

## GOLF

# The new, improved Oak Tree

▪ Newly redesigned course wants back in the majors mix.

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Oak Tree National wants to be a major player in the golf world again.

A new ownership group led by Oklahoma City businessman Ed Evans invested more than \$6 million in renovations to the Edmond course. The changes were unveiled during a re-opening Wednesday and Evans said during a telephone interview that a goal is to complement Southern Hills as a course that can bring major championships to Oklahoma.

Southern Hills, site of four PGA Championships and two U.S. Opens, will host the 2009 U.S. Amateur in August.

Oak Tree, built in 1976, hosted the 1984 U.S. Amateur, the 1988 PGA and the 2006 Senior PGA.

The 1988 PGA broke attendance records and Oak Tree was awarded the 1994 PGA. However, financial difficulties at Landmark Land — the company that built Oak Tree — resulted in the '94 PGA being played at Southern Hills.

Evans purchased Oak Tree from Don Mathis in 2008 with the intent of sprucing up the club for new glory years.

"Tulsa and Southern Hills, those guys have done a great job of attracting major tournaments. We would certainly like to be back in that mix," Evans said.

"But I think, more importantly than that, what myself and others in the ownership group felt was we have a tremendous asset that was sitting up in Edmond, Oklahoma, that was designed by one



A large bunker guards the ninth green, with the Oak Tree National clubhouse in the background, in Edmond on Wednesday. The golf course, which hosted the 1988 PGA Championship and the 2006 Senior PGA Championship, has reopened with a new name. ASSOCIATED PRESS

of the greatest golf architects (Pete Dye) of all time and it was getting a little run down and needed renovations."

Evans said Mathis did a phenomenal job with the course.

"But he made the decision that he would rather sell it than put the time and effort in to kind of bring it back and do other things with it," Evans said.

"He approached me about acquiring the course. He and I had a great conversation about it on the front end of the transaction where I sort of outlined exactly what I felt like we would do. It was probably going to upset some of the existing members, but we wanted to redo the course and really make it a premier golf experience in Oklahoma and really in the region."

Post-facelift, Oak Tree is North America's third-most difficult course, according to USGA ratings.

"A lot of people have gone out and played it and come back and said it's two strokes harder," Evans said.

But he said an equal number of people say the course is playing easier because you are hitting off better surfaces. Tee boxes were laser-leveled and fairways were sodded with U-3 Bermuda grass, the same type of grass used in a re-turfing of Southern Hills.

Evans said he has had conversations with the PGA of America, the PGA Tour and the USGA about the possibility of bringing tournaments to Oak Tree.

"I will tell you in order for us to sign up for an annual event,

it's going to have to be a pretty significant event," he said.

"It would have to be something that is relevant within the FedEx Cup events and something that is going to get us the A-players that are coming out to play.

"To have sort of a run of the mill tour stop every year, in my opinion, is pretty tough on the membership of the club, most importantly, and also on the golf course. We lose the golf course for a couple of months during that time and we are a members club. It is there for the membership to enjoy. So if it's the right event, yes, we would certainly be interested in that, but it is going to have to be the right event."

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