

ILION FISH & GAME CLUB, INC.

SPORTING CLAYS 1991 – 2016

25 YEARS OF CLAYS IN THE WOODS

Sporting Clays – A History

Sporting Clays originated at a number of British Shooting Schools in the early 1900's with the first British Open, England's premier Sporting Clays competition, being held in 1925. Sporting Clays continued as a mainly British sport until it was introduced to American shooters by Bob Brister through an article in Field & Stream Magazine in July 1980.

In the United States, the first Sporting Clays shoot was held at Remington's Lordship Gun Club in Connecticut in September 1980. Even with the corporate connection of the Remington Plant in Ilion, NY and the Lordship Gun Club in Connecticut, it took almost 10 years for Sporting Clays to migrate to Upstate, New York.

Sporting Clays New York – A Beginning

As news of a new shotgun shooting sport propagated through the Skeet and Trap shooting communities in the late 1980's, interest also began to grow in the local shooting community due to televised Sporting Clays events being broadcast by the Wide World of Sports.

In response to the growing interest in Sporting Clays, one of the first courses to offer this "traditionally" British shooting sport was the Morris Creek Club in New Berlin, New York. The Morris Creek Club offered Sporting Clays in the true British fashion which offered the Hunters Walk, Poison Birds, Springing Teals, Battues, Minis, Midis, Rabbits, and a Three Flush - all unknown to the typical Skeet and Trap shooter with the additional challenge that the targets were shot using the "down gun" starting position and interchangeable choke tubes were key.

The Morris Creek Club offered a "true" British Shooting Club experience in which a starting time had to be reserved in advance and each round cost \$25 per 50 targets with tipping of your trapper/guide highly encouraged. With the average cost of a round of Skeet or Trap being \$2.00 for 25 targets in the 1980-1990 timeframe, shooting Sporting Clays was a luxury that most Skeet and Trap shooters from the area could not afford to do more than a handful of times per year. Even with this limitation due to the expense, the fun of Sporting Clays lured shooters back time and time again and the parking lot at the Morris Creek Club was always full.

Ilion Fish & Game Members – Give Sporting Clays a Try

In 1990 the news of the Morris Creek Club reached the Ilion Fish & Game Club and a group of 10 members made the trek to New Berlin to give Sporting Clays a try. The discussion during the car ride ranged from "do we need choke tubes" to "how do you shoot down gun" and "what is a poison bird". The Morris Creek trapper/guide was very generous in explaining everything and most of the Club Members found that shooting their Remington 3200's, 1100's, and 870's with fixed choke tubes worked pretty well. Everyone was a bit concerned that they just paid \$25 to shoot at 50 targets and barely hit half of them, but the challenge and the fun of Sporting Clays was apparent. Through the remainder of 1990 many Club Members returned to Morris Creek several times to give Sporting Clays another try or to introduce other Club Members to this new shotgun shooting sport.

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Ilion Fish & Game Members – Bringing Sporting Clays Home

During the late 1980's the Ilion Fish & Game Club generated revenue to sustain operations through the re-selling of used shotgun shells to Skeet and Trap Shooters that re-loaded. The Club benefitted from the generosity of several retired members that would spend their days sorting and boxing shotgun shells for re-sale. By 1990 the price per shell for "once-fired" hulls decreased by almost 50% and the revenue generated by the club was decreasing and Club savings were starting to be used to support the funding of Club projects.

After one of the trips to Morris Creek, several of the Club Members discussed the popularity of Sporting Clays and the potential revenue generation due to the high round pricing that Sporting Clays was able to demand. It was proposed that with 212 acres of land at the Ilion Fish & Game Club, it may be possible to build a Sporting Clays course and offset the decreased revenue from the reduced hull pricing. The idea of adding Sporting Clays to the Ilion Fish & Game Club was determined to be possible but might not be a good match because the Club was very well known as a Premier Skeet shooting facility.

Through the Fall and Winter of 1990, several Club Members continued to discuss the possibility of bringing Sporting Clays to the Ilion Fish & Game Club. The idea was eventually brought to the Board of Directors in late 1990 for consideration as a project to increase Club revenue.

Ilion Fish & Game Governing Body – The Sporting Clays Committee

In early 1991 a Sporting Clays financial plan and example course layout was presented to the Governing Body and the Board of Directors for consideration. The Governing Body established a Sporting Clays Committee to evaluate the feasibility of the project and evaluate the location for the course if the project was approved.

Several Club Members evaluated the Club Property to identify the perfect location for the course that would offer the easiest build and the least interference with current Club operations. Designs to put the course on the Rifle Range, off of Skeet Field #2, off of Skeet Field #5, around the Skeet and Trap Fields (the current Winter course), and ones that utilized the woods below the former pistol range were all considered.

After careful consideration of each design, the Sporting Clays Committee selected the course design submitted by Club Member Mike Fifield that included an example 10-station layout that was designed with the assistance of local architect, Ron Stafford. The example course layout utilized the area surrounding the snowmobile trail and former roadway in the woods below the former pistol range.

