

The college connection

GOLF FACILITIES FOSTER RELATIONSHIPS WITH LOCAL UNIVERSITIES TO ENHANCE THEIR REPUTATIONS AND GROW THE GAME OF GOLF

by
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There are many ways to solidify and increase business at golf facilities, and many facilities throughout the country have developed relationships with nearby colleges and universities to do that, as well as build solid reputations and grow the game. These relationships, which benefit both parties, take on many forms, from allowing golf teams to practice to hosting collegiate golf tournaments to creating fundraising opportunities for the institutions through charity tournaments.

In early May, 16 Division II college teams

gathered in Duncan, Okla., to compete in the NCAA Super Regional Golf Championships. The stakes were high. For the host venue, The Territory Golf & Country Club, it was an opportunity to lend support to collegiate golf and showcase its two-year-old track.

The 7,100-yard course, which was designed by Oklahoma native Randy Heckenkemper, tries to set itself apart from other golf courses in the area by distinctively fitting into the landscape rather than being a typical parkland golf course that features parallel fairways and few trees.

Since the inception of the private club, the owners have received input and suggestions from Jerry Hrniciar, former athletic director and veteran golf coach at nearby Cameron University. Hrniciar's input helped form a strong relationship between Cameron and the club and has helped the Territory secure competitive events to strengthen the course's reputation.

For the Territory, the close relationship with Cameron University has been a win-win situation in the eyes of Tim Johnson, director of golf.

"We feel our golf course is setting a new standard for the quality of golf in this area of Oklahoma, and by hosting events such as the NCAA Super Regional, more players can see what it is we have to offer," Johnson says. "At the same time, by allowing the Cameron golf team members a chance to use all of our practice facilities, we're helping to develop a new generation of players. We also offer this opportunity to the high school golf teams in the area for the same reason. We want to encourage these young players' interest in the game of golf because they will be the golf club members of the future."

Hosting an NCAA event can put added

pressure on the maintenance crew of the host course, but for Brad Babek, the golf course superintendent of the Territory Golf Course, the extra effort blends in well with his program.

"The event is held in the early part of our season, so we're just coming into our green-up time, which is a busy time for us anyway," he says. "We see this as a good chance to get the crew into gear for the season."

Gracious hosts

The relationship between the Territory and Cameron isn't unique. The Territory took a page from Sunriver Resort's operations book. Sunriver, located in Bend, Ore., hosted the 2006 NCAA Division I Men's Championship in late May. It's the fourth NCAA event the resort has hosted during the past 10 years. Sunriver, which features three golf courses, continues to host prestigious events like the NCAA Division I Men's Championship because the facility is perfect for such events, according to Mike Sizemore, director of golf at Sunriver Resort.

"One of the things we can offer college players is the opportunity to stay on site during the week of the event," Sizemore says. "The players also can use all of the facilities we have, including the swimming pools, bike paths and practice facilities."

"We first hosted the Women's NCAA Championship back in 2000 and have hosted the NCAA Championships twice since," he adds. "The feedback from the players helped us secure the bid for the men's event this year."

Sizemore views hosting events such as collegiate championships as a way to establish a reputation and a legacy for Sunriver. At the



Photo: Superstition Mountain Golf Club

Management of Superstition Mountain Golf Club in Scottsdale, Ariz., has a close relationship with Arizona State University.

same time, it's a way for the associates who work at the various golf courses to develop a sense of pride about where they work.

"The collegiate championships are events that become unforgettable experiences for the players who compete in them," he says. "We want the players to have Sunriver as part of those memories. By hosting prestigious events, our employees also develop a sense of pride for what we offer to the competitors. This carries over during the summer to the service that we offer our guests. This makes all of the effort we put into hosting the NCAA Championships worth it."

Another type of collegiate relationship has been established at Superstition Mountain Golf Club in Scottsdale, Ariz., with Arizona State University. Superstition Mountain allows ASU players to hone their skills by practicing and playing on its two Jack Nicklaus-designed courses. Beyond that, Superstition Mountain sees an added value

of drawing from the university's Professional Golf Management program that develops credentialed PGA professionals.

"The PGM program is one that was developed while I was on the board of directors of the PGA of America," says Mark Kizziar, president of Superstition Mountain. "This four-year B.S. program prepares students in all phases of golf course operations and leads towards securing a PGA Class A card. ASU is one of nine colleges nationwide that offers this type of program. This program offers an excellent source for new employees to our club's needs."

Big course on campus

Along with the many private golf courses that deal closely with local universities, many of the nation's top universities – Yale, Cornell, Rutgers, Ohio State, Michigan and Purdue – have their own golf courses on campus. The trend began during the

early part of the 20th century when golf's popularity increased, and it has continued as more institutions have added golf courses to their campuses recently.

An example of this trend is the Walker Golf Course near the campus of Clemson University in Clemson, S.C. The course was built eight years ago on a 140-acre, leased plot of land just south of the main campus. Because the university is public, no state funds could be used to build a golf course. Instead, the Clemson University Alumni Foundation acted as a private entity and secured a lease for the property. The foundation is carrying the entire debt load and the management of the golf course until the debt is paid off. At that time, the foundation will donate the golf course to the university.

