



# GRAA

Welcome to the July issue of digital *Golf Range Magazine*!

Inside the July issue, you will find the following features:

- GRAA Annual Awards: Call for Entries and Applications - The GRAA has revamped its awards program to include four categories instead of two: Top 50 Golf Range/*Stand Alone Facilities*; Top 50 Golf Range/*Public Facilities*; Top 50 Golf Range/*Private Facilities*; Top 50 *Growth of the Game Teaching Professionals*. Submissions due by September 15, 2012.
- Video File: Adding Range Lights Has Boosted Profits at Haggin Oaks. See the transformation on video.
- Traffic Builders: Value at Both Ends of the Skill Spectrum - Providing services and infrastructures that cater to the customer—whether they break 80 or can't break an egg—pays off in the long run.
- Marketing: Junior Camps Aren't Junior-Golf-As-Usual - Organizing junior activities in summertime means getting creative to add the fun and freedom a true “golf camp” should offer.

Keep it fun and thanks for supporting the GRAA.

Best Regards,

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*Golf Ranges: Where the Fun Starts*

# Golf Range



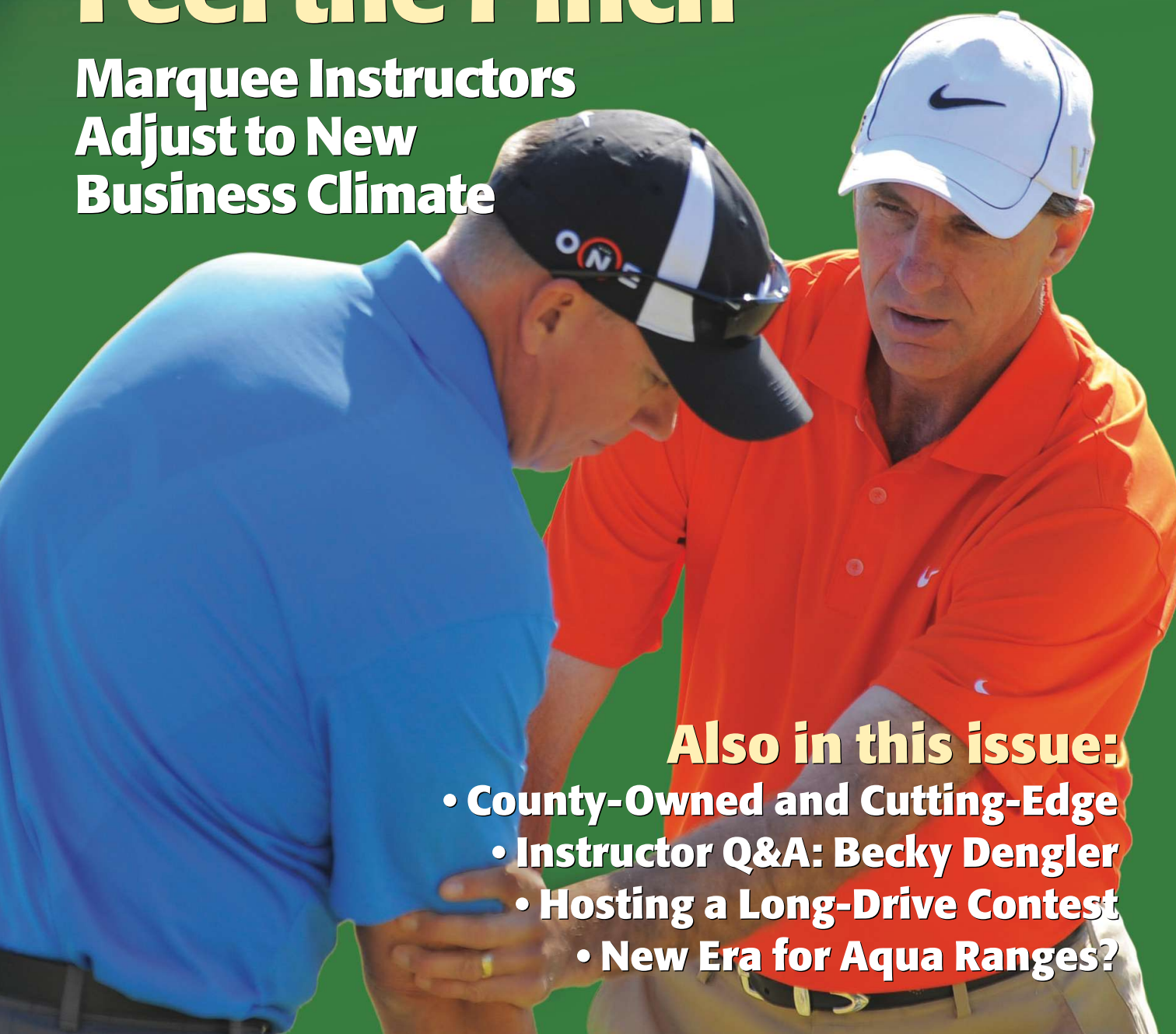
**M A G A Z I N E**

Volume 20, No. 7  
July 2012

PRACTICE • TEACHING • FITTING • MARKETING

## Top Teachers Feel the Pinch

**Marquee Instructors  
Adjust to New  
Business Climate**



**Also in this issue:**

- County-Owned and Cutting-Edge
- Instructor Q&A: Becky Dengler
- Hosting a Long-Drive Contest
- New Era for Aqua Ranges?









# Page 30 Garden State Golf Mecca













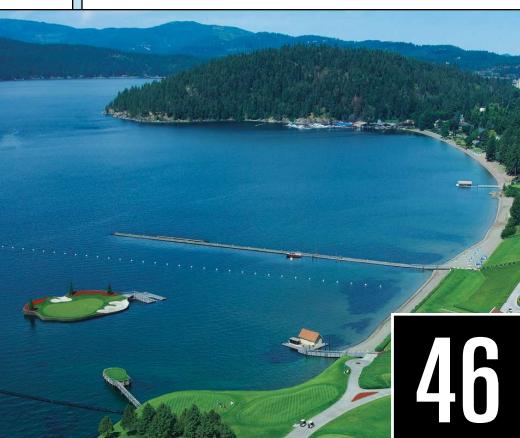
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# Golf Range

M A G A Z I N E

Volume 20, Number 7



July 2012

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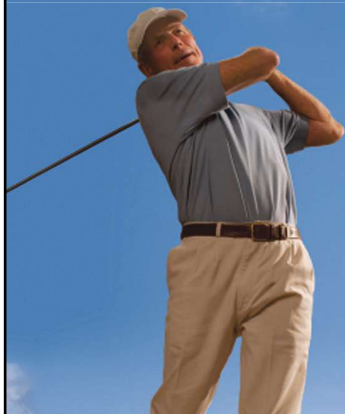
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## Big Names

**Y**ou don't need to have an MBA or work on Madison Avenue to know that we live in a brand-crazy society. As consumers, we define ourselves by our preferences and affiliations. Are you a Coke person or a Pepsi person? Apple or Android? Budweiser or Miller? The answers to these questions are often heartfelt, and debates between aficionados of different brands can take the level of arguments over religion or politics. And when you choose your brands, they become *your brands*.

For golf ranges, leveraging the power and influence of brands can be a way to reach the ultimate goals of bringing customers to your facility and creating brand loyalty of your own. In the case of a handful of facilities such as New Jersey's Galloping Hill Golf Course (page 30), creating a branded fitting and retail facility adjacent to the range can help make your range the go-to place for club fitting in your area. At Galloping Hill, TaylorMade part-



nered with the golf facility to build a branded Performance Lab (*above*), one of only seven in the country. While the Performance Lab will likely do strong business on its own, selling TaylorMade clubs, the recognition and prestige that comes from having a strong relationship with one of golf's best-known brands will surely have a halo effect on Galloping Hill's Learning Center instruction business, sales of other brands of golf clubs and overall use of the range.

Your range can benefit from brand affiliations in other, smaller ways that can still catch the attention of brand-savvy golfers. If your teaching professional has club fitting carts from different manufacturers, make sure they're visible to consumers and mentioned prominently in marketing materials. And if you have a PGA Professional who plays competitively and has a staff agreement with a particular brand or two, that can also be played up to your customers.

Showcasing your brand affiliations can give your range instant recognition with consumers, and also serve to bolster your own marketing efforts. For example, Galloping Hill will benefit from every TaylorMade commercial that runs during a PGA Tour telecast, and every time a TaylorMade staffer is seen wearing a hat or carrying a bag with the company's logo. By elevating the status of the brands carried at your facility, you can catch a free ride on the multimillion-dollar advertising budgets of golf's biggest names.

In the end, the brand you really want to build is your own. I encourage you to read the rest of this month's *Golf Range Magazine* for additional ways to make sure that when golfers in your area are asked, "Where do you go to hit balls?", their answer is as personal as the soda they drink, the phone they use or the car they drive.