Governing Body

Tom Wastowicz, President
Andy Bocchino, Vice President
Bill Wazaliz, Secretary
Ed Freedman, Treasurer

Board of Directors

Ron Bunce Carl Manino
Dale Lewis Bill Fifield
Grant Bouck Scott Fifield
Ron Robellard Tom Wastowicz
Joe Wazaliz

Sporting Clays Committee

Grant Bouck Ron Bunce
Dale Lewis Ed Freedman
Bill Fifield Scott Fifield
Tom Wastowicz

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Ilion Fish & Game Members – Building the Course

The Ilion Fish & Game Club Governing Body and Sporting Clays Committee prepared a plan to build the course in the Spring and Summer of 1991 utilizing volunteer help and assigned the management of the project to Board of Director Member Bill Fifield.

Under Bill's direction, the volunteers assembled early every Saturday morning from late Spring through the Summer of 1991 to clear trees and build roads, paths, trap stands, shooting cages, gun racks, fences and walls. The innovative volunteer team utilized relationships with local companies such as the former Engert's Lumber to obtain building supplies for reduced prices to keep the project on budget.

The determination, hard work, and exceptional skills of the volunteers resulted in the building of a Premier Sporting Clays course that is on par with the quality of operation and presentation of the Club's Premier Skeet and Trap facilities.

Build Team Volunteers

Grant Bouck	Joe Ingraham
Ron Bunce	Tim Johnson
Bill Fifield	Dale Lewis
Scott Fifield	Neil Schuyler
Mike Fifield	Don Reynolds
Kevin Herringshaw	Tom Wastowicz

Remington Arms Helps Out – Getting Trapped

One of the biggest obstacles for the Club to overcome was the relatively high price of manual Sporting Clays traps. The Morris Creek Club utilized traps that were imported from England and cost between \$1500 and \$2500 per trap. The Club would need a minimum of 11 traps to support a 10-Station course which was estimated to cost between \$15,000 and \$20,000. Fortunately, the Club and Remington Arms had a handful of Remington "Blue Rock" hand traps on site that had the potential to be Sporting Clays traps if modified.

The initial build-out of the course utilized the unmodified "Blue Rock" traps to test throwing targets at each station, but it did not provide a true evaluation as true pairs and rabbits could not be thrown. With several of the Sporting Clays Committee members being employed at Remington Arms, the idea to modify these traps into true Sporting Clays traps was presented to the Company. Remington Arms generously provided Bill Fifield (a Toolmaker) with an R&D budget to make parts and modify the traps to throw rabbits, battues, true pairs, and the three-flush. Bill also shared some of his inventive designs for target holders and modified paddles to throw battues and smaller targets with several of the other courses in the area. Remington Arms also provided the additional traps needed to complete the course at a fraction of the cost of the imported Sporting Clays traps.

Ilion Fish & Game Sporting Clays – The Legacy

With the course built and the needed traps obtained, the course officially opened for business in late Summer of 1991. The course was met with excellent reviews and quickly began to outpace the initial estimates for number of rounds per week and revenue generation – a trend that continues to this day.

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The course quickly began to gain competition in the local area with other quality courses such as:

- Trenton Fish & Game Club led by Bill Swartz
- Richfield Springs Fish & Game led by Tom Gilroy and Niles Bennett
- Clinton Fish & Game Club led by Joe Cifarelli

Over the past 25 years, the quality and dedication of the Ilion Fish & Game Club volunteers and Sporting Clays Committee Members has shown through and the only other original area course still in continuous operation today is the Clinton Fish & Game Club.

The Ilion Fish & Game Club Sporting Clays Course has been shot by a number of notable people including:

- General Norman Schwarzkopf, Jr.
- A number of the West Point Cadets
- Former NASCAR Team Owners Sam and Ed Rensi
- Ron Shearer – with highlights of the course being shown on his TV Show The Great American Outdoors

Ilion Fish & Game Sporting Clays - The First 25 Years and Beyond

The brief history presented above was provided to highlight where it all started and provide the names of the people involved to the best of our recollection. Obviously, with the number of years that have passed and our fading memories (we did spend a lot of time in the Clubhouse bar every Saturday back then) we know we have omitted some names. This omission was not intentional and we encourage you to speak out and have your name added to the history.

Getting the course started was a great accomplishment that took the foresight and hard work of many, many volunteers to complete, but it was just the beginning. An equally impressive accomplishment and arguably maybe even a greater challenge was keeping the course going continuously (even through the Winter months) for the past 25 years. The names of the volunteers that it has taken to achieve this is a long list and too numerous to document at this time. Each of you that has volunteered to “run the show”, setup the course, work as a trapper, cook breakfast, run the bar, clean the Clubhouse, load the houses, build fences, drive the truck, repair the road, and the many other tasks that it takes should take great pride in what you have accomplished...as a group of volunteers it is truly remarkable!

To all the Volunteers, Trappers, Club Members, and Guests that consider the Ilion Fish & Game Club Sporting Clays their Home Course – we Thank You for a Wonderful 25 Years and look forward to the next 25...with your help.

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