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I'M JOINING THE SUMMIT CLUB

BY Michael Kaplan



I guess it's fair to say I'm an avid golfer. I didn't take it up until my 20s - I mostly skied, biked and played hockey and tennis as a teenager, and played on the Tennis and Squash Teams at Vassar. But I got pretty crazed about golf as soon as I started, and I probably averaged three dozen rounds a year until I was about 50. I even bought a condo (developed by Jack Nicklaus) at St. Andrews in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, joined the adjacent St. Andrews Golf Club, and spent much of my 30s enjoying the country club lifestyle... being able to get out of the house without waking anyone early in the morning and *walking* down to the tee, always having a convenient place for lunch or dinner or to entertain, and always having friends around. And for three of the years I lived at St. Andrews, I had a business called Par-Tee Bag, that started by giving out gift bags at private golf clubs to members and guests at club and charitable outings, and that gave me the chance to play about 90! rounds a year with entree at just about every great course in the region.

But with golf, I've always enjoyed the camaraderie more than the competition. And while I got down to a 9 handicap once, when I was playing an awful lot (and that cost me, betting with my buddies), I really seem forever doomed to shoot in the high-80s. I never got into how other guys at the Club, no better than I, got focused on every Club tournament like it was the U.S. Open. That old saw about 'shooting my age' is more a question of how long I live than my golfing ability, and I understand my only chance to make the Tour is as a spectator.

Sometime around my 50th, I realized that I *liked* to play golf, but really *loved* the walk, the scenery, and the company. I was somewhat burnt out on golf for golf's sake, and just crossing courses off the list of those I'd yet to play. I dropped my membership at St. Andrews and started to play only a handful of rounds a year. The fun was mostly about who I was playing with - and because most of my friends who golf belong to private clubs, and play almost exclusively at those clubs, there's really not that much of an opportunity (and particularly without a membership at a private club and the ability to take my turn as host) to just arrange a game on a given Saturday, no less fight the queue at the local public courses to play any more regularly.



But with covid in full ‘swing’ last Summer, I decided to give golf another earnest chance. See if I could come out of golf retirement, and give my then 26 and 22 year old kids a chance to learn how to play at the same time. I joined Rockrimmon for the Summer, managed to get out for some great rounds, and got to spend quality time with my kids. It’s a fabulous golf course, kept immaculately, and the food is superior; but the overall experience just wasn’t quite satisfying for me. Too much hassle with tee times. Too many rules and formalities. I’m looking for an adult summer camp, and what’s out there in this area are a whole lot of pretty traditional country clubs.

So my golf plans were in limbo...when my old friend David Hirsch called me. David grew up in Rockland County and graduated from Cornell in ‘84, worked in his family door business, is now working as an investment banker with a focus on equity real estate funding, and is active politically and philanthropically. He and his wife, Claudia Newman Hirsch, who grew up in Greenwich and graduated from Dennison in ‘82, took a direct marketing company public in the ‘90s, and is a realtor with Coldwell Banker, are a local power couple. I did some investment banking together with David about 20 years ago, including providing the equity

financing for The Waterfront at Port Chester big-box retail development. And I always listen to what he has to say; in part because he’s smart and reads a lot and knows everyone and everything that’s going on, and; in part because he was *there* at the eureka moment in 2006, when I was sitting out on the 350 acres of what was then the Monticello Airport, and first conceived of developing what is now known as the Monticello Motor Club - the premier private grand-prix style auto race track in the United States - and, if truth be told, David may even have been the one to have brought up the idea that America was crazy about everything ‘wheels’.



Hirsch was excited to let me know that our mutual friend, Jeffrey Mendell, who had years ago acquired what was the Canyon Club, which became Brynwood, in Armonk, had finally received condominium approvals for the 73 luxury residences he and his partners planned to build on the site; was having Rees Jones redesign the golf course, and; would be opening as The Summit Club for play in April! David and Claudia had been long-time members at Burning Tree in Greenwich. Sounding a lot like when friends used to call to come out and play, David declared, “Summit is exactly what I’ve been looking for. A golf club that’s a place to go have fun and hang out with friends in a relaxed environment. It’s gonna be really cool!” Hirsch continued, “And my partner, Eric Nova, is joining as well. He’s 42, grew up in Ardsley, went undergrad and for a masters in banking at Mercy...and he’s 6’4”

and drives the ball 350 yards! He and his wife and three young kids moved up to Greenwich from New York City in 2016 - he’s still on the other end of the kid thing from you and me. Summit is perfect for him, too. Great place for him to meet everyone, terrific Club to use as a host, he’ll be able to get out on the course without it killing the whole day, and he wants to be able to play with his kids on a Sunday afternoon without worrying about what they’re wearing or whether their mere existence is upsetting the natural order of the universe!”

Before I could call Mendell, I had a scheduled call with David Singer, who is also friends with Mendell, to interview Singer for the feature on him and his company, Robison Oil, also included in this issue of B&NC MAG. Like me, Singer has now hit the 60s (age not golf) and, with three kids in their 20s,

David and his wife, Holly, are starting to adjust to being empty nesters. I mentioned to Singer the news about The Summit Club that Hirsch had just conveyed in my prior call, and Singer responded, “Yah, I’m all over it. You know I’m planning on selling our house. It’s just more than we need. We’re calling it an ‘upscale downsize’ because we saw that article in your magazine. And Summit looks like it might be just the right answer. I’ve never really been into the whole country club thing, but Summit seems like it’s going to be pretty mellow and cool. I’m going to join, and I told Mendell I’d be willing to give him whatever kind of pre-construction deposit they want. The whole set-up looks fantastic. It’s a great location. The whole idea of living at your Club and having great golf, first class food & beverage, live music and many other amenities, right out your door - sounds really fun.”