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*Golf Ranges: Where the Fun Starts*





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# Identifying “Frequents” and Attracting the Newcomers

Stand-alone golf ranges welcome more newcomers than on-course ranges do. The intimidation factor is a likely cause of that—a message to course owners about putting newbies at ease. **BY TONY STARKS**

One of the keys to running a successful business is knowing your customer—in particular, knowing your best customers. However, understanding the prospect you haven't attracted yet is also important. A study by the National Golf Foundation (NGF) identified key characteristics of frequent range users at both stand-alone and on-course facilities. It defines frequent users as those who, over the previous 12 months, visited a stand-alone range six-plus times or visited an on-course range at least nine times.

The study grouped range visitors by age, gender, income and average number of visits, then stated the ratio of core golfers vs. occasional and non-golfers. The fact that fewer non-golfers or occasional golfers frequent on-course facilities supports the idea that less experienced players are intimidated by the golf course atmosphere. Things like dress code as well as unfamiliarity with the Rules and etiquette lead newer golfers to the more relaxed stand-alone facilities, where they can get away with wearing jeans and a tee-shirt while skulling every third shot.

In 2011, according to NGF data, more than 3 million new golfers en-

**Get Golf Ready participants have contributed \$63 million to the golf economy in three years.**

tered the game. And for the golf course operation wishing to get a piece of that new-golfer pie, defusing the intimidation factor is a big challenge. One way

to begin overcoming it is by hosting introductory programs such as the PGA of America's nationally-branded Get Golf Ready initiative—a series of five group lessons offered at an affordable rate. Not only do programs like Get Golf Ready strengthen the industry as a whole by bringing new people to the game, they also strengthen your facility's bottom line. Research from The PGA of America indicates that 78 percent of people who complete Get Golf Ready continue to play the game within the first year. In addition, Get Golf Ready participants have contributed a total of \$63 million to the golf economy in the first three years of its existence.

## New Golfers are Consumers!

Among Get Golf Ready participants who completed the program and continued to play

What GGR New Golfers Spend in the First Year	Average Spend
Range Fees	\$91
Green Fees	\$330
Food & Beverage	\$125
Additional Lessons	\$64
Equipment Purchases	\$248
Apparel Purchases	\$126

**Total Spend for Each New Golfer \$984**  
(not including \$99 GGR Fee)

“Get Golf Ready is a win-win for the facility, for the instructors and for the students,” says Sherri McDonald, PGA/LPGA director of instruction at Eagle Ridge Golf Academy in Lakewood, N.J., where she taught 694 Get Golf Ready students in 2011. “We’re giving people the opportunity to become golfers for the rest of their lives and helping boost our revenue at the same time. It’s working.” ■

## Frequent Customer Profile

Frequent customers make up 26% of all stand-alone users but are responsible for 66% of all visits.

*Frequent stand-alone customers (6+ visits last 12 mo.)*

Number of Frequent Customers	4,600,000
Average Age	41.7
Average Visits per Year	13.2
Male	83.0%
Income \$75K+	35.4%
Core Golfers	57.0%
Occasional Golfers	24.0%
Non-Golfers	19.0%

Frequent customers make up 28% of all on-course users but are responsible for 72% of all visits.

*Frequent on-course customers (9+ visits last 12 mo.)*

Number of Frequent Customers	5,500,000
Average Age	45.5
Average Visits per Year	23.2
Male	82.1%
Income \$75K+	42.2%
Core Golfers	81.0%
Occasional Golfers	8.0%
Non-Golfers	11.0%

*Golf Practice Facilities in the U.S.: A Summary of Supply and Demand*



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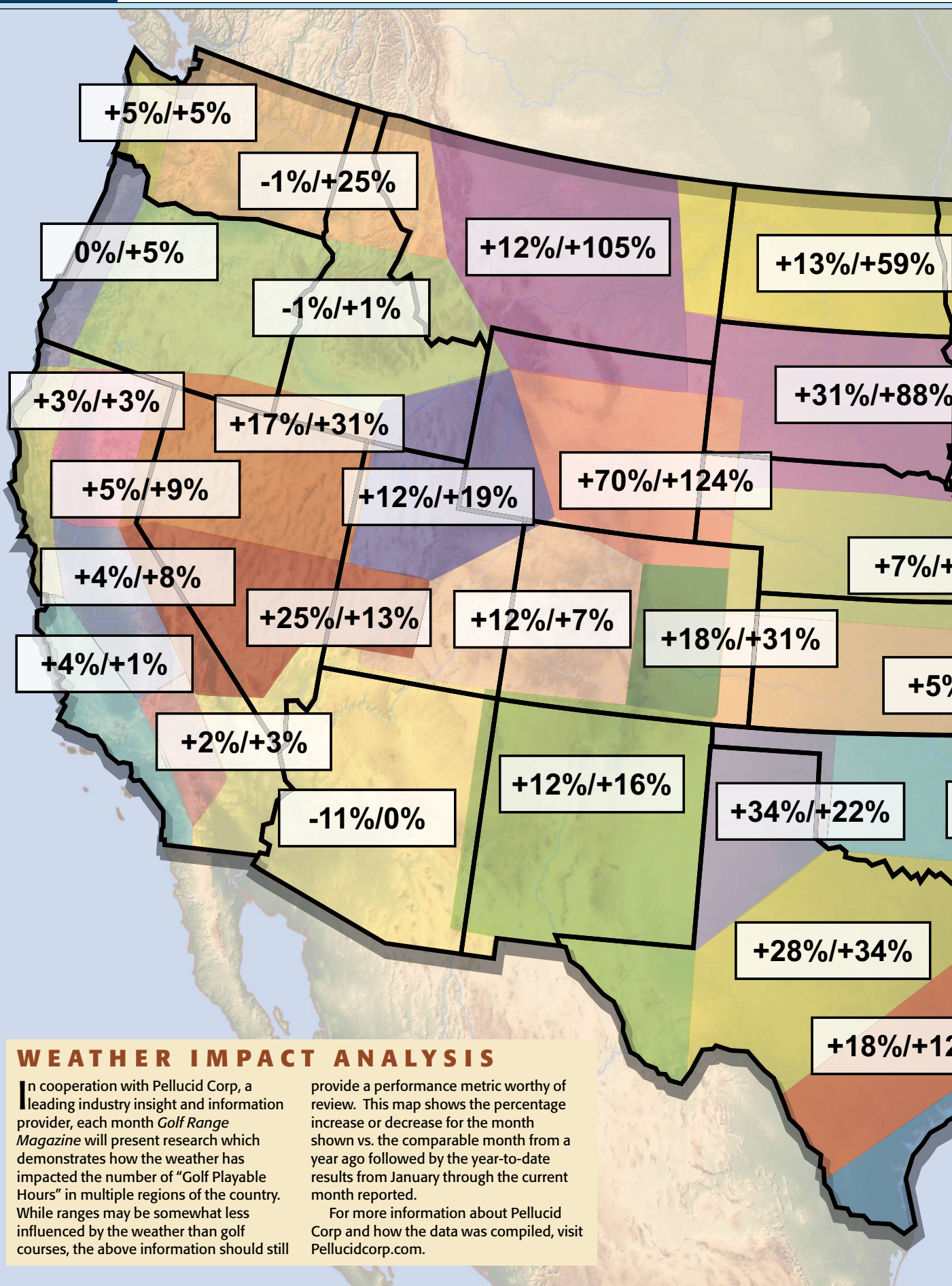


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## WEATHER IMPACT ANALYSIS

In cooperation with Pellucid Corp, a leading industry insight and information provider, each month *Golf Range Magazine* will present research which demonstrates how the weather has impacted the number of "Golf Playable Hours" in multiple regions of the country. While ranges may be somewhat less influenced by the weather than golf courses, the above information should still

provide a performance metric worthy of review. This map shows the percentage increase or decrease for the month shown vs. the comparable month from a year ago followed by the year-to-date results from January through the current month reported.

For more information about Pellucid Corp and how the data was compiled, visit [Pellucidcorp.com](http://Pellucidcorp.com).



## Golf Playable Hours: May

Each region includes: Month % / YTD %

The map displays the following data for each region (from top to bottom, left to right):

- Northwest: +3% / +54%
- West: -39%
- Southwest: +21% / +48%
- North Central: +15% / +92%
- Central: +13% / +68%
- South Central: -4% / +36%
- East Central: +5% / +32%
- Midwest: +13% / +59%
- South: -1% / +19%
- Florida: -10% / -2%
- Atlantic: +5% / +34%
- SE: -3% / +21%
- NE: +18% / +66%
- Mid-Atlantic: +10% / +42%
- South Atlantic: -1% / +27%
- DC: 0% / +45%
- VA: +4% / +27%
- NC: -1% / +27%
- GA: -1% / +1%
- FL: -1% / +1%
- ME: +20% / +45%
- MA: +5% / +41%

**+/-100% = increase/decrease exceeds 100% due to small base value**  
**N/A = out-of-season period and not reported**

WWW.GOLFRANGE.ORG JULY 2012 | GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE | 13

**N/A = out-of-season period  
and not reported**



# Golf Range Association of America Launches 2012 Awards Applications

It's time—The GRAA Awards season for 2012 kicks off as high-quality ranges and skilled teaching professionals are invited to fill out online applications that will qualify them for recognition.

