



Nothing **Short** of Progress

ClubCorp will add far-forward tees to all of its golf holes, including this signature hole at the Island Course at The Clubs of Kingwood. Its Shores Course already features far-forward tees, family golf cars and two pins on each green (inset) to accommodate varying skill levels and help the pace of play.

ClubCorp champions a new set of forward tees

ClubCorp is making its golf courses shorter and easier. Way shorter, less than 5,000 yards in most cases. What would inspire this stark contrast to the rest of the industry? The answer is member recruitment and retention, crucial components to growing the game.

In an effort to shorten rounds and offer more flexibility for beginning golfers, ClubCorp is installing far-forward tees as part of its Short Course Initiative.

It's no secret that golf demand is flat, and golf courses are closing faster than they are opening for the second-consecutive year. The biggest reasons, sources say, stem from time scarcity.

Thus far, the industry has responded to America's virtual time poverty by building longer, tougher golf courses, which largely have cannibalized shorter, easier layouts. That

trend has hampered rounds at public facilities. And private clubs are experiencing a shakeout, too. Fewer traditional country club members are willing to forgo weekends with family to golf as often as they did in the past.

"My father was an avid golfer. I can't image the amount of laughter that would have taken place if I asked him to give up his weekend golf to watch me play soccer," says Frank Gore, ClubCorp's executive vice president of membership and sales. "Conversely, my daughter played soccer for six years without ever scoring a goal, but I never missed a game. It's different now, and we saw a lot of this prioritizing what's important after 9/11."

Indeed, golf was never better around the turn of the millennium. But its current slump has many industry observers wondering if it will ever return to its glory days. Myriad task forces, think tanks and even formal entities have been devising ways to grow

Continued on page 50

BY DAVID FRABOTTA
SENIOR EDITOR

Continued from page 47

the game. The result has been a host of marketing initiatives, but the really big changes — like shaking the game of its traditional six-hour obligation — has been largely academic with the exception of a few golf courses.

That's about to change. This spring, more than 90 of ClubCorp's managed properties will offer a new set of forward tees, typically 100 yards closer to the green than the previous forward tees.

"We're trying to get people to play a nine-hole round in an hour and 15 minutes or less," Gore says. "It's not just for kids and for beginners. It's also for people with less time. You're basically playing a high-quality, 3-par course, which provides a combination of speed and lower difficulty."

With each year, more members are downgrading their memberships from golf memberships to less-expensive social memberships, Gore says. Of those who

keep their golf memberships, more of them are playing a mere 18 rounds to 24 rounds a year. That's about \$400 per round with dues. That's a tough sell considering the glut of upscale daily-fee or semi-private courses that opened in the past decade, most of which can be played for about \$100, depending on the market.

In an effort to reverse that trend, ClubCorp knows that members who regularly show up to use at least part of the club are more likely to retain their full memberships because they perceive more value in club amenities and facilities than infrequent users. Far-forward tees allow members to use the facility more often: Dad can play in about an hour after work and still attend evening obligations, or kids can play along with dad without holding up play. Both scenarios keep members coming to the club more often.

Only a big management company like ClubCorp can give a program like this a

national identity and help it root among average golfers, but the idea of forward tees is not new. In New Boston, Texas, The Oak Grove Golf Club, owned and operated by Jeff Prieskorn, has operated with kids' tees for almost a decade.

When Oak Grove hired golf course architect John Colligan to build a second nine and refurbish the original nine in 1998, Prieskorn thought it would be a good idea if his oldest son (now age 18) and his friends could have a place to golf without holding up the pace of play. So he installed tee boxes on the sides of fairways adjacent to landing areas used by golfers hitting from the traditional tees. He hid them with mounding so they wouldn't be a distraction from the back tees.

Eventually, the golf course's reputation grew as a kid-friendly place, and kids helped supplement historically slow tee times, mainly in the evenings.

"We have kids as young as 8 that play

golf

construction

news.com

"The Source for New Golf Project Information"

