



## Whispering Pines selected No. 1 course for fourth year in a row

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It seems nothing – not even a hurricane – can knock Whispering Pines off its perch as *The News'* No. 1 golf course in Texas.

The course tucked away among the pines in Trinity earned that distinction for the fourth consecutive year, despite losing more than 250 trees and having to shut down for two weeks in 2008 after Hurricane Ike rolled through in September.

"We had the entire crew, including the golf pros and caddies, clearing trees and cleaning up the course," said pro Chris Rowe. "We had only been open two days before it hit. We managed to reopen in less than two weeks and keep the course looking great."

Rowe said the pride the entire staff feels for the course helps keep it in near-perfect shape. It doesn't hurt that the course is closed nearly half the year. That keeps golf traffic to a minimum and allows superintendent Michael Dieckhoff and his crew to keep the course in prime condition. Golfers play in the spring and early summer and in the fall, meaning they see the course only when it's at its best.

"I'm proud of the staff and members because they've bought into the spirit of the place," said course founder Corby Robertson Jr. "It's a beautiful golf course, but it's also one that gives back."

Robertson is referring to the philanthropic work done through the course. Half the membership fees at Whispering Pines go to the World Health and Golf Association, which donates money to charities, including Baylor College of Medicine Teen Health Clinics, the First Tee program at Whispering Pines and the Houston-Harris County Immunization Registry.

Whispering Pines constantly looks to improve or add amenities. Rowe now has an indoor teaching facility to help instruct the 160 members and their guests. Routing is complete on a nine-hole par-3 course on land Robertson purchased near the fifth hole. No plans have been made for building the course.

"We're certainly honored to stay No. 1," Robertson said.

For the third consecutive year, Dallas National finished second in the rankings. The course was third in 2006 before making the jump to runner-up the next year. Boot Ranch, in Fredericksburg, was third for the second straight year.

But then things start to change a bit in the top 10. Cordillera Ranch, named *The News'* best new course last year, debuts in the rankings at No. 4. It's a Jack Nicklaus design in Boerne that features some memorable holes, including the par-3 16th, which debuted on *The News'* lists of 18 most beautiful holes and 18 best holes.

"We feel like the course deserves to be there," said Chris Hill, vice president of Cordillera Ranch Development Corp. "We've taken a piece of land that is second to none with great topography and incorporated it into a really good golf course design. It's hard to find something like that."

Vaquero Club in Westlake, the No. 1 course in 2005, was 11th, dropping out of the top 10 for the first time. Escondido (Horseshoe Bay) and the Cypress Course at Champions Golf Club in Houston also fell out of the top 10. The Club at Carlton Woods – the Nicklaus and Fazio courses – both made the top 10. Only two courses – Colonial Country Club in Fort Worth (No. 5 this year) and Preston Trail Golf Club in Dallas (No. 8) – have remained in the top 10 every year *The News* has compiled its rankings.

The TPC Four Seasons Las Colinas was ranked 50th, returning to the top 50 after being closed for renovation.

## WHISPERING PINES

**Opened:** March 2000

**Designer:** Chet Williams (Nicklaus Design Group)

**Length:** 7,480 yards from the tips

**Notable:** The course employs students from Sam Houston State's Professional Golf Management program as caddies. ... The only houses visible from the course are the cottages that members use for overnight stays. ... The course is open for six months. It opened March 25 and closes July 3. It reopens in September. ... The biennial Spirit International Amateur Golf Championship, featuring players from 24 countries, is Nov. 2-8.