The Golf Range Association of America is ready to bestow accolades on the top range facilities and top growth-of-the-game teaching professionals in America. Under new leadership, the GRAA has revamped its awards program to include four categories instead of two. Those categories are: Top 50 Golf Range/*Stand Alone Facilities*; Top 50 Golf Range/*Public Facilities*; Top 50 Golf Range/*Private Facilities*; Top 50 *Growth of the Game Teaching Professionals*.

The process for application has been updated as well. In addition to submitting the required forms online, all applicants will need to provide a video (via a YouTube link at no more than three minutes in length) that describes why they believe their facility is deserving or how they as a teaching professional are growing the game. Applications without a video will not be considered.

You can start the application process right away at [www.GolfRange.org](http://www.GolfRange.org) (See AWARDS option in top navigation bar) or by clicking through to the following links:

**GRAA Top 50 Golf Range/*Stand Alone Facilities*:**

**GRAA Top 50 Golf Range/*Public Facilities*:**

**GRAA Top 50 Golf Range/*Private Facilities*:**

**GRAA Top 50 *Growth of the Game Teaching Professionals*:**

The applications and videos are due by September 15, 2012 and will then be reviewed by the GRAA. Award winners will be notified by November 10, 2012. The award winners will be listed in our January 2013 issue and receive invitations to an Awards reception to be held at the 2013 PGA Merchandise Show.

If you have any questions, please contact Patrick Cherry by phone at 215-914-2071 or by e-mail at [pcherry@golfrange.org](mailto:pcherry@golfrange.org). ■



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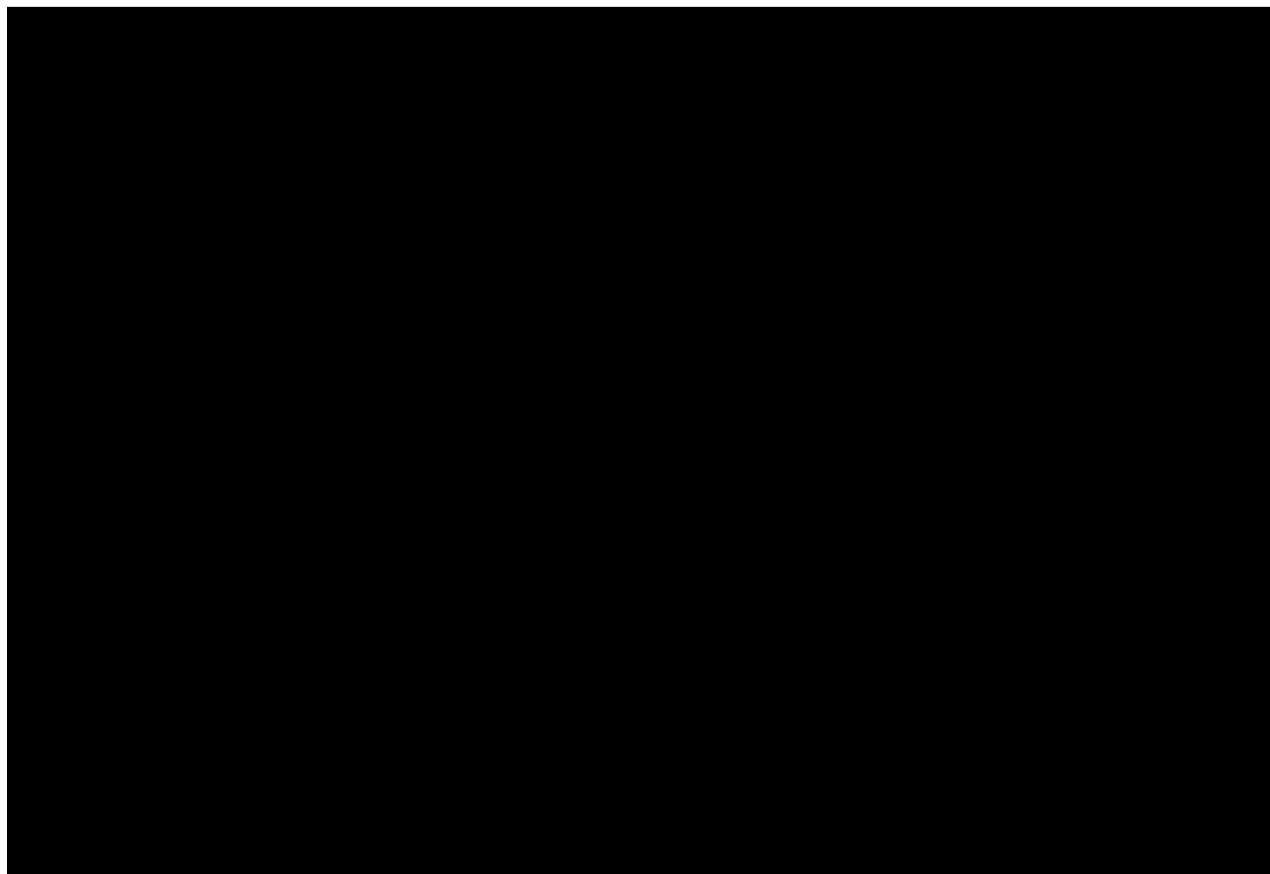


# Haggin Oaks Range Lights up a New Market

For ranges able to clear permit hurdles and install lighting for night play, there's a great chance to tap into a totally separate customer base. Here's how one California course made the leap.

**G**olf managers at the Haggin Oaks Golf Complex in Sacramento, Calif., don't let any grass—or even artificial turf—grow under their feet. Among the recent upgrades at this award-laden facility are 20,000 square feet of synthetic turf on five state-of-the-art raised target greens. This is top-grade material—able to resist compacting for realistic shots that hold. Golfers hitting to these targets won't be seen bending down, either, thanks to an automatic tee-up system that sets Haggin Oaks apart from the competition.

But as you will see and hear in this video hosted by PGA director of golf Mike Woods, the biggest revelation at this range is driven by installation of light towers that allow after-dark play (in fact, 24-hour play, May through September.) Is some of that nocturnal hitting done by low-handicap types who want to stay sharp? Yes, but only a fraction. Watch the video and find out what actually happens when the switch gets flipped and Haggin Oaks hitting bays fill up—it will shed light on an important truth about golf's appeal and the game's chances for growth. ■



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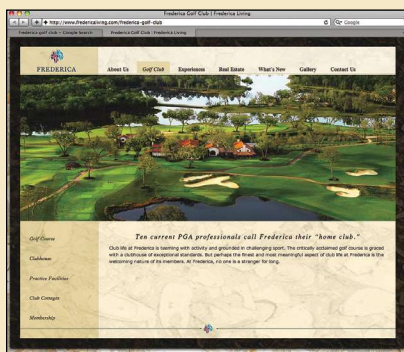


# A Wide Range of News

Keeping you up to speed on trends in the golf practice-and-learning sector



Memorize an equation, hole some five-footers – that's the formula for education and fun at the **PGA Center for Golf Learning & Performance** in Port St. Lucie, Fla. The golf complex, renowned for its practice facilities, has welcomed 18 middle-school students from Port St. Lucie to take part in the inaugural EAGLES Camp – which stands for Educating about Golf While Learning Engineering and Science. Along with mastering proper coil and weight transfer, the students get a heavy dose of what educators now call STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) learning.... **Frederica Golf Club** in St. Simons Island, Ga., is the home



course of nearly a dozen PGA Tour players. The acclaimed club and community has announced plans to build a new year-round golf learning center. Scheduled to open in October of 2012, the Center will be adjacent to a 35-acre practice grounds that Tom Fazio has described as "one of the best in the country." The new Center will boast a full menu of services, including indoor teaching bays, computer-based swing analysis, a launch monitor, clubfitting, club repair and lessons.... "On the Range," the newly acclaimed **Golf Channel** program that takes viewers inside-the-ropes at the driving range of each week's PGA Tour stop and looks at how players prepare for golf tournaments, has a blog in which host Gary Williams

## The Summer issue of GR: *Golf Range Magazine*

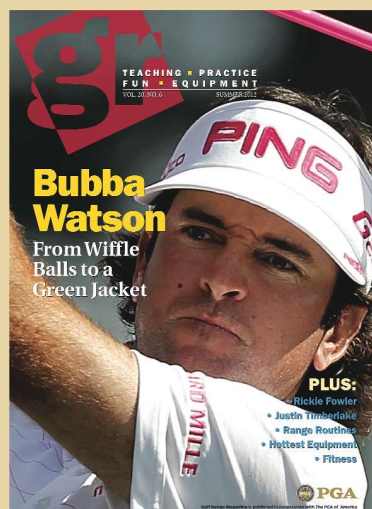
The summer is upon us and the golf season is in full swing. And as golfers continue to roll into your facilities to work on their full swings, as well as other areas of their game, be sure to offer them a free digital copy of *GR: Golf Range Magazine*. The special consumer issue contains practice tips from some of the biggest names in golf including Masters Champion Bubba Watson and England's Ian Poulter. It also gives readers an inside look at a very unique range session conducted by one of the PGA Tour's hottest young stars, Rickie Fowler.

