

Early History of
Riverside Golf Course, Chehalis, WA
Established 1927, Course Opened 5-21-1927, Second Nine Opened 1971
Course Architect: 1927 – Jacque de Forest Griffin; 1971 – Glen Proctor & Roy Goss

Located one mile northwest of Chehalis, Washington, the Riverside Golf Course opened for play on May 21, 1927. Riding the crest of golf's popularity during the "Roaring Twenties", Paul Donahoe, a farmer and a businessman, turned parts of his 600-acre farm into a golf course and much more.

Envisioning a multi-purpose recreational resort, Donahoe laid out an airfield, a gun club range, and a baseball field, all in addition to the golf course.



Sister plane to Charles Lindbergh's *Spirit of St. Louis* at Donahoe Airfield, adjacent to Riverside GC, in 1927

Prior to 1927, two golf clubs had been operating in the Chehalis-Centralia area. Centralia Golf and Country Club (est. 1915) and Chehalis Golf and Country Club (est. 1922), both now defunct, were small private clubs which served the golfing populace, including Donahoe who was a member at the latter club.

Golf was booming across America during the "Roaring Twenties." Donahoe, a farmer turned businessman, sensed an opportunity to tap into the growing market; he embarked on a venture to build a public golf course. As described in the local newspaper, "Mr. Donahoe will conduct the resort as a public place as a private investment. He believes that there are many people in both Chehalis and Centralia who will patronize it and who will learn to play golf with a fine

course so near at hand which can be so easily reached from the Twin Cities.” (*The Chehalis Bee Nugget* 11-5-1926)



Paul Donahoe (1884 – 1951)

Paul Donahoe was born in Chehalis in 1884 and grew up on his parent’s farm. He was an avid sportsman and had numerous interests including aviation, golf, hunting, and fishing.

He was elected to the Washington State House of Representatives in 1934. He later served as a State Game Commissioner.

He introduced golf to his wife, Bryna, and to their children who were all regular players at the Riverside Golf Course. A Chehalis resident all his life, he died in that city in 1951 two days after his 67th birthday.



On course home of Paul Donahoe (photo courtesy of Riverside Golf Course)

In 1926, Donahoe hired a local architect Jacque “Jack” deForest Griffin to lay out the course. This was unusual in that while Griffin was a well-respected building architect who designed many of the buildings in Chehalis, he had no known experience in designing golf courses.

Griffin drew up a plan for a nine-hole course and by spring of 1927, the course along the Chehalis River was ready for play.



Jacque de F. Griffin
1892 – 1951

On a rainy day on May 21, 1927, the Riverside Golf Course, at times known as the Donahoe Golf Course, officially opened for play. Curiously, or perhaps shrewdly, Donahoe timed the opening of the course with the opening of the Donahoe Airfield, later named the Chehalis-Centralia Airport. Reportedly 4,000 attended the opening, although likely only a few were there for golf.

<p>A crowd of people variously estimated at 4000 or more gathered Saturday afternoon at the Paul Donahoe aviation field on the river road between Chehalis and Centralia to see the dedication of Chehalis' municipal aviation landing field, and Paul Donahoe's new nine-hole golf course. The affair was a decided success from every angle.</p> <p>There were twelve planes on the field, including several army planes in charge of Lieutenant Koenig, manager of the army air forces at Sand Point port; and Lieutenant Oakley G. Kelly, pilot, and Captain E. P. Murdock, flight sergeant, of Vancouver, Wash., and several other privately owned planes.</p>	<p>with a well-attended ball in the public auditorium in honor of the visitors, under the auspices of the Active club, proceeds from which were given to the Red Cross for relief work in the middle west.</p> <p>The oil and gasoline used by the planes incident to the dedication was furnished free by the Standard Oil Company. F. D. Brannon of Seattle, formerly of this city, was an important factor in arranging details of the program here.</p> <p>Local golfers used the new golf course, and unite in saying it will be one of the finest golf courses in this part of the country. Unfortunately the wet weather made the playing Saturday rather slow.</p> <p>Visiting airmen included the fol-</p>
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Chehalis Bee-Nugget 5-27-1927

