

## Let's roll

Bocce ball court construction drives revenue for a division of Brewer Landscape Construction.

**WHAT GAME DOES** Pro Football Hall-of-Fame coach John Madden play when enjoying his outdoor living area? Not *Madden NFL 13*. He plays bocce ball.

"John and Virginia have been great in helping to promote the game and our business," says David Brewer, president of Boccebrew Inc., a division of Brewer Landscape Construction, Novato, Calif. "We started including bocce court installations back in the early 1990s, and now it consumes most of our business."

Dubbed "Italian bowling" by some, bocce is played on rectangular outdoor courts measuring 12 feet by 60 feet. The surface is hard-packed by using clay soil and oyster shell with a topping of oyster shell flour, limestone or decomposed granite.

The construction can be as plain or as ornate as a client would like. Some courts are surrounded by 4-foot stone or brick walls; others feature outdoor lighting or trellises to reduce sunshine on the playing area. Thus, the design/build price can range from a few thousand dollars to tens of thousands of dollars.

Although a well-designed bocce court can add value and beauty to outdoor living areas, the real purpose is social, says Brewer. "Folks come over for a barbecue, have a glass of wine or a beer and the balls start rolling."

Maintenance, especially in spring and summer, keeps Brewer's crews busy. "We recommend resurfacing with oyster shell at least once a year," Brewer says. "The oyster shell can be purchased at most farm and garden supply stores. Depending upon the design, applications vary, but regular service costs between \$250 to \$600."

Brewer says that although many of his clients are professionals, "the beauty of the game, and of the simple construction, is that bocce fits almost any pocketbook."



Brewer Landscape Construction has a separate division, Boccebrew Inc., for its bocce court installation business.

Brewer came to bocce court construction by accident. "To be honest, I didn't know anything about bocce until my ex-wife asked me to build a court for her," he says. "My business grew from there, the more people saw it, the more people liked it."

Over the years, Brewer has come to specialize in bocce court construction. "It's really a central part of our business now," he says. "The margins are good, and just as with any other business, the more complex and detailed the build, the more room to increase the margins."

"The real task is to place the court in an area where it becomes aesthetically pleasing and blends seamlessly within the landscape," he says. "We think we do that better than anyone. After all, we've been at it a long time."

Like the build itself, Brewer says, bocce rules can be simple or inordinate. "There is a national and an international federation, with proper rules and sponsored tournaments and all that, but mostly, people keep it simple and have a good time with it," says Brewer. "It's a great lawn game and anyone can learn to play, so it's perfect for families looking to spend some quality time together."

Most of Brewer's business comes from referrals, but Brewer Landscape Construction also promotes its bocce service on its website and by involving itself in the local community. The nearby city of San Rafael has built 10 outdoor courts at a city park and also has two indoor courts. Brewer says, "The game is really growing in popularity."

Ingles is a freelance writer based in Columbus, Ohio.

### >> SERVICE SNAPSHOT

**COMPANY:** Boccebrew Inc./ Brewer Landscape Construction

**HEADQUARTERS:** Novato, Calif.

**SERVICES:** Landscape design and construction, specializing in bocce court design

**CLIENTELE:** 90% residential; 10% commercial

**EMPLOYEES:** Three full-time designers and 10 seasonal maintenance employees

**WHY BOCCO COURT CONSTRUCTION?** According to the World Bocce League (WBL), more than 2 million Americans play bocce regularly and 25 million have tried it at least once. The WBL is working to introduce the game to youth and disabled veterans, to help stimulate a greater following. Bocce is now played in the Special Olympics and the World Corporate Games.