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Golf returns early to Berkshires

By Richard Lord, Berkshire Eagle Staff,

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Golf in mid-March in the Berkshires?

Who would have guessed it?

Actually, at least three golf enthusiasts who entered a contest on the Cranwell Resort, Spa and Golf Club's Facebook page to predict when the resort's course would open for business.

"St. Patrick's Day -- go for the green," said one of three correct respondents, which will indeed be opening day at the par-71 course with temperatures expected to remain well above normal in the Berkshires.

Cranwell isn't alone in opening a good three weeks earlier than usual. Egremont Country Club and Bas Ridge Golf Course are already open, sources said. Skyline Country Club and Berkshire Hills Country Club are expected to open for play today, and Forest Park Country Club will join Cranwell in opening on Saturday.

"The ground hasn't been frozen for a while, so [Thurs day] we made the decision," said David Strawn, Cranwell's director of golf. "The conditions are good. I looked at a basket of [grass] clippings and they were a almost a beige color, but under it the grass was green."

"We had been keeping an eye on the weather and decided to put up the [Facebook] contest about 10 days ago," said Norma Probst, Cranwell's director of marketing. "I expected we would get 100 or so guesses, but we only had 33 because we had to take it down earlier than expected. It's different to have both our ski areas and golf courses to be open at the same time."

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Ski Area and several other ski areas are expected to be open at least through this weekend -- making it possible to hit the links and the slopes in the same day.

The early start is good for the county's courses, which suffered through a subpar business year in 2011 with late snow and plenty of rain through the early summer.

"Our phones have been ringing and it's neat to tell everyone that we're opening this week," Strawn said.

This will be the earliest the course has opened, at least since Strawn joined the resort's staff in 1994. The course opened on April 7 last year.

Skyline head professional Jim Mitus said that this is probably the earliest the Lanesborough course has opened. Last year, it opened on April 8.

Williamstown's popular Waubeeka Golf Links is still a couple of weeks ago from being ready for play, said general manager Mark Mills.

"The course is still pretty wet, but our driving range is

open," Mills said.

For those anxious to tee it up, it would be wise to call ahead to make sure the courses are open for business on the day you plan to play.

Other courses planning openings should contact Richard Lord at (413) 496-6236 or rlord@berkshireeagle.com.

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