Foodservice and spikeproof carpet aid success of daily fee course

In the backwoods of southern New Jersey, on land that once was a cornfield, sits a golf club where the chef’s score may be more important than the golfers’.

Actually, Centerton Golf Club isn’t a private club. It is a public course with golf facilities that owner Ed Carman describes as “pleasant, interesting, and challenging enough for the best of players.”

The course, 6650 yards in all, carries a par 71 rating from the South Jersey Golf Association.

But one doesn’t have to care a fig about golf to enjoy the clubhouse-restaurant and banquet facilities. Although Carman developed the club in 1964 with the idea of attracting south Jersey golfers, many travelers from Philadelphia (55 miles away) and Atlantic City (60 miles away) come to enjoy the golfing and food. Carman notes he does not advertise. Over the years, word of mouth from satisfied customers has established Centerton.

As you drive up the winding passageway off the country road, Centerton’s 20,000-square-foot, Colonial-style building comes into view. Parking is handled by attendants, and the parking facilities can easily handle 1,000 cars.

Inside the main building there are two large, separate kitchens that service seven banquet rooms and a 19th Hole Restaurant. Four brightly-decorated locker rooms and the executive offices are also housed there.

Centerton’s facilities will accommodate up to 800 visitors at one time. Carman credits the club’s excellent service to his four managers. Each handles a special area: private party bookings, waitresses, and bartenders; food preparation and selection; golf shop; and grounds.

Carman explains that each manager works independently, but “I have my fingers in all of their jobs.”

At the height of the season, Centerton’s front tee is busy from sunrise to sunset with golfers readying to play the well-groomed 18 holes — twosomes, foursomes, and company golf outings.

Ed’s brother, Allan, handles the pro shop, assigning tee times, organ-
izing golf outings, managing golf car rentals, and doing any other tasks related to seeing visitors golf happily.

As those golfers turn the ninth hole or finish up at 18, they don’t have far to fall to be fed well. The club’s 19th Hole Restaurant is open 7 days a week from 11 a.m. to midnight, serving up anything from a simple sandwich and a bottle of beer to a prime sirloin steak with a fine bottle of wine, or an elaborate luncheon or dinner buffet.

Guests may order from a standard lunch or dinner menu, both packed with hearty southern-style foods, including prime meats that are cut on the premises. Daily menu specials change with seasonal availability and include soft shell crabs, capon Tahi-tian, or baked crab imperial.

The daily luncheon buffet includes fresh salad fixings; choice of several homemade soups; delectable homemade pies, cakes, and breads; a selection of delicatessen meats; and every type of garnish. A half-dozen hot entrees are presented in large steamer dishes on antique credenzas.

The day we visited, the hot buffet included fresh flounder fillets rolled and baked in butter sauce, homemade fish stew with chunks of different fish, and chicken baked in a wine sauce. Food fit for hungry golfers.

The dinner buffet includes more hot entrees (different than lunch menu), twice as many desserts — including a trifle, and a half dozen layer cakes — and several types of hot breads.

As you can imagine, the 19th Hole Restaurant is constantly busy with golf and visitor traffic. In less than two years, the 19th Hole’s indoor/outdoor carpeting was worn, torn and dirty. Carman says stain resistance and durability under spikes topped his list for new carpeting. “Since we couldn’t afford to have the restaurant out of commission even one day, replacement had to be done in off hours.”

A 5-year wear-warranty against spikes by yarnmaker Dow Badische — coupled with Scotchgard protection to meet Carman’s other needs — helped him decide on “Club Champion” carpeting. Carman selected Wellco’s Spyglass series, with stripes of various widths, diagonal stripes, herringbone and multi-chevron effects, in red to match the hall and dining room walls. Ripping up the old floor tiles and carpeting began around 4 a.m. on a Friday morning. By 11 a.m. Friday, Centerton’s 19th Hole was newly carpeted and ready for business.