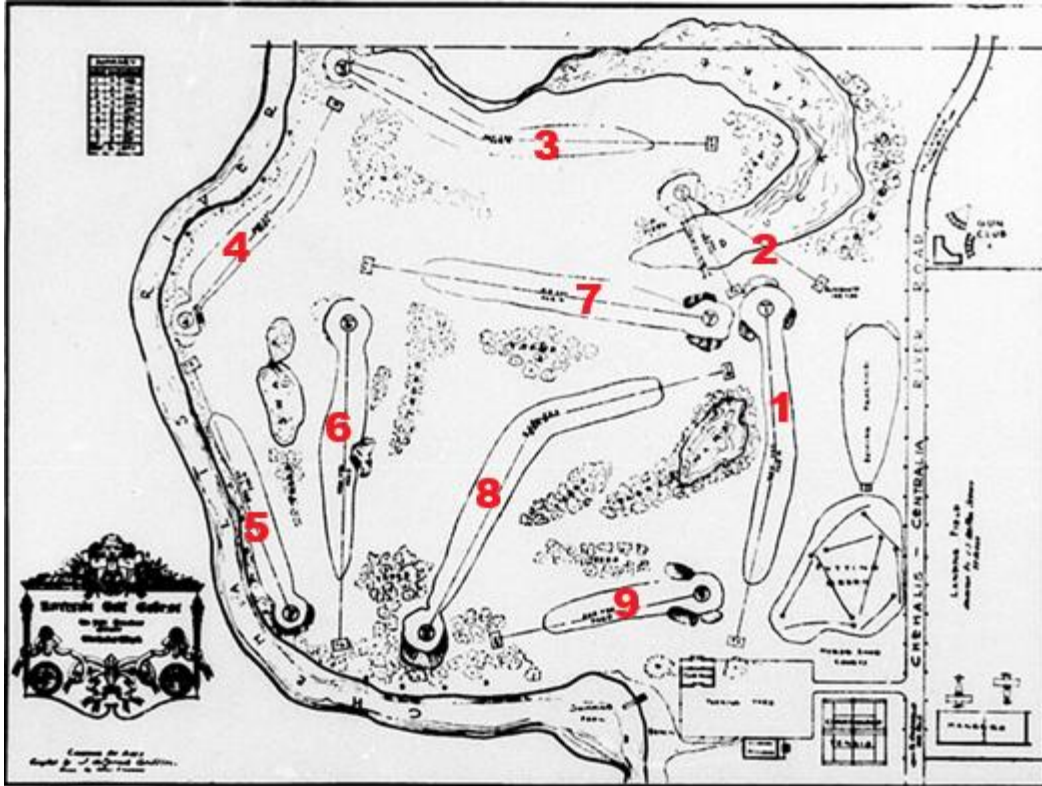
The nine-hole course measured 3090 yards , par 36 with several holes running adjacent to the Chehalis River. It sat on what is now the back nine.

Hole	Yards	Par
1	400	4
2	100	3
3	360	4
4	340	4
5	395	4
6	450	5
7	315	4
8	525	5
9	205	3
Total	3090	36

Riverside GC – 1927 yardages

While substantial changes were made to the course in 1971 when the second nine holes were constructed, the basic routing of many of the original holes remain to this day.

As shown in the two layouts in the following page, the first from a plan developed by Griffin in 1926, and the second from today, a hundred years later, holes 10 – 14, and 17 approximate the routing of holes 1 – 5, and 7 shown in the 1926 plan.



Riverside Golf Course – 1926 Plan by architect J. de F. Griffin (airfield shown in lower right)



Riverside Golf Course (back nine plus holes #1 & #2) – 2026

Donahoe took over the operation of the golf course for the next two decades. The farm's granary was converted into a clubhouse in the early days of the club.

Most of the golfers who played at Riverside in the early years were novices. With no dedicated golf professional on site at that time, Donahoe arranged to have Nelson Upton, the golf professional at the nearby Chehalis Golf and Country Club, to give lessons to Riverside players.

Top players in the early days of the club were Paul Donahoe's son and daughter: Jim Donahoe and Jane Donahoe. Both won multiple club championships at their home course, as well as the Lewis County Amateur Championship titles in their respective divisions. Inaugurated at the Chehalis Golf and Country Club in 1934, the Lewis County Amateur is a long-running championship which has drawn strong fields over the years and is a fixture at the Riverside Golf Course to this day.



Jane Donahoe (1915 – 1981)



Jane Donahoe Hole-in-One certificate - 1932

Miss Jane Donahoe made a hole-in-one on the 100 yard second hole at the Donahoe Golf Course. The 80 yard span of water is evidently not much of a mental hazard for this young golf expert.

Chehalis Bee-Nugget – 7-8-1932

Inter-club (so-called “home and away”) matches was a popular form of competition in the 1920s and 1930s. While Chehalis and Centralia clubs arranged matches with other private clubs in the region, Riverside's matches were against their public counterparts including Mountain View GC in Lacey, Glengarry GC in Olympia, and Oakridge GC in Elma.

Two years following the opening of the golf course, the stock market crashed on October 24, 1929. While the effects of the crash were not immediate, golf clubs all across the country struggled to survive during the Great Depression. Riverside Golf Course was no exception.

On the surface, it may seem that a public course in a small population center competing against two nearby private clubs, the Centralia and Chehalis country clubs, combined with the Great Depression, would have doomed Riverside. However, in reality, the opposite was true. What proved to be the death knell for private clubs turned into a lifeline for many of the public courses. During the 1930s, a large number of members at private club were defaulting on their dues, or simply quitting outright. These were golfers who still wanted to play the game, but could no longer afford the monthly dues and assessments. They could play on public courses of their choosing more cheaply. That is not to say public courses prospered during the depression years, but that they survived due partly to this dynamic.



Mary had a little lamb,
whose fleece was white
as snow,
And everywhere that Mary
went, that lamb was
sure to go.
He followed her to school
one day, which was
against the rule;
It made the children laugh
and play, to see the
lamb at school.



The joys of golf are
varied and many
You get double value for
each penny,
This investment in health
combines pleasure, too,

Donahoe Golf Course
Chehalis (Opposite Airport)
Phone 796-W

Ad for Donahoe (Riverside) Golf Course (Chehalis Bee-Nugget 11-8-1929)



Riverside Golf Course with airport (center left) - c.1940 (courtesy of Lewis County Historical Museum)

In 1970, the new owners, golf professional Joe Mihelich and businessman Carl DeGross, hired golf architects Glen Proctor and Roy Goss to expand the course to 18 holes which included remodeling the existing layout. Proctor and Goss's other course designs include the Tumwater Valley Golf Course and the Hi-Cedars Golf Course in Orting, Washington. The new 18-hole course opened in 1971.

Then as now, the golf course is a popular stopping point for golfers travelling between Seattle and Portland.

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