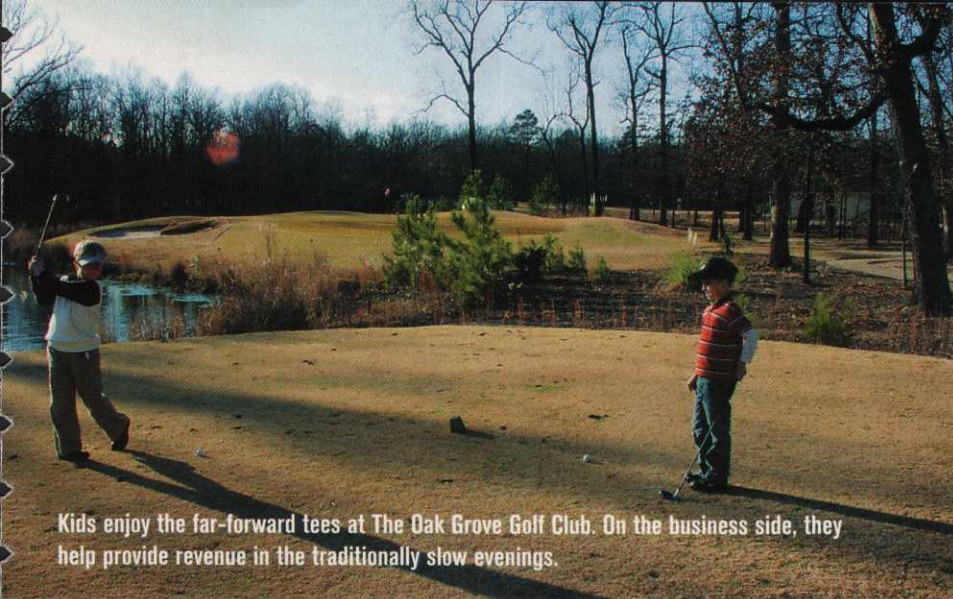
golfconstructionnews.com (GCN) is an online report containing the most current and in-depth information on golf projects in the U.S. GCN keeps tabs on thousands of projects a year to provide the most up-to-date, comprehensive details as they become available. Reports can be ordered for up to eight regions of the U.S. to fit any-sized business.

Features include:

- Access to project updates 24/7 via secure, password-protected access
- Project tracking from conception to completion, with its status regularly updated
- Full details for New & Proposed Projects, Remodels to Existing Courses & Recent Openings
- State-of-the-art click-through contact access with developers, course designers and construction companies (if selected), and related parties
- Sortable project database — including by state, development phase, type and opening date

Subscribe online now! It's as easy as visiting www.golfconstructionnews.com. Review regularly updated sample projects on the home page and see the power of GCN for yourself.

For additional information, call toll-free 866-640-7170.



Kids enjoy the far-forward tees at The Oak Grove Golf Club. On the business side, they help provide revenue in the traditionally slow evenings.

by themselves," Prieskorn says. "Many of them play faster than the men because their holes are so short."

The semi-private Oak Grove has 250 members, and Prieskorn says membership growth and retention has been better than competing golf courses in the area because the family golf concept is such a good selling point when potential members inquire about joining.

Others at the club are starting to use the far-forward tees, too. Families and area high-school golf teams often use them for practice. And one senior member — 92 years young — was close to retiring his clubs before Prieskorn offered him the short-course perspective.

"He was frustrated because he could barely hit the ball out of his shadow anymore, about 100 yards off the tee," Prieskorn says. "He was ready to quit, and he told me, 'If I can't play, then I'm going to go home and die in my La-Z-Boy.'"

Thanks to the forward tees, that member continues to hit the links.

The concept has worked so well for Oak Grove that Colligan Golf Designs

has mimicked the layout for several other clients.

"It doesn't take much of a sell because it doesn't cost anything during the renovation process, and it offers some flexibility on the course as well as a marketing tool down the road," Colligan says.

The Prairie Lakes Golf Course in Grand Prairie, Texas, a municipal facility, features new junior tee boxes by Colligan. The tees are used by men working on their short game and beginners as well as kids. Its 27 holes allow the course to use the forward tees on nine holes on slow days while maintaining a regulation golf course for traditionalists.

Colligan helped christen the new tees with a round of golf after his job was done — nine holes from the men's tees and nine holes from the far-forward tees.

"I'm not sure I played much different from the forward tees," he says. "What I noticed was it helped with the intimidation factor, and it brought a lot of the fun back into the game. Golf should be enjoyed, not endured."

Continued on page 53

[ABOUT THIS SERIES] "Growing the Game" is *Golfdom's* quarterly series — now in its third year — that focuses on how the golf industry can attract more players to create more rounds. In addition to this installment on initiatives aimed to quicken the pace of play and shake the game from its traditional six-hour obligation, we've also explored the impact women, minorities, disabled golfers and baby boomers could have on increasing play. We've talked to golf course architects about ways they can make the game more friendly for beginners and average golfers, and we've highlighted creative marketing programs that golf courses use to attract new golfers.

Visit our archives at www.golfdom.com to view the 2006-2008 "Growing the Game" series.

Series sponsored by:

Club Car

IR®

HONOR THE GAME.

