

BUSINESS PROFILE

Old Corkscrew's Mark Iwinski has made a career out of golf

BY MARY BRIGGS
Special to Florida Weekly

Golf has been Mark Iwinski's life for the better part of 30 years — even longer if you count his formative years as a youngster who discovered the game overseas.

"I love being around golf because of the people and the club environment," said Iwinski, 52, the general manager and director of golf at Old Corkscrew Golf Club in Estero. "It's such a wholesome environment."

A self-described "country club brat" whose father worked for a corporation overseas, Iwinski, a Buffalo, N.Y. native, was weaned on courses in the Philippines and Ecuador. "I fell in love with the game."

That adulation led to a decision to pursue golf professionally. As a range attendant at a South Florida club, he began honing his skills, asking for pointers from members, including Bruce Fleisher, a PGA Champions Tour member. "He was good and so helpful," said Iwinski.

"My goal was to get good enough to play for a living," he continued. "But then the most fortunate thing happened to me. I found out quickly I don't have Tiger's talent. I played at the local level and quasi-pro tournaments, and decided it wasn't my bag, so I moved on."

In this case, moving on meant a different approach to golf.

Iwinski's foray into the management

side started at clubs in the Miami and Fort Lauderdale areas, before he made the move to Southwest Florida in 1989. He worked at Pelican's Nest and Miro-mar Lakes before being tapped for the Old Corkscrew job, one he said he got through a long-time friendship with one of the owners. "He'd never played golf before, and I introduced him to it," Iwinski said. "He's never forgiven me for it."

At Old Corkscrew Iwinski is dedicated to enhancing the playing experience for the private club's members.

The club, located seven miles east of Interstate 75 on Corkscrew Road, is a downsized version of the grand Florida country club. There are no homes, and never will be, and its 275 acres "is natural Florida," said Iwinski. "The land really is pristine, with saw palmettos, pine trees, cypress heads and natural grasses. Jack Nicklaus did a great job blending the land forms into the natural surrounding."

Old Corkscrew has a pro shop and a small restaurant that serves lunch and other fare worthy of the 19th hole. "We're not a full-fledged country club with dining in the evening," said Iwinski. "We have a nice area for golfers to come sit down have a sandwich or salad. We're known for our lobster salad and our pressed Cuban sandwich."

Iwinski can take the credit for that. He's been with the club nearly four years. He hired the Cuban chef and other club personnel and spent the first 18 months on the job working closely



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Mark Iwinski

with the Nicklaus design team. Iwinski and his 10-year-old son even caddied for the Golden Bear during the inaugural round in early 2007.

Old Corkscrew caters to the golf connoisseur, the person who loves the game but just doesn't have a lot of time

for it. Many of its 150 members are seasonal residents or frequent visitors. "Our membership is set up for intermittent play," Iwinski said. "It's a place for the golfer who plays 40 to 50 rounds a year."

Memberships, available in one-, five- and 10-year increments, range from \$3,000 to \$15,000, and daily fees are discounted according to the length of the membership.

"We're different from most clubs in Southwest Florida," he said. "There are no annual dues, fees or other charges, and it lets golfers stay in control of their golf budget. It's great for the guy or gal who's still working and loves to drive in the country, get away from it all for four or five hours and then back into the rat race."

Iwinski doesn't play as much these days. When he does, it's usually with members or his family — wife Julie, who has a "good swing," and his son, who discovered the game on his own. "It's been great watching his swing develop," said the proud father of four.

Iwinski counts Nicklaus among his role models. "He always remembers my name," he said. "I've always admired him because of his devotion to his family and kids. I come from a large family and family's important to me."

"My life is all about my family right now," said Iwinski, who credits golf for shaping his life. "I really couldn't have scripted my life better with the experiences I've had." ■

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