I called Mendell...and left a message for him to call me back. And in the 15 minutes before he did, I got a call from my friend and former law partner, Mark Weingarten. Mark is also a friend of Mendell's, and his powerhouse Westchester law firm, DelBello Donnellan Weingarten Wise & Wiederkehr, is the firm representing Summit in securing their approvals. Mark grew up in Yonkers, went to Cornell '81 and Boston University Law School '84, is influential in Westchester and New York State business and politics, has long served on the Board of Directors of the March of Dimes, and now serves as a gubernatorial appointee on the Board of Trustees at his alma mater Cornell. I was one of the folks who turned Mark on to golf, but to say he's become passionate about it is an understatement. He's a member at Metropolis, and at Innisbrook in Tampa, where he and his wife Diane have a second home, and even sponsors a PGA player trying to make it on Tour. I relayed the coincidences I was experiencing about Summit to Mark and he told me, "Yup. Gonna get built! Mendell's

been on it a long time, but he persevered. The course is going to be terrific! He's got Rees Jones doing great things out there. The site is pretty demanding with dramatic elevation changes and a very challenging layout. I'm not dropping Metropolis, but I'm definitely joining Summit too!" Mark had been talking my ear off for a couple of years now about Silo Ridge up in Millbrook, a first-class golf course and real estate development by Discovery Land. He said, "That's what Summit is going to be - only right here in Armonk, and only 35 miles from Manhattan. A great golf course, a *community* of *owners*, a who's-who golf membership that are just out there to relax and have fun, and an entirely elevated atmosphere. Mendell likes to call it 'casual chic'. You should join! In fact, you should move there! Like when you lived at St. Andrews, only these 73 condos will be much nicer. They all overlook the golf course and have 20-mile views to the south and west. They're going to be nice enough for even you, Kaplan."

I've known Mendell - as a friend, and as a successful real estate investor and developer - since the 1990s. I've watched him pull off one great project after another, including the Greenwich Shore Apartments, and the recent historic renovation of a 1928 art deco industrial/office building at 330 Railroad Avenue in Greenwich. He's also a scary good golfer. Doesn't bother you with it, but then you notice the birdie he just rolled in follows a long string of pars, and that he's only one or two over with only a few holes left to play. And I have a great memory of hosting Mendell for golf as a part of a large group up at Grossingers and The Concord. We played eighteen holes at The Big G, in foursomes...then played the second round at The Green Monster in a sixteen-some, with bets flying on every swing, some libations, a lot of trash talk, and about the most fun I've ever had on a golf course! I'm looking for that kind of hilarity and spirit at Summit.

First words out of my mouth with Mendell were "I'm in!" I told him I wanted to join, and I went through the coincidence of calls I'd just gone through with Hirsch, Singer and Weingarten. I congratulated him on having persevered and getting to this point in the development. I explained that, like Singer, I'm interested in a residence. And I asked if he was really going to have the course open in April...

"Thank you, and yes as long as Mother Nature cooperates, we're on schedule for golf in April! It's full swing ahead! I'm not going to dish on who else is joining, but you won't be disappointed! I am fortunate to have partners with decades of experience in owning and managing private clubs and our first initiative is renovating the golf course with a national golf contractor under the watchful eye of Rees Jones. We've re-designed and reshaped several holes, are creating 3 challenging new holes, rebuilding all the bunkers, adding new tee boxes, taking down over 300 trees, and adding lots of signature Rees Jones design features. Rees has really accentuated the natural terrain and landscape to give new life to this 60-year-old challenging and beautiful golf course. But equally as important as the golf course, Michael", Mendell was pleased to tell me, "...is the way we're going to run this Club. This is not going to be 'your father's country club'! Our objective is to make the Club an extension of your relaxed and luxurious Westchester lifestyle! We're going to serve great food, have music playing (I'm partial to classic rock and our new cart fleet will have built-in bluetooth speakers, GPS screens and coolers on board) and when you're finished with golf you can gather round the firepits with friends and enjoy cocktails and cigars, if that's your thing, as the sun sets. The next phase of the development includes an Amenities Pavilion which will feature an infinity edge pool, hot tubs, fitness and yoga center, bar and grille, a spa, and casual indoor/outdoor dining. We want every Member to feel like they're on vacation without leaving home!"



Turning to the Summit Residences, Mendell continued, "I have a great team on this project. My residential partners are a family development firm based in Miami that has built many successful projects over the past 60 years. And Richie..." referring to another mutual friend and golfing buddy, Richard Granoff, principal of the award-winning Greenwich-based Granoff Architects "is designing the condos. They've created truly spectacular modern residences in three-story buildings with underground parking and elevators that open directly into the units. The residences will be generous 2 to 4 bedroom designs with 10 foot ceilings, lots of glass, and large outdoor terraces. Every aspect of the project will be top quality, with high-end appliances and custom finishes, gas fireplaces inside and out, and every residence will have amazing long-distance views of

dramatic sunsets over the golf course. We expect to start construction later this year." And Mendell added, "You know Richie is a member at Tamarack, but he's joining Summit as well."

I told Mendell I'm interested in getting on his list for a Residence, told him I was looking forward to getting out on the course with him, arranged to speak with Leslie Dixon, Director of Membership Sales... and I've signed up for a Family Membership to play this Summer - whenever we feel like it - at Summit. I can't wait to get out on the new course. Finally...and even if covid still requires distancing this summer... there's a local golf club meant to have fun - first and foremost! A place to socialize and entertain, sans the bs. Most of all, I'm looking forward to playing with my friends, and excited to see who we might meet out on the course this summer.