The issue also includes range advice from some of the game's foremost instructors such as 2011 PGA Teacher of the Year Mike Malaska, Suzy Whaley from TPC River Highlands and Eric Hogge from the PGA Center for Golf Learning & Performance.

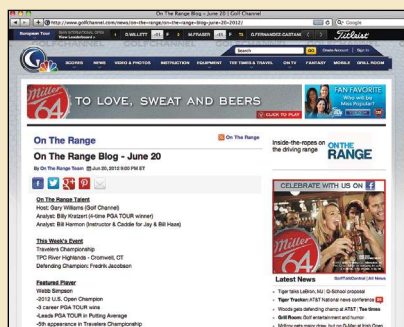
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<http://www.gr-golfrange.com/issue/69750>

**The range: It's where the fun starts!**



along with analysts Billy Kratzert and Bill Harmon post about recent occurrences on the PGA Tour. Readers can also chime in with comments.



<http://www.golfchannel.com/news/on-the-range/on-the-range-blog-june-20-2012/>.... Speaking of Golf Channel, the driving range at **Holiday Valley Resort** in Ellicottville, N.Y., turned into the set of "Big Break" during a Play Golf America Day on Sunday, June 17. The contest was free to enter, and featured "Big Break" staples such as The Wall and Break the Glass. The event attracted hundreds of attendees.... Titleist 913 drivers were spotted on the range at **Congressional Country Club** the Monday prior to the AT&T National tournament. The company's new 913

model is not a radical departure from the 910 series it will replace. Reporters who peeked at the new driver saw that it retains its predecessor's glossy black crown, traditional pear shape, simple alignment marks and SureFit Tour adjustable hosel system.... The Tommy Hilfiger Group, which is wholly owned by PVH Corp., announced its sponsorship of the **Golf Club at Chelsea Piers**. The iconic Manhattan golf range is located along the Hudson River as part of massive sports complex for urban folk. The apparel brand's two-year Chelsea Piers sponsorship deal includes prime advertising placement for the spring 2013 golf campaign featuring Keegan Bradley. ■



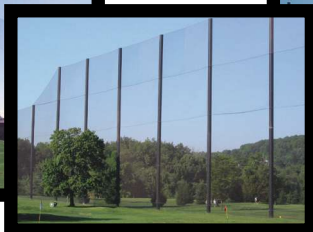
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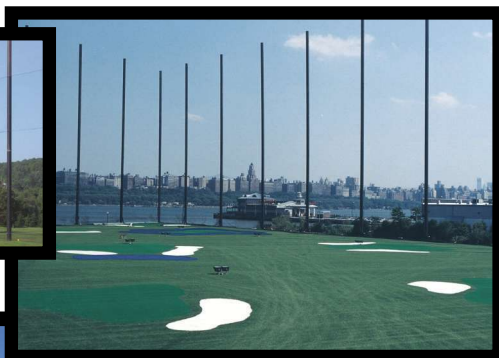
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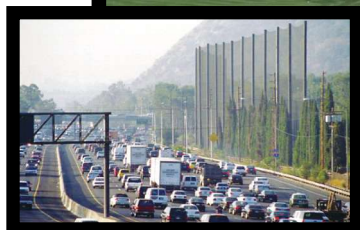
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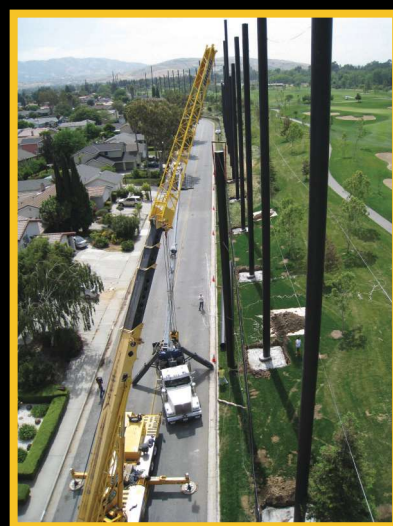
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**GRAA**

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# Value at Both Ends of the Skill Spectrum

Providing services and infrastructures that cater to the customer—whether they break 80 or can't break an egg—pay off in the long run **TONY STARKS**

**Y**our clientele could be serious golfers or wide-eyed newbies, one rule still applies: The services you offer should speak to their needs. To make that happen, you need an accurate read on who these customers are and what they're after. The next step is execution—addressing those identified wants. This month, Traffic Builders takes a look at how two stand-alone facilities on opposite sides of the country—one with a clientele of serious golfers and another whose patrons are newer to golf—provide services that hit the mark and keep business humming.

## No Frills (Just Little Extras) for Serious Players

The Golf Learning Center of New England is a go-to spot for serious players intent on honing their skills—so says facility manager Tom Foster. Lower-handicap golfers arrive to find plenty of practice space and amenities that include a 12,000-square-foot putting green, multiple chipping greens, various practice bunkers and an affordable membership program (\$475 a year for individuals). It's no wonder the Norton, Mass. facility is a

favorite among locals.

"We don't sell food here and we have a very small golf shop," says Foster. "The only thing that brings you here is the chance to practice your golf, and that's why the serious players come to us."

In 2011, the facility decided to expand their offerings even further by adding a nine-hole pitch and putt course.

"We had the space to build the short course and thought it would be something nice to offer our

customers," says Foster. "The course has bentgrass greens and we keep the tee boxes manicured. It's an ideal setup for practicing all the scoring shots."

The value of the par-3 layout to your short game is obvious, but it's also a great solution for anyone short on time or short on cash. Players can fly around the nine-hole layout in 30 to 45 minutes for the extremely tempting price of \$5. If there's time left over, the player will zip through a few extra holes—without ever getting frowns or a hassle from the staff.

"We're giving that player an inexpensive and quick way to get their golf fix," says Foster. "They appreciate that."

Research has indicated that time and cost are two of the major reasons why people play less golf, or don't play at all. The short course idea is a good way to combat that.

Another way that the Golf Learning Center of New England has helped separate itself from the competition and attract the serious player is by



implementing the “give a little to earn a lot” philosophy. Patrons will always find a scattering of range balls on the practice greens, around the chipping greens and in the bunkers for golfers to use at any time, with no charge.

“Oftentimes people won’t want to hit a large bucket. They’ll just want to putt or try a lot of little wedge shots, and they can do that here,” comments Foster. “It’s for different reasons: Maybe they’re injured, or on their lunch break so they putt and chip before heading back to work. Once they get in that routine, it’s not likely that they’re going to go somewhere else to hit their range balls in the future. So it’s our way of building loyalty.”

### Demos on the Range

In most cases, beginning golfers do not own a set of golf clubs. So when they decide to make that first trip to the driving range, unless they have a friend they can borrow clubs from, they’re likely out of luck. In a pinch, they could pull some unwanted or even abused old relic from the spare-club bin. However, there are alternatives.

Range facilities that provide rental and demo clubs for guests can reach all potential golfers and open themselves up to new business.

## Short layouts let newbies learn and good players get their “quick fix.”

According to Steve Pellegrine, PGA general manager at River Park Golf Center in Fresno, Calif., there’s a percentage of people who enter his facility each day who have never held a golf club in their hands. In fact, he considers half of the people who use the range to be beginners. In order to attract those who may not play the game due to a lack of equipment, River Park maintains an extensive selection of demo clubs.

“We try to get the word out about

the availability of demo clubs through all of our communication with customers,” Pellegrine says. “It’s pretty much a part of every email blast or social networking post that we do.”

The demo clubs also come in handy during instruction. Many new golfers have starter sets, just to get by while their game develops. As they improve and their desire to play increases, they usually recognize that their equipment has kept them from progressing as fast as they would like.

“I’ll bring demo clubs that are more advanced than what they have and they see what better shafts and more forgiving clubheads provide,” Pellegrine says. “They pretty much pay for themselves; my initial investment in a demo club is repaid after selling one or two sets.”

The initial costs of taking up the game of golf can be daunting for some. By shrinking the investment of purchasing new clubs, range facilities with free, good-quality demo offerings can reach a larger audience and develop relationships that will keep the golfer coming back. ■

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# Spice Up Your Junior Golf Program with These Cool Tips

Organizing junior golf activities in summertime is a bit different than what you do in spring and fall. Extra fun and freedom is a “golf camp” theme worth trying – here are tested ideas for spicing things up. **BY SHERYL BINDELGLASS**

**A**t many – or even most – golf facilities, summer season is the time for Junior Golf Camp activities. Whether your campers are new to the game or returning players, you want their experience to be top-notch. The right activities can keep kids engaged and parents coming back, year after year. Keeping things fresh and fun while building skills is the absolute right recipe for a successful junior golf program – especially at a carefree time of year like summer.

