

6 Must-Have Amenities • Greenest Clubhouses ▶

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MOST



POWERFUL PEOPLE **in** Golf

We identify the 30 most powerful people in the U.S. golf business, and also take a look at the leaders in Asia.



6 must-have amenities

While quality golf courses are still vital, club members are demanding more facilities and a wider range of services.

BY REBECCA LARSEN

This fall, Columbine Country Club opened a 56,000-square-foot, three-level clubhouse for its 600 members.

The new facility at the Denver-area club includes:

- Indoor and outdoor dining with double fireplaces and seating for 300, as well as a wine cellar for tastings and private dinners.
- A dedicated kids space with lots of activities. “It’s not just babysitting,” said General

Manager Michael Bratcher.

- A room filled with golf simulators, as well as other video games and movies for private parties.
- A 5,000-square-foot fitness center with a movement studio and a massage room.

Columbine is an example of how members’ expectations are changing when it comes to facilities at golf clubs. For many years, the amenities at clubs were all related to golf: How beautiful is the scenery? Is the course challenging? What is the signature hole? How is the condition of the fairways and greens?

But today’s courses and clubs have gone beyond that. Resorts and private clubs, particularly, keep piling on new luxuries and sources of entertainment, from golf simulators for use when there’s snow on the ground to wine cellars for private dinners and tastings.

Public courses often can’t compete with what country clubs offer in expensive amenities. But many public courses still pride themselves on providing a close imitation of a luxurious private experience.

So, here are six must-have 21st-century amenities. Many public courses we talked with are adding more and more services similar to

those at private clubs, while private clubs are trying to draw the public into their properties to increase revenue.

1. Scenic locations and quality clubhouses

These classic fundamentals have always been a major attraction to golfers. But the clubhouses, particularly in the private club world, keep becoming more lavish.

Columbine is not the only course in Colorado that is attempting to up its appeal with a new clubhouse and an expanded range of amenities.

The Club at Ravenna, a residential property and private golf course that ran into financial problems during the Great Recession, is building its first real clubhouse, said Kevin Collins, managing partner for the development.

After working its way out of bankruptcy and operating out of temporary quarters, the development will start with a small footprint with hopes of expanding later. A 4,700-square-foot fitness center will soon be completed, and work on the new golf clubhouse will get underway. Eventually there will be a 22,500-square-foot main clubhouse.



THE NEW CLUBHOUSE at Columbine Country Club offers a range of new amenities for members.

2. Expanded practice areas and player development programs

Making teaching and practice facilities available to both men and women is a key element in growing a greater pool of new golfers.

Trilogy Golf Club at Vistancia, part of a Shea Homes development in Peoria, Ariz., offers a lesson plan for \$75 a month designed to attract residents and non-residents. For that price, students can take four classes a month as well as get daily access to the practice facility. To make it easier to schedule classes, 18 class times are available each month, General Manager Scott Mattiello said.

3. Layouts designed to draw different levels of golfers

At a Shea Homes Trilogy golf club in Ocala, Fla., architects Tripp Davis and Tom Lehmann designed a course aimed at attracting golfers who find the traditional 18 holes too much, said General Manager Brian Woodruff. It's a hybrid course that golfers can play five ways. And, it's built on 50 acres, as opposed to the 100 or more acres needed for a conventional course.

The five play options are:

- An 18-hole, par-54 skills course that's challenging for players of all levels with holes



TRILOGY GOLF CLUB AT VISTANCIA, part of a Shea Homes development in Peoria, Ariz., offers a lesson plan for \$75 a month designed to attract residents and non-residents.

that vary in length from 63 to 200 yards.

- A more traditional 18-hole, 6,600-yard-long, par-72 routing that players can use to help establish a USGA handicap.
- A 6-hole, par-18 course that plays in less than an hour.
- A 6-hole, par-24 loop that plays in about 90 minutes.
- An option that allows players to pick the tees and holes they wish to play.

Mondays through Fridays, the course is set up for those who want to play it as a skills course. On weekends, it's set up for players who want a traditional-length experience.

"It's a concept we expect to see grow in the future," Woodruff said.

About 20 of these hybrid courses have been

built around the country in the past few years. Bandon Dunes Golf Resort in Oregon, Pine Valley in New Jersey and Ak-Chin Southern Dunes Golf Club near Phoenix all have similar layouts.

