

Standard Golf: Onward in Iowa

By Thomas Skernivitz,
Managing Editor

Time doesn't stand still in Cedar Falls. Located in the heart of Iowa, the home of Standard Golf, to your surprise, appears blatantly chic.

Its downtown district, while probably one day emblematic of The Waltons, has since been commandeered by the cast of The OC. There's neon and martinis and the ultimate anti-sooey — sushi. Eclectic restaurants, trendy bars and art galleries go by the likes of Montage, The Stuffed Olive and Pursuing Picasso. Together, they line a strip of fresh concrete that literally defies patrons to walk the straight and narrow — the renovated street is curved like a letter S.

A few miles up The Hill, at the University of Northern Iowa, students and townies avidly support their favorite football and basketball teams. It's a scene not unlike many college towns, except that Panthers Nation does its cheering from inside a dome. And while the Uni-Dome is already nearing its 30th birthday, the facility, with its white bubble rising above the campus and surrounding cornfields, nonetheless seems like a technological marvel — and oddity — to the first-time visitor.

Not that Cedar Falls has lost its little-town charm. Its main street, even with the fancy new curves, is still Main Street. The sushi bar shares property with an old-school barber-shop. And the buzz down at Toad's Bar and Grill is over this Saturday's headliner at the Uni-Dome — Larry the Cable Guy.

"Larry is not a graduate of UNI," Ron Smith, the Panthers head assistant basketball coach, jokingly notes while leading a tour of the school's state-of-the-art athletic facilities. "But we like his motto."

Yes, Iowans like to Git-R-Done.

So, too, do the employees of Standard Golf, most of whom have deep Iowa roots. The family-owned business, founded in 1910, is into its third generation in the name of Peter E. Voorhees. Matt Hurley, the vice president and

general manager, was born and raised in Cedar Falls. He graduated from UNI, as did John Kelly, the director of marketing. They've been with the company a combined 37 years, which is about par for the 50 or so Standard Golf employees.

Standard Golf prides itself as being

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Off The Fringe

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a leader in "golf course furniture" — flagsticks, flags, ball washers, tee markers, etc. More than 250 distributors in 47 countries in six continents sell its products.

"So we're not a really tiny operation sitting here in Iowa that no one knows about," Kelly says. "I think we'd be really very surprised if we were ever on a golf course that didn't have something on it that we manufactured."

With more golfers wanting to turn their backyards into single-hole fields of dreams, Standard Golf this year changed its philosophy and started offering 60 of its regular products directly to the lightest of consumers.

"We'd get hundreds of calls a year from homeowners that wanted to order just one cup, one flag and one flagstick," says Mike Doyle, director of sales development. "For years we pretty much said, 'We only sell to distributors,' and we hung up, not knowing if they ever called the distributor. But the distributors we talked to didn't want (the homeowners) calling them anyway. They had nine flagsticks in a box and they didn't want to sell them one flagstick, one cup."

The company is embarking on its most exciting move since it literally changed locations within the city after a fire destroyed its factory in 1992. In December it will begin



In December Standard Golf will begin selling a ball picker that can operate in reverse direction.

selling a revolutionary ball picker that can operate in reverse direction.

Available in three- and five-gang pickers, the Magnum Harvester can clear a driving range 30 percent more quickly, the company says. The primary selling point of the picker is the ability for the operator — often a teenager — to switch into reverse without tangling or damaging the gangs.

"We had one guy tell us, 'Well, you know, it would be great if you can make a picker that backs up. But that can't be done. It's impossible,'" Hurley says.

Impossible? Not at Standard Golf. It's progress or bust these days in Cedar Falls, even if Gitting-R-Done means making a machine that goes backward.

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