Here are some tried-and-true tips for making campers happy:

**Play in the Sandbox** – Convert one section of your driving range into a

sand bunker. All you need are a few two-by-fours and some bunker sand. For that small investment, your juniors can get real experience hitting out

of the sand. Bonus - your members will be happy, because the juniors aren't tying up the dedicated practice bunker in order to practice their sand shots.

**Beat the Pro** – Every junior loves to brag about beating the pro or the instructor. One easy and fun activity to make this happen is the classic “Marshmallow Long Drive.” The clubheads may get a little sticky, but it's a small price to pay for the smiles on kids' faces after they outdrive their instructor.

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When junior instruction is provided with summer-camp fun, the lessons “stick” with kids due to the extra enjoyment factor.

but learning them has to be fun, or junior golfers will get bored. Try these ideas – which are great for rainy days when you’ve still got your young charges on-property:

- **Are you Smarter than a PGA Pro?** Play this like the popular TV show, “Are you Smarter than a 5th Grader.”
- **Golf Jeopardy:** This version gives values to questions and categories, from easy stuff to the knottiest situations. Campers must answer in the format of a question.
- **Who wants to be a Golf Millionaire?** Create multiple-choice questions in the format of the show. Assign values based on level of difficulty. Use correct and incorrect answers to spark discussion with campers.

**Balloon Bust** – Sunny, sizzling hot days can wear out staff and campers. To test campers chipping skills and

keep them cool, try this idea. Fill small round balloons with water and use your water balloons as golf balls for pitching and chipping practice. The kids will be surprised at how much

## Games like **Beat the Pro**, played with **marshmallows**, add life and some laughter to the learning process.

force they can use and keep the balloon intact as they send it on its way. When they use a little extra force, it’s a slightly wet but fun and satisfying moment.

**Hoop it Up** – Place three to four Hula Hoops at different yardages on the range. Have all the golfers work on chipping their ball through the hoops.

To add even more spark and interest, set it up as a Tic Tac Toe game, by arranging the Hula Hoops into a nine-unit grid. You can also use ropes to designate the game board (Use a larger board for beginners, a smaller board to challenge experienced campers.) Divide the campers into two groups, each with different color range balls. Golfers must chip their ball into the squares, trying to win three in a row for their team.

Using creative games to teach skills will set your junior golf camps apart from the rest. The energy and effort you put in will pay off. Campers will clamor to be a part of your summer programs, and they’ll know you were willing to go the extra distance for their enjoyment. Parents will be satisfied that their children are learning serious skills through fun methods. All that’s left for you to do is to bask in the glow of increased revenue and satisfied customers. When fall junior golf programs start up again, you can slip back into a more “serious” approach to teaching kids the game of a lifetime. ■





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# New Challenges for Marquee Instructors

The game's best-known, best-compensated teachers operate by a business model that flourished before the economic downturn. For many of them, lean times have lately brought disruption. **BY STEVE PIKE**

**N**ame-brand restaurants showcasing celebrity chefs have been a healthy investment in recent years for high-end resorts and hotels. Eateries fronted by Wolfgang Puck, Bobby Flay and Emeril Lagasse bring star power, visibility and guests to the properties. But if you ask most general managers whether they actually like the “celebrity” chef concept in their hotel, they are likely to say not-so-much.

The marketing opportunities and visibility are great, but these restaurants add little if anything to a property's bottom line because most of the costs – from construction to licensing – are absorbed by the property. In most cases, the celebrity chef is paid an upfront fee and is required to make a certain number of appearances each year. Other than that, the property is on its own.

The same holds true on the golf side. Over the past 20 years, resorts and high-end courses have paid millions of dollars to marquee instructors, such as Jim McLean, David Leadbetter, Dave Pelz and Rick Smith, to build and house their golf schools.

When golf's popularity was fueling construction and expansion of high-end resorts and courses, academies fronted by magazine-cover professionals were seen as vital amenities. Teaching professionals with high profiles cut handsome deals based on their ability to draw corporate and social visitors to these schools. The properties used the marquee names as carrots to drive visibility, viability and business. For the resort and/or

course developer, it was a logical way to build an image and generate guest traffic. The on-site academy's P&L benefits were measureable to a degree, though not completely.

But with the economy's woes and slack golf demand, resorts and courses don't seem to have as much need for high-profile names. The business model doesn't work so well when a golf school is basically put together as a marketing expense.

“Something's changed in the marketplace in the last five to seven years,” says Lorin Anderson, who runs the newly renamed Proponent Group, a membership-based web business supporting 300-plus instructors (formerly part of Golf Business Network). “That Top 10 teacher who's got lots of media visibility and could expect an enticing invitation from a resort outpost, isn't getting it.” Anderson, a former GOLF Magazine Instruction Editor, recalls the era of expanding golf-resort markets as a heady time for the better-known teaching professionals his company serves.

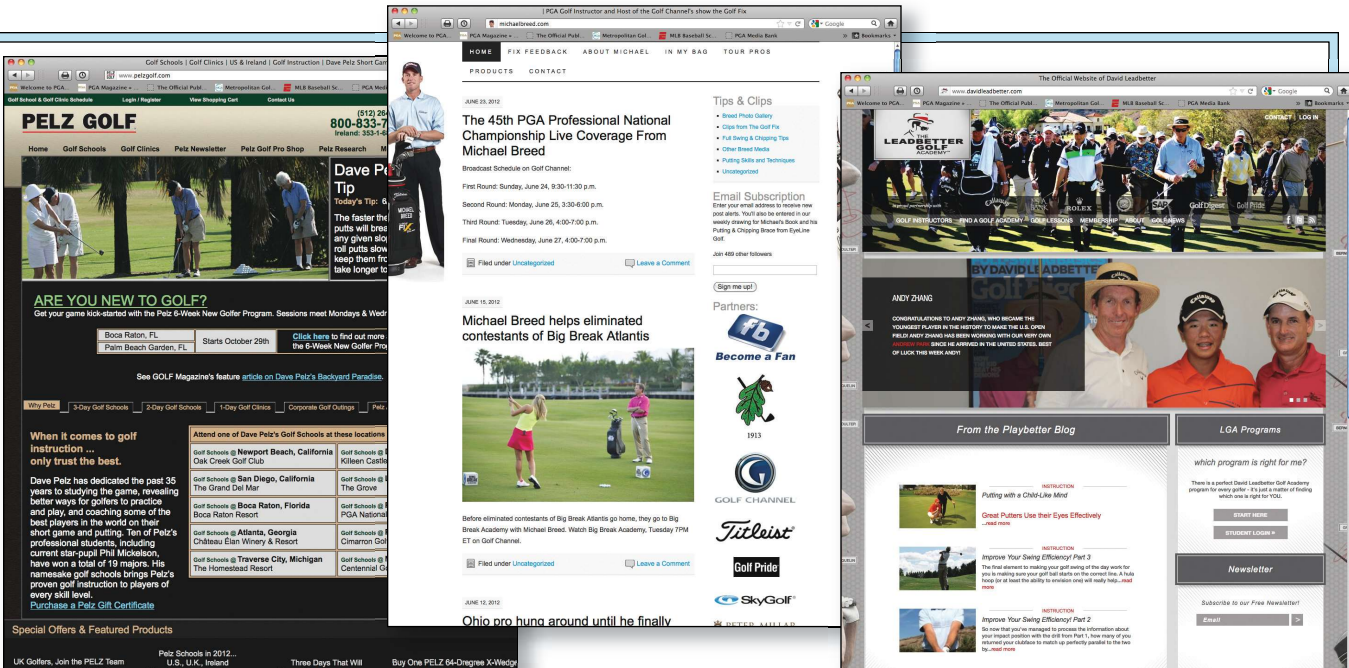
“That was the glory period for big-name academies, when a resort would feel it had to entice an academy that was an established brand,” Anderson says. “Now what you hear from the properties is: ‘How much are you going to pay us if you want to come here?’

Mike Bender, right, at his new academy on the range at Magnolia Plantation Golf Club in Lake Mary, Fla., down the road from his previous base, Timacuan Golf Club, where Bender had a falling-out with new ownership.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MIKE BENDER ACADEMY





We'll provide the building and the marketing support and the range balls, but you'll be paying rent.' And these are guys who haven't paid rent—or much rent—in a long time."

Tiburon Golf Club in Naples, Fla., for example, has ended its long-standing relationship with the Rick Smith Golf Academy, and McLean recently ended a 16-year partnership with PGA West in La Quinta, Calif. McLean reportedly is negotiating to stay on at the Doral Golf Resort & Spa in the wake of the resort's purchase by Donald Trump. Among the difficulties McLean experienced at PGA West was the tear-down of his academy building in 2011, over legal issues with the municipality involving its original permitting. Acquiring approvals for a new academy building was likewise complicated by local politics, leaving resort ownership in a position of having to deal with considerable red tape, which it elected not to do.

