Times are a-changin’, and more and more people are using their smartphones to surf the web or do their banking. Some even use an app to order pizza!

May of you have downloaded the MSGA smartphone app to post scores. And, almost 50% of you are viewing the MSGA website (msgagolf.org) on your phone... or, at least trying! Up until now...

The MSGA is proud to announce their new and improved website... now MOBILE FRIENDLY! No more squinting or trying to enlarge the screen to navigate. Now, the website will adapt to you, whether you are on your desktop computer, tablet, or smartphone.

The website is full of useful information, including a handicap search, course search, Golf Etiquette 101, rules links, the tournament calendar, the state tournament Leaderboards, and frequently asked questions. Now you can access these tools from anywhere. We hope you enjoy the new format!

You can contact Emily at support@msgagolf.org for questions or more information.

The month of March in Montana was characterized by swings of temperatures. Unseasonably warm at times and, not surprisingly, some pre-spring snow flurries to varying degrees around the Treasure State.

We, like many states with more varying temperatures and weather patterns, subscribe to the April 1st- October 31st score-posting season. While in January your course may not be covered in snow, the ground can be hard and that 200-yard hybrid may go an additional 80 yards with some solid roll. So, while we’re not guaranteed anything in Montana during the off-season, as a rule—and a good rule—April 1st marks the beginning of score posting for handicap indexes.  ...Continued on the next page
HANDICAP SEASON ... from previous page

Now is the time to make sure you renew your MSGA memberships through your local club. All golfers with an active handicap are MSGA members by definition.

One member benefit that has been celebrated is the ability to post scores online and via our mobile app. Score posting has never been easier! Numerous MSGA members have availed themselves of the handy MSGA mobile app, available for iPhone and Android devices. You can also enter scores by logging in to the MSGA website at www.msgagolf.org. Additionally, MSGA member clubs have posting kiosks available, so you can enter scores after your rounds.

As another golf season is upon us, encourage your friends to become MSGA members (www.msgagolf.org/join-the-msga) and, in turn, help support their home course. Purchasing a handicap and becoming a member not only benefits golf in Montana, but the local course as well.

Please note, as a reminder, that if you played during Montana’s inactive season (and we hope you did) in a region observing an active season (e.g. Arizona, Florida), those scores must be posted for handicap purposes, if you haven’t already done so.

We, at the MSGA, are excited for the 2016 season! If you haven’t checked out the host sites for this season’s major tournaments, please do so via the MSGA website, by clicking on “Tournaments”. Lastly, please stay connected at home and on-the-go via social media. We encourage you to send us tweets, photos, and share updates on Facebook.

May your 2016 season be filled with pars, birdies, and many joyful memories on the links.

MSGA Mid-Amateur Age Requirement Now 25

Nick Dietzen, MSGA Communications Director

In 1981, the USGA inaugurated the U.S. Mid-Amateur, a national championship for golfers at least 25 years of age. Before the Mid-Amateur’s arrival, the post-college player found himself at a disadvantage in the U.S. Amateur. Since 1980, only four Mid-amateurs have won the U.S. Amateur, the last coming in 1993 by John Harris.

The U.S. Mid-Amateur has proved to be a great forum for those golfers who have careers and family, but still seek national and international caliber competition. Since 1988, every U.S. Mid-Amateur champion has been invited to The Masters and many have represented the USA in the biennial Walker Cup.

At the state level, in 1987 the MSGA instituted the Montana State Mid-Amateur. This past year, the decision was made, with nearly 30 years of tournament play, to move the age requirement from 30 to 25, the same age requirement used by the U.S. Mid-Amateur.

This year’s host club is Polson Bay Golf Course. The tournament will be conducted August 11-13. Last summer, Spencer Williams of Helena claimed the 2015 Mid-Amateur Title in impressive fashion. It was Williams second Mid-Am victory (2012). Jon Heselwood of Missoula lays claim to the most victories at the Mid-Am with four.

Click here if you’d like to apply to play in this year’s Mid-Am.
The MSGA is ramping up its commitment to junior golf. The board of directors voted recently to commit $10,000 to enhance development of young golfers in grades K-8. The money will be used to fund grants to clubs, golf courses, schools, and other programs that are growing the game at the grass-roots level.