While building a separate short course might be financially out of

reach for many golf clubs, a number of them are adding sets of far-forward tees to accommodate beginners and less-skilled golfers.

4. Restaurants designed to compete with outside dining spots

"Restaurants must have a stand-alone quality," said Kate Sheppard, senior marketing manager for BlueStar Resort & Golf. "They can't just be a place where a golfer runs in between holes to grab a burger. And they need to offer great beers and wine."

At a public course, one goal should be to attract customers who aren't golfers. Restaurants can do that by providing the kind of dining that people desire most — often casual restaurants with lots of small plates and appetizers. Where the climate allows for it, outdoor dining is being added. Fire pits seem to be just about as essential as pizza ovens and salad bars these days.

It's not just about dining at these restaurants; it's also about entertainment and views. At Granite Links Golf Club, a private club near Boston, a summertime patio restaurant in a tent was opened on the highest point of the property. Called the Crossing 9's Patio & Bar, it's open to the public as well as members. Revenue has grown to almost \$2 million a year.

Golf courses have some of the most expensive scenic settings in the world, so it makes sense to take advantage of them by opening



TRILOGY GOLF CLUB, Ocala, Fla



GRANITE LINKS GOLF CLUB'S outdoor patio and bar, located in a scenic spot on the property near Boston, has grown food and beverage revenue to almost \$2 million annually for the club.

such as bocce ball and pickleball. At Desert Willow Golf Resort, a municipal course with resort facilities in Palm Desert, Calif., the traditional golf course is also the home course of the American FootGolf League.

Footgolf is played using soccer balls on a traditional golf course with 21-inch cups. Desert Willow allows this game as business and pace of play allows. Spaces and times not used for golf yield additional revenue for the resort, said Derek White, general manager.

Probably no other golf-oriented development has more opportunities for recreation than The Cliffs in the Blue Ridge Mountains of the Carolinas. Each of the seven communities in The Cliffs has a golf course. Members, many of whom have homes in the development, can play all the courses. Last year, members played more than 107,000 rounds of golf on the seven courses. The Cliffs has made an effort to attract more women and children to golf by building forward tees on courses. But there is a lot more to do than golf at The Cliffs.

Each community has its own swimming pools, but one of the most popular water recreation areas is Lake Keowee, a 26-mile-long lake that features kayaking and paddleboarding. Last year some 4,000 users visited the lake, including members who drove an hour to reach the lake because their homes are at the

restaurants to the views.

For example, a clubhouse being built at The Club at Ravenna will have a partly covered terrace on its rooftop, featuring beverage service, a fire pit and a bandstand for concerts. It should be a great place to relax after a round of golf in the summer.

“But Colorado residents love to be outside in the winter as well,” Collins said.

Columbine Country Club also will have a rooftop viewing area.

5. Other games and sports to attract more people and make better use of facilities

“Private clubs are transforming themselves into something like the YMCA with many different types of games and sports,” said Kevin Stark, chief operating officer of Club Specialists, a consulting firm in Tallahassee, Fla.

He pointed to the growing popularity of CrossFit and the possibility that a club could lease some of its unused space to a similar fitness program.

Public clubs are also adding more sports,

far ends of the development.

“It’s an area that provides recreation for all members of the family,” said David Sawyer, managing partner of The Cliffs Clubs.

6. Spas and fitness centers

Many Trilogy golf properties include spa treatment rooms in their fitness areas. Besides working out, you can have a massage or hot-stone treatment or have your hair and nails done. These facilities are open to the public as well as members, but members get preferred rates.

At The Cliffs there are fitness centers, a wellness program and personal trainers, as well as massage therapists and aestheticians. Want to see more of the outdoors? The Cliffs has an outdoor exploration program that offers five hikes a month into the mountains and forests. You don’t need to cycle in a gym, there’s a cycling program led by a cyclist who competed 17 times in the Tour de France.

In the past few years, golf properties and clubs around the country have made a lot of changes to attract new business as they recover from the recession. Management and members are investing heavily in the future and diversifying to meet the economic challenges of the future.



BOATING ON LAKE KEOWEE is just one of the variety of activities offered for members at The Cliffs.