"That tells you something when a guy like Jim McLean, who had been at PGA West for so many years, would end up leaving there," one golf school industry insider said. "It shows that nobody is immune."

Mega-golf schools of the past that carried a media brand, be it Golf Digest or ESPN, aren't as highly visible as they were a decade ago.

Other top-tier teachers, such as Mike Bender, have encountered

difficulty with their landlords. Bender, the 2009 PGA National Teacher of the Year, recently left Timacuan Golf and Country Club in Lake Mary, Fla., after more than 20 years because the new owners replaced his building with a hot dog stand – literally. Bender is now at nearby Magnolia Plantation Golf Club where he has a 30-year lease on the back end of the driving range. The lease is such that even if the club changes owners, Bender is safe.

## The closing of the Jim McLean academy at PGA West "shows that no one is immune," one insider muses.

Some of this can be attributed to the downsizing of the golf industry and the poor economy, but some of it also can be attributed to the plethora of alternatives, such as Golf Channel, where Mike Breed and Martin Hall each have developed huge followings; high-tech training aids; and the Internet, where every golf teacher – name and no-name – offers instruction.

"The golf academy business has changed considerably," says Brad Brewer, who operates the Brad Brewer Golf Academy at Shingle Creek Resort in Orlando. Like Bender, Brewer owns his business. He negotiated a lease agreement with Shingle Creek in 2004 after leaving Arnold Palmer's Bay Hill Club in Orlando where he co-founded (along with Palmer) the Arnold Palmer Golf Academies.

"I didn't want to work for anybody," Brewer says. "I'm fortunate to be at a location that appreciates my involvement. And I'm making money for them. I bring in unique customers and entertain a lot of corporate groups."

Just as important, students who come to Brewer's—and Bender's—academy know he'll be there. If you go to a marquee instructor, chances are the man behind the name won't be there – unless you pay extra – just as if you go to a restaurant with Emeril Lagasse's name, chances are he won't be there. Sure, you'll be getting good food served by one of his trained chefs, just as you'll get good instruction from a teacher trained in say, the Leadbetter or McLean, philosophy, but you know it's not the same.

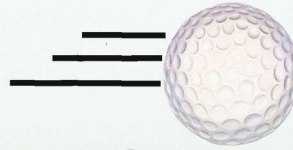
"It trickles down through the whole process," Anderson says. "At the end of the day, the guy with his name on the range building is still doing fine. It's just not the easy road it was 10 years ago." ■





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# Serving New and Longtime Golfers—at a Full Gallop

New Jersey's Union County made a good situation better when it chose KemperSports to manage its Galloping Hill Golf Course — where the upgraded range and learning center now boasts a TaylorMade Performance Lab **BY DAVID GOULD**







PHOTO COURTESY OF GALLOPING HILL





For the Performance Lab's grand opening, TaylorMade staff member Hank Haney went through the fitting process with Joe Graziano, an official of the county that owns Galloping Hill.

the contemporary architect who refurbished it, Stephen Kay, also laid out a nine-hole starter course that plays at 2,400 yards. Then there's the Learning Center, a generous, double-ended range with 52 stalls (20 of them covered and heated) plus 40,000 square feet of putting and chipping areas, practice bunkers, a 180-yard practice hole and an academy-level teaching staff.

Necessary or not, a clubfitting techno-mecca now graces the Kenilworth, N.J., property. In early June, facility managers from Kemper Sports joined Union County and TaylorMade in a ribbon-cutting for the new Performance Lab. It's a testament to what can be achieved within public-sector golf that one of only seven TaylorMade Performance Labs in the U.S. is now located here. Leading up to the gear manufacturer's selection of Galloping Hill, there was careful study of the selling opportunities. Between KemperSports and TaylorMade, in fact, lots of market research has been conducted to assess this property's potential.

"Anyone looking at our upside is first going to notice the Garden State Parkway along our southeast border – that's 250,000 cars driving by every day," says Greg Ward, Galloping Hill's director of sales and marketing. "Corporate America is 15 miles away, in Midtown Manhattan and on Wall Street. We get a fair amount of unsolicited calls from major companies and we're seeing that pick up already. Newark International Airport is four miles away. We're in a golf hotbed but it's oriented to private clubs. We are telling the public golfer that the amenities and experiences we offer will compare favorably to what you get at the top clubs."

With a mission to generate returns on investment while serving the local citizenry, Galloping Hill comes instinctively to altruistic practices that can also build business. It serves as home course to the First Tee of

**T**o succeed as a profitable enterprise – and as a hotbed of player development – did Galloping Hill Golf Course need a TaylorMade Performance Lab perched at the edge of its practice tee?

You would think not – there were already so many important building blocks in place. Seen on the map as a 270-acre greenspace amid New Jersey highways and streets,

Galloping Hill is a full-scale, full-bore public golf complex owned and doted on by Union County. Its renovated 18-hole course first opened during golf architecture's Golden Age and





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Raritan Valley and recently hosted an LPGA-USGA Girls Golf outing for a group of young aspiring players from gritty Newark. “We feel that our role in making golf widely accessible gets better by the day,” says Ward. “Part of that is hosting the First Tee and Girls Golf, but in general we’re active all the time in providing things like golf certificates for needy causes.”

Ward believes experienced golf administrators like himself – he came to KemperSports and Galloping Hill from the PGA Golf Professional position at South Carolina’s Seabrook Island – need to do much more for incoming new golfers than was done in the past. He recalls the wave of new-golfer enthusiasm that marked the late 1990s with regret at the retention problems that ensued.

## “Golf failed to retain its wave of new players in the 1990s – we can’t let that happen again.” —Greg Ward

“I see this Learning Center as a solution to the issues that caused new players from a dozen years ago to drop out at a high rate,” says Ward. “We weren’t prepared for that – we saw them stream in and thought they would just get hooked. At Galloping Hill there is a way for the new player to get oriented, get comfortable, feel accepted and basically establish a foundation in every skill area, so when they go to play a regulation course the anxieties won’t be there.”

This is a golf facility with both the infrastructure and the mindset to be an important entry point, retention point, crossroads – whatever might be needed to grow the game. It’s a comfort zone for new players, returning players or that golfer who is “hanging on” by only hitting balls and occasionally playing the short course, as he waits for finances to improve or

kids to grow up. Ward has an extra and somewhat unconventional use for his Learning Center, as an ideal place for corporate team-building of the sort Galloping Hill plans to specialize in.

“The theme of our new clubhouse, as it connects to the Learning Center and the two golf courses,” says Ward, “is *capture them for the day*.” Not needing to wait on the finished clubhouse, Ward recently brought in a private group of 50 women golfers, all C-level executives, and guided them through a day of practice, clinics, nine-hole play, golf orientation, video analysis, even little contests. “They received a great variety of experiences and we were able to make them feel like they had the place to themselves,” says Ward. “That’s the sweet spot we want to hit.”

It’s worth noting that TaylorMade, albeit one of golf’s biggest brands, was nonetheless required to lay out its plans, goals and commitments to county officials and KemperSports execs. Other golf equipment manufacturers who build high-tech clubfitting satellites presented competing proposals. Ward feels the partnership offer went to TaylorMade because “they wanted it more – they had a sharp insight into what the potential is here, so they were willing to invest more energy and resources.”

With the Lab building completed, Galloping Hill boasts two golf shops, one exclusive to TaylorMade-adidas product and one operated by the facility with a full array of lines. When the build-out at Galloping Hill concludes, standing tall at the center of it all will be a 46,000-square-foot clubhouse. Along with a gleaming new golf shop, the structure will house a state-of-the-art catering hall for groups up to 300 and a fully wired, 24-seat meeting space. The clubhouse building will even become official headquarters of the New Jersey State Golf Association – and let’s face it, landing a tenant like that means you’ve truly become a hub for golf in your region. Best-case scenario was for the new clubhouse to



be ready in early 2012. Now it’s on-schedule to open in spring of 2013.

Following a small-scale VIP day came the official Performance Center grand opening, public invited. And local golfers indeed responded. Some 600 of them streamed through, eager to see the completed construction phase, eat grilled hot dogs and enjoy a clinic on the range with Michael Hunt, director of golf at nearby Bayonne Golf Club. Early in the day, a shakedown cruise of sorts was conducted for the Performance Lab sensor technology and the big-screen





imaging of the body motion it captures. Some old-fashioned local politics was taken care of in the process, as Union County's public works and engineering director, Joe Graziano, played the role of fitter. No less a golf-swing and clubfitting guru than Hank Haney – on hand as a TaylorMade professional staff representative – conducted the session.

"What's so great about this configuration," Ward notes, "is that the trip from the Performance Lab to our range tee is all of 10 or 12 steps. A golfer can see his captured swing via

For many young attendees, this First Tee event at Galloping Hill served as an introduction to what a golf facility can provide as they work their way happily up the learning curve.

the computer model, and be shown all the data about swing speed, ball speed, tempo, angles and carry distance, then a few seconds later he can have it all verified by seeing the flight of the ball off live hits." Along with making Haney available for the day, TaylorMade ensured that, in Ward's words, "every single last club in their huge arsenal of product was on our range for golfers to demo."