The PGA Junior League, which already operates successful programs for kids aged 7 to 13 in Billings, Missoula, and the Flathead Valley, is an example of an organization which would qualify for funding. Applications will be available soon for all junior programs statewide that could use funding for instruction, equipment, or other factors.

For many years, the MSGA has been making a large investment in junior golf in other ways. The state association annually spends nearly $30,000 to conduct junior tournaments (regional and state) and to reward the top boys and girls with trips to Junior America’s Cup tournaments around the West. It has also funded the Montana-Alberta matches for many years.

The most recent strategy for junior golf recognizes that we won’t have highly skilled junior golfers in the 14-17 age range unless we have a larger pool of developing golfers in the 7-13 range. Toward that goal, the MSGA is undertaking a major initiative that hopefully will produce significant funds for the growth of junior golf far into the future.

At an MSGA board meeting in October, the association approved a fundraising raffle that could produce as much as $30,000 to benefit junior golf. The MSGA is selling 300 tickets at $200 apiece for a series of 12 travel prizes. Among the prizes are trips to locations such as Ireland, Mexico, San Diego, Hawaii, and Florida. Other prizes include an NFL football game in Seattle, major league baseball in Denver, a National Finals Rodeo trip to Las Vegas, and an Alaskan cruise.

More than 50 tickets had been sold through March, even though the project didn't get much publicity over the winter. It’s hoped that golfers will be more responsive to the project once all the state’s courses are open in April. Golfers and non-golfers alike can enter the raffle. Brochures will soon be available at MSGA courses, or you can visit www.msgagolf.org/raffle-fundraiser for further details and to download the raffle entry form. The first drawing will be in May.

Every dollar raised will be invested back in junior golf development programs, and it’s hoped that the fundraiser can be repeated each year. Carla Berg of Sidney, an MSGA board member, is handling ticket sales.

NEW BOARD MEMBERS FOR 2016, AND OTHER BOARD NEWS
The MSGA welcomed Peter Benson of Billings, Mary Bryson of Helena, and Sterling Swigart of Sidney to the board. There are now 20 members on the board – four from each of the five geographical districts.

In other action taken at the board meeting in Helena, a major change was approved for selecting a team of amateur golfers to compete against the professionals at the annual Montana Cup matches. For many years, the MSGA has chosen the top 10 finishers from the current-year State Amateur tournament, plus the top two finishers at the previous year’s Mid-Amateur event, for the 12-man squad.

Starting in 2016, the process will include the top three from the 2015 Mid-Am, the top two from the 2016 State Am, plus seven players who qualify through a sequence of statewide tournaments that has been used for many years to qualify top players for the USGA Team Championships. For the first time, PGA-sponsored Pro-Am events in both the Western Montana chapter and Yellowstone chapter also will be used to award qualifying points. Amateur winners at the Monday Pro-Am events will receive 20 points, and runners-up will get 10 points. The PGA members strongly supported the change and hope the change will encourage more top amateurs to enter the Pro-Ams.

Geise is a retired Great Falls Tribune sports editor and current MSGA board member.
Billings’ Grass Named GCSSA President
Nick Dietzen, MSGA Communications Director

Peter J. Grass, longtime superintendent at Hilands Golf Club (Billings) was elected president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) Feb. 11, 2016, at the association’s annual meeting in San Diego. Grass also serves as chairman of the board of trustees for The Environmental Institute for Golf (the philanthropic organization of the GCSAA).

Grass has been the superintendent at Hilands since 1991. Previously, he served as the assistant superintendent at Hilands for nine years. In nearly 40-years working at the pristine Billings 9-hole facility (25 years as head superintendent), Grass has become an incredible resource around the state, as well as serving now on the national level with a one-year term as President of the GCSAA.

“There are about 4,000 nine-hole facilities in the country, and I am proud to represent them as president of GCSAA. Many people have come through the ranks and have worked at a nine-hole facility; I just never left. I started working at Hilands as a teenager, and I am now 56,” Grass said.