The Walker Golf Course, which generates more than 30,000 rounds annually, also is a practice facility for the men's golf team,

The Territory Golf & Country Club in Duncan, Okla., has been able to host collegiate events and strengthen its reputation thanks to management's relationship with nearby Cameron University's golf coach.
Photo: The Territory Golf & Country Club

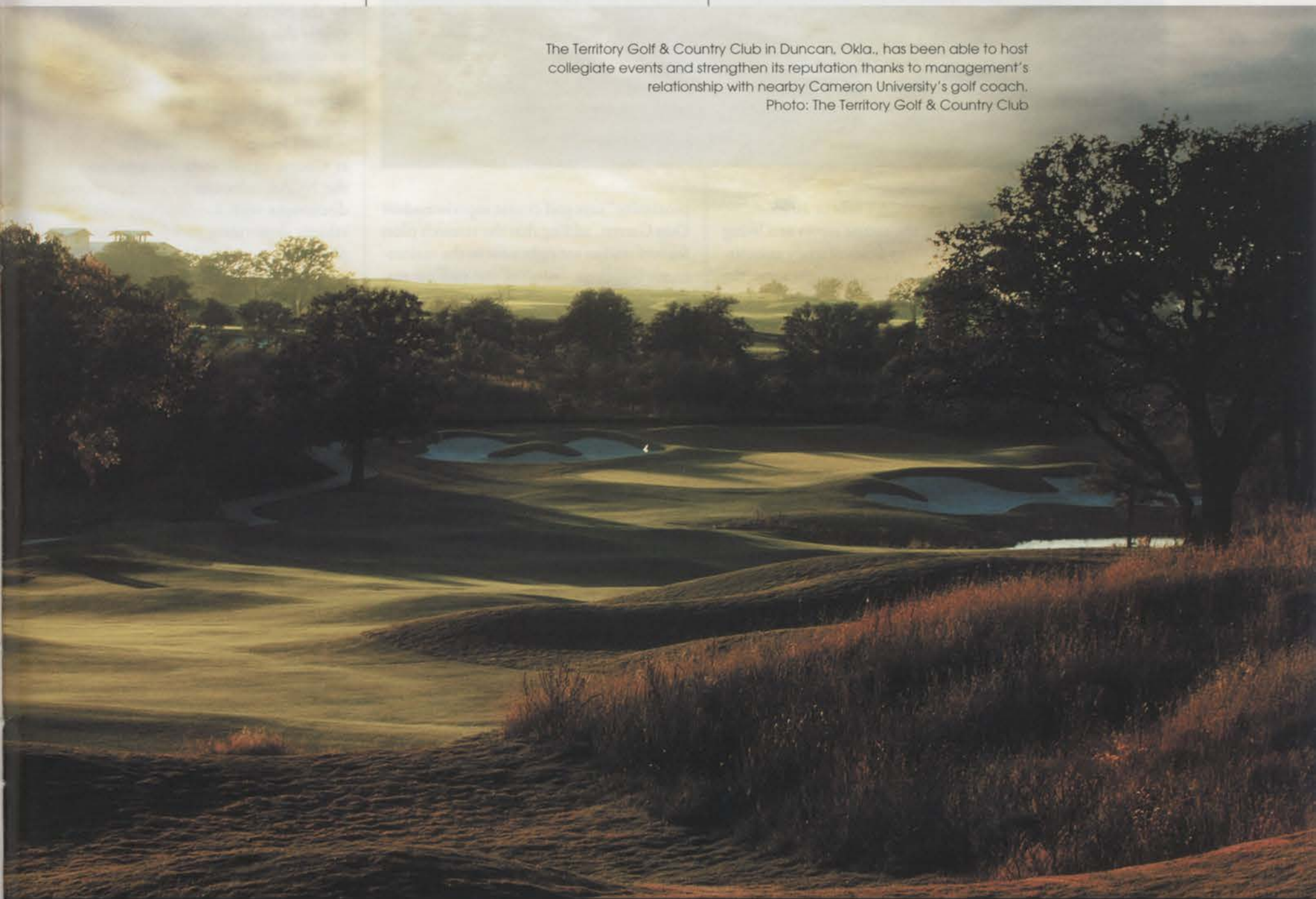




Photo: Superstition Mountain Golf Club

Arizona State University's Professional Golf Management program is a source of new employees for Superstition Mountain Golf Club.

which won the NCAA title in 2003.

Additionally, the course serves as a living laboratory for many fields of study associated with Clemson. It's located right across the street from the research labs and classrooms for the nationally acclaimed turf school and can be used to field-test new ideas, theories, discoveries and products.

"We offer a marvelous opportunity for the turf school students because of our close

proximity," says golf course superintendent Don Garrett, adding that the research plots for turf studies are right next to the maintenance buildings. "Most of our staff are students. We even have a few graduate students who work on the course while they're also working on their research projects."

In addition to Garrett's duties at the golf course, he teaches an introductory course for turf school and professional golf manage-

ment students.

"My lab gives students the hands-on experience with different pieces of equipment and practical application of everything from mowing a green to raking a bunker," he says.

Garrett also allows students in the entomology, botany, environmental sciences and civil engineering departments to use the course for research.

Precautions

Although relationships between golf facilities and universities are beneficial to both, they should be dealt with carefully. While golf courses can be used for fund-raising and alumni functions, any golf manager still must understand that when dealing with collegiate athletics the potential for an inappropriate relationship with student athletes could develop.

"There are very specific rules dealing with student athletes that are strictly governed by the NCAA," Sizemore says. "Any golf course that wants to help out junior players or collegiate players needs to be aware of them. You want to be supportive to student athletes in a proper way and not jeopardize their future."

Brent Jessup, director of golf at the Walker Course agrees with Sizemore and says the NCAA rules can be clarified through discussions with a college's or university's athletic department and through the compliance office.

"Properly researching into potential pitfalls can save an embarrassing incident later on," Jessup says. GCN

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The Walker Golf Course near the campus of Clemson University serves as a living laboratory for many fields of study associated with the school. Photo: Clemson University