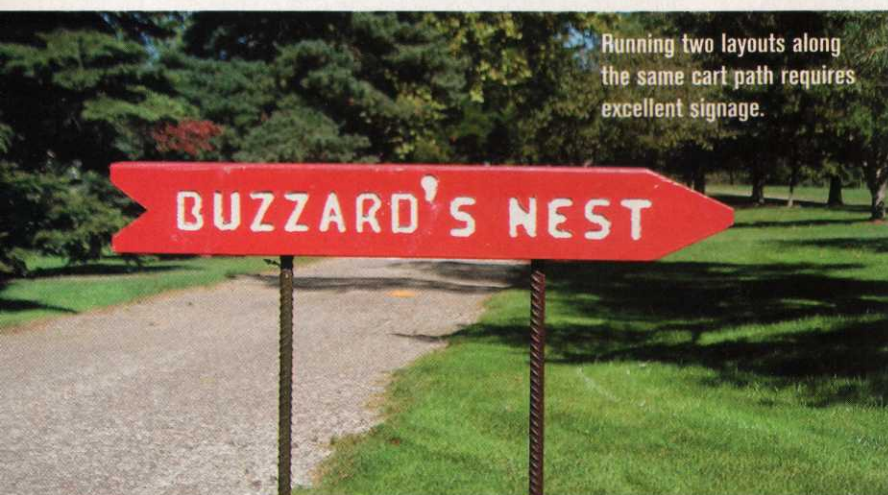


# Find Your Niche



Running two layouts along the same cart path requires excellent signage.

## EDITOR'S NOTE

This story and the accompanying Quick Tips examine several golf courses and the marketing initiatives that helped them create more rounds.

## Soaring Success: Five-hole Buzzard's Nest elevates area interest and lifts rounds.

**BY DAVID FRABOTTA**  
SENIOR EDITOR

**A**s a peculiar precursor to spring's rebirth, turkey vultures return to Hinckley, Ohio, each March 15. Their homecoming might be thousands of years old, but naturalists just noticed the phenomenon about 100 years ago. So each year, hundreds of spectators converge to get a glimpse of the unlikely harbinger of northern Ohio's seasonal rejuvenation.

Many buzzards make their way to the Hinckley Hills Golf Course and surrounding acres of farmland, and they've become a kind of mascot for the area. So it's appropriate that Hinckley Hills Golf Course named its new five-hole layout the Buzzard's Nest. And just as the giant birds return to the region each season, golfers flock to the area's myriad layouts.

With so many quality golf courses in such a small geographic area, Hinckley Hills needed a way to bring in new business for the short golfing season. The family-owned business wanted to add nine holes. But as suburban sprawl encroached on the course, nine holes just weren't in the cards.

And though its five new holes began as conciliation to those market conditions, it has grown into a forward-looking venture in growing the game and capturing more of the area's wallet share.

Situated in the middle of the 1964 Harold Paddock layout, five holes of the original championship design have been remarked, rebranded and resold as the Buzzard's Nest, which is in its third year of operation.

"Play has been up and down the past few years, but it's definitely generating interest and business," says general manager Susan Smith, daughter of Donald Krush, who developed the golf course from farmland. "It's a nice way to introduce beginners to the game of golf because it's not too hard."

Its relative ease has been pivotal for its success. Even though the five holes were part of

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**Sister Act:** Susan Smith and Jeane Esposito co-operate Hinckley Hills Golf Course, home of the five-hole Buzzard's Nest.

**QUICK TIP**

**Water Works**

Residents of Pocomoke City, Md., received a free round of golf with their water bills in July. Pocomoke wanted to bolster awareness and enhance play at the city-owned Winter Quarters Golf Course, and get this: The coupons are fully transferable. Perhaps water-conscious districts would be willing to partner with an area golf course to reward residents who make an effort to conserve water, maybe in conjunction with Smart Irrigation Month?

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the original 18 that slopes at a 125 from the tips, the holes are very manageable for beginners while still offering a challenging greens complex for avid golfers.

Three of the holes are less than 350 yards from the back tees — slightly shorter from the forward tees — with fairways plenty wide for a wayward five-wood or slicing three-iron from the teeing area. No. 3 is 377 from the back tees and 268 from the front tees. And just when you're itching to hit driver, hole No. 5 stretches 460 yards from the tips (340 yards from forward tees) with about 20 yards of elevation on the second shot to the green. It was the No. 1 handicapped hole in the original layout, and it's still a difficult test.

It's fun to play for the experienced golfer, but it's still straightforward enough for children to accompany dad on a Saturday or Sunday when weekend duffers fill the regulation 18 holes.

But more importantly, it's a quick five holes. A busy working dad can play the Buzzard's Nest after work in about an hour on a busy day, and a wide-open five holes can be played in about 40 minutes, which means making it home on time for dinner.

It works out well from an agronomic perspective, too. Jeane Esposito, Smith's sister and co-operator of the facility, handles the grounds and the 23 golf holes as superintendent. She likes to stagger aerification around the course and close down the doctored holes during heal time. The Buzzard's Nest, which golfers play twice while the nine holes heal, allows her to administer aggressive cultural practices without sacrificing quality of play. It also allows her to keep greens cut at .17 of an inch under fairly heavy play.

The only tangible agronomic frustration might be due to golfers' treating the five-hole layout as their personal practice course.

"Sometimes I'll see five divots right next to each other, none of them replaced, of course," Esposito says.

But five holes is plenty for some, judging from positive feedback from the new families that have tried the five-hole concept. And with an \$8.50 price tag, it's about the same price as taking the kids to see the latest "Harry Potter" movie.

"We had a young family out here practicing for a family golf outing, and it was obvious that some of them had never played before," Esposito says. "It took them a little longer than an hour, but they said they really had fun. That's what it's there for."

Hinckley Hills hopes such families will return each year as predictably as the area's beloved buzzards.

**[ABOUT THIS SERIES]** "Growing the Game," a four-part series appearing in *Golfdom* throughout 2007, focuses on how the golf industry can attract more new players to create more rounds. In addition to the third installment on what golf course maintenance suppliers and companies can do to grow the game, we've also reported on the impact that baby boomers could have on increasing play (February) and what golf course architects can do in their designs to make the game more friendly for beginner and average golfers (May). In this final installment, we singled out some of the more creative golf courses in the country to discuss the marketing programs they've implemented to attract new golfers.

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