

Clubs Invest in Training Facilities to Attract Members, Generate Revenue

By Pamela Brill | April 29, 2020



Photo Courtesy Somerset G&CC

By creating bigger and better all-purpose space, clubs are turning their golf instruction and practice centers into top-notch facilities that attract more members and make important community connections.



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Practice and training are the keystones of any golf pro. As clubs take a closer look at how to enhance their facilities, instructional spaces designed with the latest hi-tech capabilities and teaching resources not only help fine-tune players' skills, they can generate interest both inside and out of the club.

Off- and On-Campus Training

At Somerset Golf & Country Club in Reno, Nev., players can perfect their golf games year-round, thanks to a recent project that converted an old cart barn into a permanent training facility. Following the move into a new clubhouse, management decided to repurpose a 4,000-sq. ft. space into a structure that provides golfers with a comprehensive learning facility.

"Although simulators are fun and very realistic, nothing would be as beneficial as seeing actual results," says Director of Golf Stuart Smith, PGA, of the club's decision to create a permanent facility. "You can only hit so many balls into a net without boredom setting in."

Conveniently situated about 80 yards from the clubhouse on the west end of the parking lot, the short-game arena was designed to maximize the putting area. An 1,800-sq. ft. putting green is divided into two zones: the lower half is a flat-to-moderate surface with 1-2 slope ratings, while the upper half is more steep and severe, with ratings of 2-3 or greater.

Seven types of synthetic turf provide different conditions from which to putt and chip, and a kidney-shaped white synthetic area acts as a bunker. Three full-swing areas are located around the arena's perimeter: two hit into archery netting, and one into a stand-alone net. Golfers are able to view swing numbers and flight simulation on a 55-inch television screen, via a launch monitor.

To create sufficient illumination for this instructional space, LED lighting is positioned on the building's framework, enabling more interference-free shot options. The entire system is tied into two switches, which operate on a checkerboard pattern "on sunny days and for electricity conservation," notes Smith. Two large sliding doors can be opened in the summer for additional natural light.

Maintaining the vinyl skin of this structure requires regular cleaning using soap and warm water, while the aluminum framing is dusted, the cabinetry is oiled and all synthetic surfaces are vacuumed every other week. Because the building had experienced water seepage in its previous formation, management installed six-inch curbing around the perimeter for adequate waterproofing. With the building monitored via cameras, no additional employees are required for surveillance, and space heaters set on half-hour timers keep electricity costs to a minimum.

Providing this training center to both members and golfers from the University of Nevada, Reno has been a win-win for Somerset (see pg. 30). "There are many opportunities with this building that remain untapped," says Smith. "But as of now, we are all enjoying the opportunity to improve our skills during the winter."

Spring in Their Step



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At Springdale Golf Club in Princeton, N.J., members are roaring with excitement over the latest addition. Last March, the club unveiled the Tiger Performance Center (TPC), marking a partnership with Princeton University's golf teams and Springdale members.



"The Tiger Performance Center has brought a 'wow' factor to our facility. It sets Springdale apart and has assisted the club in securing additional members [without affecting] our operational efficiency." — Anthony Pagliari, PGA, General Manager of Springdale Golf Club

"Being in the Northeast, our weather is always questionable from October through April," says General Manager Anthony Pagliari, PGA. "Given the inclement weather we face throughout the winter, we found a need to offer our student-athletes a place to practice, focus and relax. The TPC provides all of this under one roof."

Located on the northwest corner of the club's practice facility and steps away from the pro shop, the 1,472-sq. ft. center provides a convenient space for players to train and relax. Upon entering the TPC, visitors walk through a small lounge area and into an indoor hitting bay that houses a golf simulator for winter training.

"The simulator screen in this practice area retracts, creating an additional bay to hit shots down-range," notes Pagliari. The main indoor practice room, consisting of three hitting areas, rounds out the center's offerings.

Sporting a solid design, the TPC is outfitted with synthetic green turf flooring in the hitting bays and half-tile, half-carpet in the main meeting area. The wooden structure sits atop a solid concrete foundation, is wrapped in plank siding and topped with asphalt shingles. Springdale GC associates provide regular cleaning services to maintain the property.

Even while builders faced challenging weather through the construction process, Pagliari says the project remained on schedule and resulted in a noteworthy addition to the club's offerings. "The TPC has brought a 'wow' factor to our facility, adding tremendous benefits to all who utilize the space," he notes. "It has assisted the club in securing additional members from surrounding areas, and has not affected our operational efficiency."

In addition to serving as a great source for forging member/university relationships, the TPC provides a hi-tech, easy-access instructional spot for golfers in the offseason. "This facility sets Springdale apart from most others in the area, giving our members and golf professionals a space to practice, learn and teach," says Pagliari. "The state-of-the-art setup and technology provide an experience that Springdale would never have enjoyed before."

Set for the Next 100 Years

Priming for its centennial anniversary, Highland Golf & Country Club in Indianapolis, Ind., recently updated its facility with an all-weather instructional space that opened in February 2018.

"One of the goals that came from [our strategic plan] was to differentiate ourselves from many clubs in the Indy area," says Head Golf Professional Bill Pollert, PGA. "Being in a northern climate and traditionally not [being] able to offer year-round golf amenities, this seemed like a great opportunity."



The 9,200-sq. ft. building is comprised of 5,000 sq. ft. of practice space, including a 3,200-sq. ft. short-game room that has a sloped putting green and chipping surrounds. Four additional hitting bays designed with heaters, lights and garage doors open into a practice range.