QUIETLY GOING ABOUT ITS BUSINESS. Let's face it. You need a vehicle that's all business. One that keeps hauling and keeps you productive all day long. The Carryall Turf 2 with IQ Plus™ is all that — and more. Equipped with the new Club Car IQ Plus System, the most advanced DC drive train technology in its class. Plus, it's so quiet, you can keep working without disturbing golfers. How can we help your operation succeed? 1.800.CLUBCAR www.clubcar.com

Club Car



Continued from page 51

ClubCorp isn't exactly flying blind on the private club side. The company already champions The Clubs of Kingwood (Texas) as the most kid-friendly complex in the country, so it has some experience empowering its junior members. At the Shores course at The Clubs of Kingwood at Atascocita, kids actually get to drive the golf car thanks to a fleet of 20 special vehicles that feature a courtesy brake on the passenger side. The facility also has family golf cars that allow four-somes to ride together.

The Shores course completes its setup with tee boxes, fewer bunkers and one-height mowing for fairways and rough. Only tees and greens are mowed differently to make it easier for juniors and novices.

But unlike most of its properties, Kingwood has 117 golf holes, which allows ClubCorp to dedicate its nine-hole Shores course to family golf and kids play. But Shores will be the anomaly in the ClubCorp portfolio. For now, the company's other properties will simply mow out teeing areas instead of building tee boxes, and it will complete the teeing area with ball washers and benches. That way, each facility will be able to gauge adoption by measuring rounds and gathering feedback from members before constructing new tees that might not be used.

"Kingwood has had a very good

increase in retention, so that's one of the key components driving this," says Mark Burnett, executive vice president of the golf and country club division at ClubCorp. "The more that you can give the spouse or the kids ways to increase the country club-usage patterns, then you can build the longer-term benefit of retaining and recruiting golfers."

Burnett is charged with implementing the Short Course Initiative. He's begun the process at a handful of clubs so far, and he expects each of the company's more than 90 clubs to be up and running this spring.

Burnett says the short-course concept is just one incentive to bolster value for club members. He's also consulted with clubs in his portfolio to create three-hole and six-hole routes, as well as upgrade practice facilities when appropriate.

All the initiatives aim to alleviate the time commitment that traditional golf requires. Golf purists likely will resist many of the changes coming down the pike. But amid slowing demand, shrinking supply and an uncertain economy, the game might need to change to ensure its survivability.

"There are some people who are in total denial about golf and think that it will come back to the level it was," Gore says. "But we (at ClubCorp) don't believe it will unless we change." ■

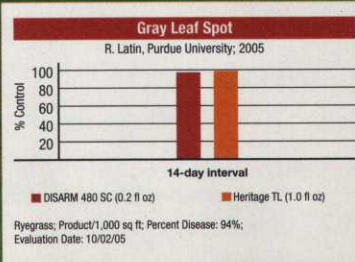
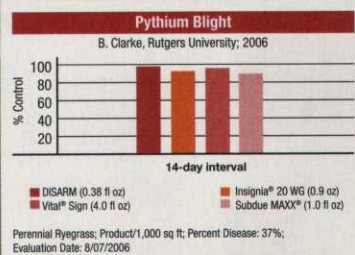
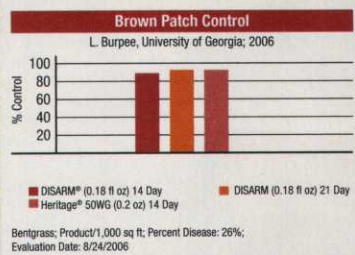
Quick Tips on Building a Short Course

- Create a master plan. Locate new teeing areas on all the holes before implementation.
- Locate new teeing area near a cart path when possible. Tees should be on the edge of the fairway with a good line of sight to the flag, on the left side of the landing area on a dogleg right, for example.
- Eliminate carries over water or menacing bunkers from new tee.
- Actual new tee boxes need not be constructed. Well-marked mow-out areas can suffice, but give it a formal presence with a ball washer and bench.
- If an earth shaper is on property already, say for a renovation, then build tee boxes low, raised about 2 feet, so maintenance cost will be slight.
- About 400 square feet to 500 square feet is sufficient until the club can gauge usage trends of the new tees.
- Grass mounds or decorative grasses can obscure the view of the new tees from the traditional tees and help them blend with existing landscape.
- Distances should range between 60 yards to 110 yards on par 3s, 120 yards to 180 yards on par 4s, and 180 yards to 230 yards on par 5s.

Disarm®

Protection From Tee To Cup™

Greens control with fairway affordability.



Insignia is a registered trademark of BASF. Vital is a registered trademark of Luxembourg Industries (Pamol) LTD. Heritage and Subdue MAXX are registered trademarks of a Syngenta Group Company.



Arysta LifeScience

Harmony In Growth