The GCSAA is golf’s leading association dedicated to golf course management and environmental stewardship worldwide. Formed in 1926, GCSAA provides education, information, and representation to some 18,000 members in more than 78 countries.

“Many people have told me how cool they think it is that someone from a 9-hole facility can serve on the board of directors and become president of the association,” Grass said. “But if I can convince others that they too can benefit from being a GCSAA member, then I’ll consider my year in office to be a success.”

A 31-year member of GCSAA at the national level, Grass is also a member and past president of the Peaks & Prairies GCSA, a regional chapter of the GCSSA. A native of Mankato, MN, Grass and his wife, Charlene, have five children: Jason, Jennifer, Erica, Stephen, and Katie.

This year, our friends at Peaks and Prairies will contribute some thoughtful commentary on the less publicized areas of golf like turf-management practices and conservation. Next month, Peter Grass will contribute an article in the MSGA Newsletter. We thank all our superintendents around the state for their influential work in being caretakers and good stewards of the game we love in Montana.

Announcing the 2016 MSGA vTour Series
Emily Hulsey, MSGA Handicap and Website Coordinator

It’s ONLINE! It’s FREE! How do you play? First, register online at www.msgagolf.org/join-the-vtour. You will need your MSGA login.

Next, play golf any time during the dates of the event, at any Montana course. All 18-hole scores count! Then, post your score as usual before the event ends at the course kiosk, online, or using your smartphone app. It will automatically be included in the vTour.

It’s that SIMPLE! Players prizes will be given randomly to participants. Winners will be notified by e-mail. The top players will receive ballots toward a Grand Prize drawing at the end of the season -- a Sun Mountain Speed Cart GT!

Ready for fun? Register today!
Adding its first two recruits for the 2016-17 season, MSU-B’s men’s golf team will welcome Garrett Woodin and Jack Shea next fall. Woodin is a senior at Billings West High School, and Shea is a senior at Sequim High School in Washington.

Woodin’s father, Kevin, is the current interim head men’s and women’s golf coach for the Yellowjackets. “Our coaching staff is excited to have Garrett and Jack join our men’s golf team,” Coach Woodin commented.

During his senior season with the Golden Bears, Woodin placed in the top-5 in six of the seven events he participated in and led his team to the Class AA state title. Woodin won the Billings Invitational on August 24-25, 2015, with a two-round score of 142 (70-72).

Woodin’s best individual round score came at the state tournament, where he shot a 69 in the final round to finish third individually among a field of 70 high-school boys. Woodin was a two-year team captain and a four-year letterwinner at Billings West. The Bears counted his score in 36 consecutive rounds over his final three seasons, and 33 of those scores were sub-80. He was picked as a Class AA all-state golfer in 2015 and had a scoring average of 73.46 as a senior in the fall. “I chose MSU-B because I felt that it was the best option for me moving forward as a golfer, student, and person,” Woodin said.

“Garrett played very well last summer and then had an exceptional fall senior season at Billings West,” said Coach Woodin. “He is a very consistent player, and we feel his best golf is yet to come.”

Shea is a three-sport athlete for the Wolves, participating in golf, basketball, and football. A four-year letterwinner in golf, he was picked as the Olympic League most valuable player as a junior on the golf team. He is a two-year team captain, and has earned academic honors all three seasons to date.

Shea competed in the Class 2A state golf championships as a sophomore and a junior, placing in the top-10 last season under head coach and father Bill Shea. He posted a career-best single-round score of 65 (7-under par), and also holds the lowest scoring average in school history. As a junior, he was an all-league selection in football as a defensive end, and was picked as the defensive most valuable player as well under head coach Erik Wiker. He was an academic honoree for football and basketball as well.

“I was looking for a college where I could play golf, and I loved what I saw when I looked around the campus,” Shea said. “The reason I want to play college golf is to improve my game and I feel like MSU-B is a great place to do that. Not only am I looking for a great golf team, I would love to manage a local golf course when I’m done with school, and I feel like taking a business management class is one step closer to that career path. I feel that MSU-B has a great program for that course.”

“Jack has had an impressive high-school golf career to date, while also excelling in both basketball and football,” Coach Woodin said. “He will add great depth to our roster next fall.”