A fifth bay is a 600-sq. ft. private room reserved for teaching and clubfitting, complete with a hi-tech setup, three-camera system and two 50-inch monitors to see video and data playback. A member lounge includes two simulator bays, along with a service bar and five televisions, with a separate lounge and team room for neighboring Butler University's golf teams located on the other side of the building.

Highland's instructional space is just off the driving range, enabling golfers to hit balls into the practice range regardless of weather conditions. "Additionally, we wanted to make sure that members could drive their cars close to the building, to avoid any long walks during the cold and snowy winter months that may deter people from using the building," says Pollert.

Weather also played a part in determining the building's placement on the property. "We wanted to do our best to position the building so golfers would not be hitting into the prevailing [west] wind, which is the direction our range sits," he adds. This locale also ensures that golfers don't hit balls into surrounding areas of the golf course or towards a nearby maintenance facility.

With such a thoughtful approach to layout and design, Highland Golf's practice facility has extended its usefulness beyond golf. Special club events are held on the premises, as are private member parties that average 8 to 12 per year. "This flexibility has been a major benefit and something that ensures the building is constantly being used," notes Pollert.

To accommodate flexible scheduling, motion sensors have been installed to activate lighting. Hitting bays are heated via timers, eliminating the need for additional staff and reducing utility costs.

Thanks to consistent use of this space, Highland's club membership has increased over 20 percent during the past two years, which Pollert attributes in large part to the training building. "Due to the design of the building and the fact that we have controlled costs and staffing levels throughout the year, the building also operates as a profit center for the club," he says. "We hope to grow this moderately in the future."



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Creating Community Appeal

At DuPont Country Club in Wilmington, Del., adding instructional space for membership has turned into a business opportunity that reaches beyond its core membership. After the club was purchased in 2018, management decided to enhance its longstanding reputation as a club, but with a wider reach.

"Our goal was to turn this into a private club with a public purpose," says Director of Golf John Burke. A new indoor facility and teaching academy, along with a fitness center and two pools, opened last November, with an outdoor driving range and short-game facility due to open later this spring.



"We wanted the main indoor facility to allow members to play golf year-round and to develop a teaching-academy model that mirrors world-class instruction for juniors and adults." — John Burke, Director of Golf of DuPont Country Club

The 9,000-sq. ft., ranch-style instructional space boasts six indoor bays—two for teaching and four exclusively for member use—and is located 120 yards from the main clubhouse. Entrants to the indoor facility are brought into a bar and lounge area that sits 55 people.

Wooden flooring and vaulted ceilings create a spacious layout for both instruction and recreational purposes. The lounge area leads directly into the member bays, where garage doors provide easy access to the outside for hitting balls into the driving range. Down the hallway to the right are two teaching bays with 3-D analysis, one of which also acts a clubfitting bay.

With such comprehensive teaching capabilities in place, the indoor facility's design speaks to its dual purpose. "We wanted the main indoor facility to allow members to play golf year-round and to develop a teaching-academy model that mirrors world-class instruction for juniors and adults," notes Burke.

In addition to its own DuPont junior academy, the club partners with five Wilmington-area high school golf teams and the University of Delaware's golfers. High school players assist in DuPont's youth academy program and are able to take advantage of internships and other employment opportunities. The club also partners with the Special Olympics of Delaware and The First Tee of Delaware, and has contracts to host a tournament for the American Junior Golf Association and the Peggy Kirk Bell Girls Golf Tour, further cementing its reputation as a local resource for up-and-coming golfers.

With a vibrant and active golfing community utilizing these new facilities, DuPont's membership has received a boost since the indoor center's opening. The practice space has also generated tremendous buzz in the Greater Wilmington and Philadelphia area and prompted golf pros to seek out the club as a potential teaching resource.

Challenge Accepted

Like most renovation projects, designing and implementing plans for golf instructional space has its share of headaches and setbacks. Here's how some clubs overcame adversity to get the job done.

Cost initially became a prohibiting factor for Somerset Golf & Country Club in Reno, Nev. when management wanted to construct a training center for members and student golfers. By tapping into local resources, the club opted to partner with the men's and women's golf teams from the University of Nevada, Reno, which were in need of an indoor facility for winter practices.

Thanks to financial assistance from the university's golf team alumni and athletic boosters, the project was able to be completed. "It is truly a shared amenity for our members and the university golf teams," says Director of Golf Stuart Smith, PGA. "On winter days and evenings, you can find both the



A partnership with the University of Nevada, Reno helped Somerset G&CC overcome cost hurdles for its training center; installing turf without a concrete slab created a true short-game space at Highland G&CC.

men's and women's university teams utilizing the arena, staying sharp and improving their skill."

Creating a short-game space that is ideal for not only putting, but also chipping and pitch shots, might have been a tall order, but the design team at Highland Golf & Country Club in Indianapolis, Ind. was determined to get it done—and done right. Seeking out a turf installer that used unconventional methods was the trick to putting this dream into motion.

"Instead of putting the product over the concrete slab of the building like most indoor surfaces, they left the ground 'as is' and then built up the sub-layer from there," explains Head Golf Professional Bill Pollert, PGA.

The approach involved starting with dirt from the ground under the building and then adding a mixture of different sizes of rocks, more dirt, and sand by hand. Finally, the turf was installed directly on top of the sub floor, allowing for different chip shots.

"When the ball lands on the green, it reacts almost identically as it would on an actual green on the golf course," Pollert says. **C+RB**

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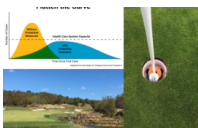
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