To continue its hot streak, Galloping Hill was just selected as the

site of the New Jersey Open in 2016, marking the first time in the event's 91-year history that a public-access course was chosen to host. The field will consist of many a top amateur accustomed to private-club excellence. What they get at Galloping Hill should rival that level of quality, but when they receive a warm welcome they will only be experiencing what average golfers – old, new or returning – experience each day. ■



# Create "Distance Fever" by Staging





# a Long Drive Competition



If you've never brought a smashing spectacle like Long Drivers of America to your property, you're missing a chance at added revenue on event day plus marketing that will resonate afterward. **BY SCOTT KRAMER**

With a large field, entry fees will add up quickly – the LDA splits this money 50-50 with the host facility





**I**n the movie business and product marketing generally, it's an oft-stated fact: *Sex sells*. There's an echo of that mantra in the otherwise more dignified golf industry: *Distance sells*. Check out covers of newsstand magazines, ball and club ads – even swing trainer infomercials – and you'll be reminded how much “power golf” matters to weekend players.

One way for golf operators to leverage the seduction and adrenaline of the mightiest and longest tee shots is to invite golf's top bombers to strut their stuff at your facility. We're talking long-drive competitions, and even if the smackdown has to take place on an actual hole, your range business is well-positioned to get a boost from the presence of touring distance kings. Either way, the chance for a notable bump in facility revenues comes naturally with long-drive competition hosting.

What's involved, exactly?

A good source for that answer is Steve Wiley, vice president of sales and marketing for Long Drivers of America (LDA), which quite rightly views itself as “the” alliance of big hitters.

## Promoting a long-drive event—which LDA actively helps you do—boosts your wow factor in the market.

Hosting an LDA event requires no license fees or deposits, according to Wiley, just a simple contract. Under its terms, host facilities split the revenue earned down the middle with the

Contestants in the Long Drivers of America championship earn their spots in that field through victories at courses throughout the U.S.—yours could be one of them.

LDA. Therefore, at the competitors' going rate of \$40 per attempt (each one consisting of six swings) \$20 goes directly to the host site, which also retains all food, beverage and range-ball revenue. LDA encourages sites to pursue additional local, non-conflicting sponsorships, revenues from which flow 100 percent to the host operation.

“These events typically garner significant local and regional media attention,” says Wiley. “Your event may end up sending a representative to the world finals in Mesquite, Nevada in October and be featured on the ESPN telecast.” LDA suggests that host courses hold a media day a few weeks in advance of their competition. This is a chance to invite (and get reliable turnout by) local sports media and celebrities, who will spend the morning participating in breakfast, a brief



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presentation and then a round of golf. The host facility will also do well to market the event through its website and other avenues, down to offering any paid entrant a merchandise discount in its golf shop.

"The effort put in will determine the event's success," says Wiley. "The grid setup can be done by a groundsworker in one to two hours on the day of competition, when you also need to set up a registration tent." The typical LDA event runs four hours in duration. After the last drive has rocketed toward the target grid, it will take about 30 minutes for whoever is refereeing to submit final paperwork. Whether you have experience with long-drive contests or you're coming at it fresh, support will be there.

"LDA helps you with promotion using our own website, as well as through social media and an email campaign," Wiley explains. "We provide just about everything needed, including posters, a press release, along with ideas of how to promote the event, through other golf-related sites. Ultimately the site director is the event promoter responsible for local media and promotion."

Dick Rodgers is a Pittsburgh-based site director for two venues. Not only has he recently conducted his 137th long drive contest in 12 years, he's competed in them for 38 years. One of his sites, Pittsburgh North Golf Course in Gibsonia, Pa., holds its events on a par-5 hole. "In our area, it's almost impossible to find a flat area of sufficient length to hold today's long drivers," says Rodgers. "This hole is slightly downhill, so guys can see where the ball lands and if it's staying in the grid. It's also right by the clubhouse, so hit-



To take advantage of the excitement long-drive contests create, consider holding a "distance clinic" in tandem with the event.

ters can run in and get a sandwich." He says his other venue, the driving range at Oakland Beach Golf Club in Conneaut Lake, Pa., hosts America's largest regional long drive contest.

Rodgers adds that "there's no limit to the amount of tries someone can take. Due to the fact that so many people host long drive events now, you tend to get smaller fields. I hold eight qualifiers a year and have cut it down to six because the numbers can't support the facility taking the time up. So if I have 50 tries in a day—that might be 10 guys each trying five times—that would mean a \$2,000 intake. LDA gets half, the other half goes to the

facility. Typically you'll get 30 tries per event. But more-populated areas will undoubtedly attract more entrants and make a lot more money—they can draw up to 60 or 70 tries, which is a money total that will really sway a facility to put on an event."

Among the nice perks for host facilities: Spectators buy food and beverage, plus the participants average 50-plus warm-up balls—that's a tall stack of range buckets they pay for. "Revenue can add up quickly," says Rodgers, who knows much about leveraging this opportunity. "Most newspapers have a weekly supplement on local golf," Rodgers says. "Contact their sports department, find out who covers the golf beat, and get into a personal conversation with that person about professional long drive. Let them know about your event."

He also advises newbies to find a radio station tie-in. "Radio stations are always looking to come out and do live remotes and interview long drivers," says Rodgers. "Also, talk with the local chamber of commerce about your event. They'll ask how they can help you and get the word out quickly."

Potential expenses to consider include paying an outside site director to run the event and buying materials such as yardage markers to line the grid with. But once you run an event, you can milk the grid afterwards by hosting fun weekly mini long-drive contests for members and guests, with local businesses providing prizes. By posting news or even a commemorative plaque on the spot where the winner's longest bomb landed, you can extend the value of the power-golf adrenaline buzz long after your long-drive event is over. ■



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# Her Theory: Golf Instruction is Becoming a True Science

Returned from the 2012 World Scientific Congress of Golf, award-winning instructor **Rebecca Dengler** is “geeked up” about the heavily researched and richly technical data she feels teachers must now learn.

**O**n the website [www.rebeccadengler.com](http://www.rebeccadengler.com) is a recent blog posting titled “Attention all Golf Geeks.” It provides information for Becky Dengler’s (*right*) colleagues and friends on taking out membership in the World Scientific Congress of Golf. The WSCG is an obscure but increasingly influential organization that holds a quadrennial gathering of golf instructors, scientists and researchers. Dengler, listed at No. 19 on the *Golf Digest* roster of Top 50 Women Golf Instructors, attended the Congress this past March in Phoenix, Ariz. It was one of several pilgrimages the Delaware-based professional has made in recent years to hear about cutting-edge studies and findings on athletic performance in general – with a heavy slant toward golf.

Possessing a solid background in human anatomy and an associate’s degree in surgical technology, Dengler is one those people who “came to a strong science interest later in life.” The ranks of LPGA-certified instructors have traditionally included

women who seek game-improvement information from other fields and from scientific sources generally. Dr. DeDe Owens was among the early inquirers into what could be learned outside the golf community about the swing and athletic performance. In this era,



the instructors and co-authors Lynn Marriott and Pia Nilsson, founders of the VISION54 approach, are regular speakers at WSCG convocations. They preach that swing technique is just one of six vital elements that must be integrated for peak performance. The other five require, yes, some book-learnin’.

Meanwhile, there is Dr. Debbie Crews Ketterling (*center photo, top*), who sits on the board of directors of the WSCG. Ketterling is a sport psychology consultant for the Arizona State University men’s and women’s golf teams and a research analyst in kinesiology at ASU. If anything, these analytical and technically minded women only spur each other on toward further new-frontier theories, testing, research and revelations.

Becky Dengler’s core message about opportunities like what the





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WSCG offers is that golf-trained people always need to be looking over the fence for what's emerging elsewhere. She answered a few questions about this most recent WSCG meet-up and described her takeaway from the experience.

**If you're attending talks on neuropsychophysiology and golf, it must mean that you feel a golfer's ultimate competitive performance can't be understood or coached just with what we've got now.**

For a long time, I've been wanting to give every student on my lesson tee guidance and information that I know is based on something proven and real. The other day I saw a statistic about sales of Ben Hogan's "Five Lessons" instruction book. It's interesting how popular that book is, 50 years after it was written. I was thinking maybe it was a little too popular, from the perspective of what is truly going to improve golfers' skills and their scores.

Hogan's book has become almost iconic – it's earned a place in American golf culture.

That's exactly true, and deservedly so. "Five Lessons" should have that iconic status, but as for the actual information in it, we ought to have moved beyond that by now. "Search for the Perfect Swing," a book that helped launch what is now the World Scientific Congress, has also been absorbed and understood and at this point it contains lots of data that makes it very dated. Homer Kelley's book, "The Golfing Machine," is in the same category. It's amazing that Kelley was able to create that book when he did. But still, we've moved beyond what he was able to explain.

