

## **Area golf courses treading water**

By Sam Feeley

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The closure of golf courses may have been brief — just 11 days between the April 9 state order shutting down non-essential businesses and the order allowing golf courses to open with restrictions — but damage has still been done, greater Cortland area course owners said.

In fact, damage may continue, because the restrictions will mean a number of facilities many courses make money from remain closed.

“It’s hard to tell” the exact effect, said Jensen Pilkington of Maple Hill Golf Club in Marathon. “But we definitely have had to turn away quite a bit of business.”

The state updated its ruling late last week, saying courses can open, but:

Clubhouses, pro shops and bathrooms must remain closed.

The only workers allowed at courses will be involved with security and maintenance duties. They cannot collect greens fees, which must be paid online or perhaps via a drop box.

Motorized carts will not be used and flags cannot be removed from the holes during play.

Golfers must remain at least 6 feet apart and refrain from gathering in groups.

“We lost a good amount of this revenue due to the virus and having to close our doors to the public,” said Deron Snyder of Fillmore Golf Club in Locke. “(We) are not just a golf course. We have a bar and restaurant as well as an event facility.”

Snyder says Fillmore has felt the financial sting in multiple ways.

“(We) have lost plenty of revenue as well as league revenue, now tournaments, high school matches, driving range, bar and restaurant, and events,” he said. “We have also lost green fee and golf cart revenue due to the fact we are not allowed to rent golf carts. We are a mountain golf course and it is tough to walk for some people.”

“We do not schedule an opening date, we let the weather decide that,” Pilkington said, and snow squalls have punctuated the past several days. But the coronavirus pandemic and shut down affect indoor golf simulators and restaurants, too.

“A lot of our golfers utilize our indoor golf facility in the winter to stay ready,” he added.

Snyder said Fillmore opened earlier than usual this year because of mild weather in March, before the shutdown went into effect.

“Being a mild winter and having temps in the 50s in March, we actually opened earlier on March 26,” he said.

While Maple Hill’s staff has been unable to work, Pilkington said they have remained healthy and are simply “waiting to start work for the season.”

But golf courses are businesses, and Snyder said he has 12 employees to worry about, and not just their health.

“The toughest part, as every other person and business in the world is going through, is the unknown fallout that it is going to have on us and the economy,” Snyder said. “From a golf course perspective, we plan and forecast a budget for the upcoming year, pray for good weather, and hope everything else falls into place. We have good years and bad years but it seems to even out in the long run, but we are in uncharted territory now.”

“Hopefully, we can open up and be fully operational soon,” he added. “We will do what we have to do to survive.”

Ironically, Snyder said, golf “is actually a great way to practice social distancing. The week we were allowed to rent golf carts, all of our golfers were very respectful and followed all the guidelines. At least we had some foot traffic and people were supporting the club the best they could.”