed by Alex Smith, a Scottish golf pro and two-time U.S. Open winner. It is also Michigan's longest continually operated golf course.

The links style course is noted as "One of America's Historic Golf Landmarks" by Golf Digest and sits on Michigan's Historic Register. The development of Wawashkamo Golf Club and the survival of its unique brand of traditional golf runs parallel to the uncommon history of Mackinac Island, a place where much of the flavor of the nineteenth century survives.

"It's very old and very unique," said Olson, who is just the third PGA golf pro in the club's history.

Although the island's other golf course — The Jewel at the Grand Hotel — may have more notoriety, Olson is hoping to change that in the new future.

"It hasn't done much in getting the word out to the rest of the golfing community, but I am looking forward to sharing this historic golf landmark with golf enthusiasts from around the world," Olson said.

The nine-hole, 5,949 yards course is semi-private with 100 members, but open play to the public. It has two differ-



CHUCK OLSON of Suttons Bay has been named the new head golf professional and general manager of Mackinac Island's Wawashkamo Golf Club.

ent sets of tees, Olson said, making 18 holes of play possible.

Olson played high school golf at Clarkston, but wasn't sure where the game would take him.

"I was a 5-foot-4 jock in high school," said Olson, who is also an assistant basketball coach at Suttons Bay High School. "I spent my winters in gyms and always wanted to be a coach or be in the sports business."

"When the opportunity at Ferris came, I took it. I've always loved the game and teaching it, so it fit what I wanted to do."

Olson said the challenge of playing golf attracted him to the sport.

"You have to work at it to be good," Olson said. "And it's complicated because of the mental aspects."

"It's very challenging because of all the conditions each hole has always changes."

Olson said he didn't expect to change

any of the Wawashkamo course traditions, other than to get the name out there more.

The links-style layout utilizes natural hazards as opposed to artificial ones. The fairways were designed to magnify the effects of slicing the ball. Bunkers were few, but strategically placed.

As with the St. Andrews links, the fairways were defined not by trees but by mowed grassy areas. The holes were designed with straight fairways, with no doglegs and the green directly visible from the tee.

"What I'd like to accomplish is having more people get an opportunity to come and play it," Olson said. "I think it's a hidden jewel."

Olson, who lives with his wife Susan, has two children. Charlie Jr. is a junior at Bowling Green State University and Hannah is a freshman at the University of Colorado.

Bulldogs win at Alba

The Traverse City Bulldogs Athletic Association's girls basketball team will be busy over the next week as it hosts its first home game of the season.

The Bulldogs are 2-1 after traveling to Alba Monday and winning 51-24