**In years past, this event has included presentations on the brain and the nervous system – pretty intense science about how they influence physical performance. Did the 2012 edition cover that topic?**

Yes, and it was one of the more compelling topic areas. One speaker was Lanny Bassham, a U.S. Olympic shooting competitor. He talked about his difficulties at the Munich

Olympics of 1972, and how his marksmanship faltered when it counted – as a result he lost the gold and ended up as silver medalist. Lanny explained how frustrated and confused he was by that – and of course that same faltering under pressure sounds like what tournament golfers go through. Anyway, he began an intense study of the activity of the brain and the nervous system in pressure competitions. He interviewed a long list of Olympic gold medalists to discover what they were doing differently to win. With what he learned he built a whole system for competing at peak levels, which he taught himself and had huge success with – he won 22 world individual and

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**"I'm committed to giving students guidance and information that I know is based on something proven and real." —Becky Dengler**

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team titles, he set four world records and won the Olympic gold in '76. After that he went around the world teaching his system to very high-level clients, including PGA and LPGA Tour players. Golfers now make up the majority of his clientele.

**What would you say is the most important advice Lanny Bassham would give to the serious golfer – or even the weekend player?**

What he said about how golfers practice – the emotional and mental aspect of it – really struck a chord with me. He said our sport is the only one where it's considered OK to bitch and moan – audibly and routinely – in the midst of a practice session. I've been thinking a lot lately about what I say to students about the post-shot routine – whether they are practicing or hitting shots during a round, and

Lanny's ideas were really relevant to that. I'm coming to the belief that what a golfer does with his self-talk after the ball lands could be as important as anything in his development as a player. First rule in that regard is do not judge yourself. Post-shot is all about asking questions that will tell you how you went about the shot and what the physical and mental feelings were. You just gather information. If you complain or get upset with yourself you "anchor" the bad shot in your thought process and in your emotional process.

**We noticed on the WSCG agenda a segment about yet another means of handling stress, involving use of an electroencephalogram (EEG). Could you talk a little about that?**

It's all about understanding your optimal neurological state during competitive pressure, and developing tools to get yourself in that state and maintain it when you most need it. The process involves measuring your baseline EEG when your brain and nervous system are doing what's needed in the stress of performance. They have what looks like an arcade game you sit at, trying to work the controls so you fly a simulated airplane perfectly straight and level. The video-game airplane will only fly straight when the right neurological pattern is happening. They teach you to recognize the feelings and patterns you experience at your ideal baseline. You get so you know it without any doubt or confusion.

**You've been to previous editions of this convocation – was the 2012 WSCG as valuable as you've come to expect?**

If anything, there may have been too much quality information – simply because they schedule multiple presentations at the same time. There were a couple of times that I wished there were three of me, each one carrying a notebook. Along with the major events every four years they have interims, which are also very good. Instructors who want the latest information should give them a try. ■



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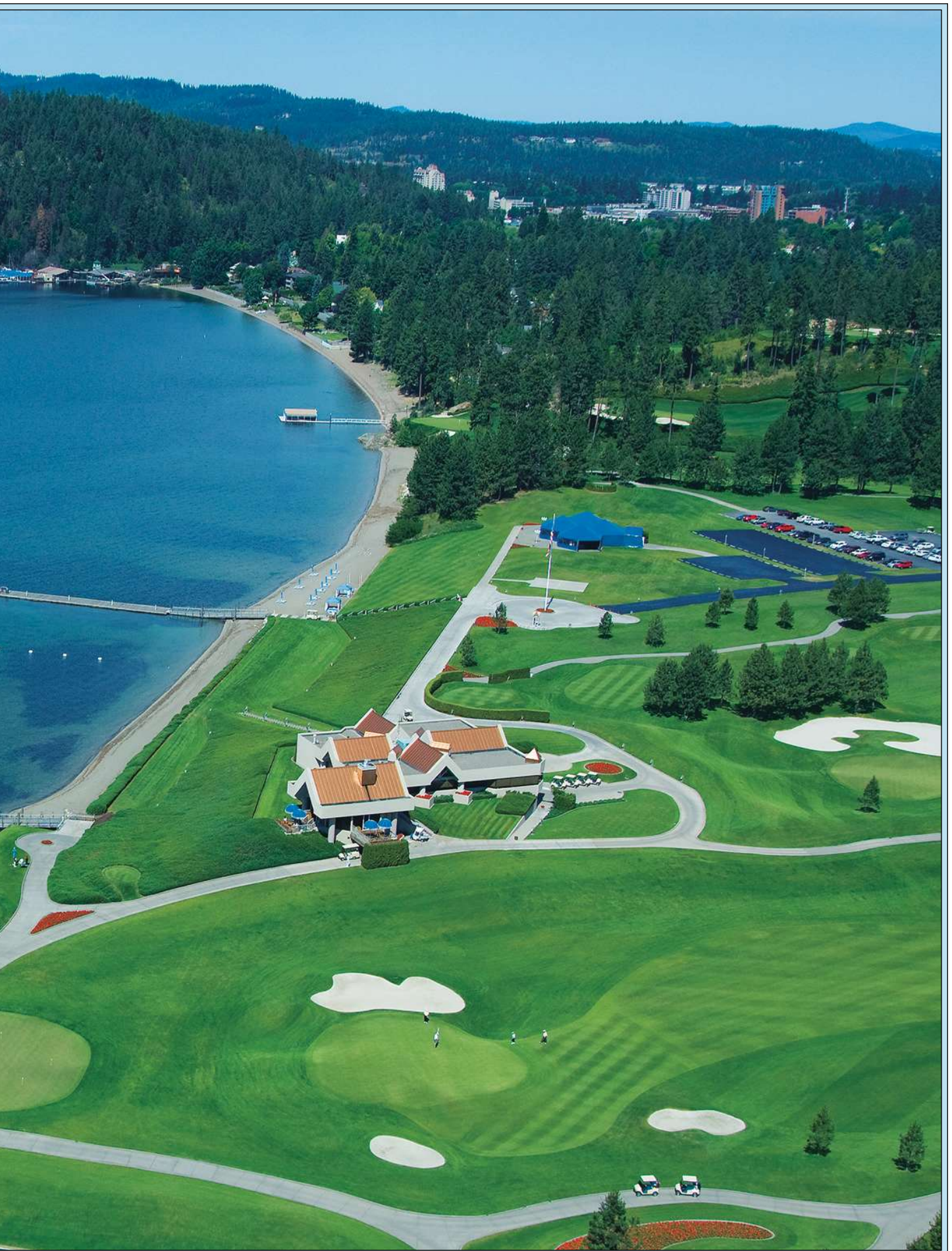
# Still Room on the Landscape for Water Ranges?

**Not what you think of first as a venue for serious practice and learning, the aqua range retains its benefits in flexibility, operating cost and customer appeal.**

**BY JAMES Y. BARTLETT**

Positioned alongside its famous floating-green par-3, Coeur d'Alene Resort's aqua driving range has the amenities and turf quality needed to make it an attractive place for practice and lessons.







**Y**ou may recall the scene in the 1998 comedy, “There’s Something About Mary,” in which Matt Dillon attempted to impress Cameron Diaz with his golf knowledge. That scene was shot in Pembroke Pines, Fla. at a locally beloved facility called The Aqua Golf Range, under the approving eye of owner Dave Breslow. Diaz, a non-golfer, was able to execute a decent swing with minimal instruction, says Breslow, who remembers the blonde actress as “a pretty good athlete” based on that performance.

In today’s range-centric world of golf operations, is a watery landing area good for more than scenery in a Farrelly Brothers movie? Breslow’s facility, with its shaded hitting stations and 20-acre lake for catching floater balls, endures as one of the older aquatic golf ranges in the country. “This place has been here at least 50 years,” reports Breslow. “I’ve owned it for the last 25.”

Aquatic golf ranges are surprisingly common. At the Grand Sierra Resort in Reno, for instance, guests can take a break from the gaming tables and the slots to hit some balls into a lake late into the night. The Coeur d’Alene Resort in Idaho is renowned for its moveable par-three 14th green floating in the beautiful waters of Lake Coeur d’Alene (the adjustable green can play from 95 to 200 yards), but golfers warming up for their round can visualize the splashy horror that awaits on that hole on the resort’s aquatic range.

There are more. A city-owned range in Denver is sited on a lake. Hangman Valley in Spokane, Logger’s Trail in Stillwater, Minn., Kensington in Naples, Fla., the Wild Dunes resort in Charleston, S.C. and the Celebration Golf Club near Orlando all boast blue, liquid ranges. Since lakes and ponds rarely need mowing, seeding or fertilizing, aquatic ranges have lower maintenance costs than land-based ranges. The costs of operating a cart picker on land is roughly the same as operating a “jonny boat” with a trawler motor, according to the range owners.

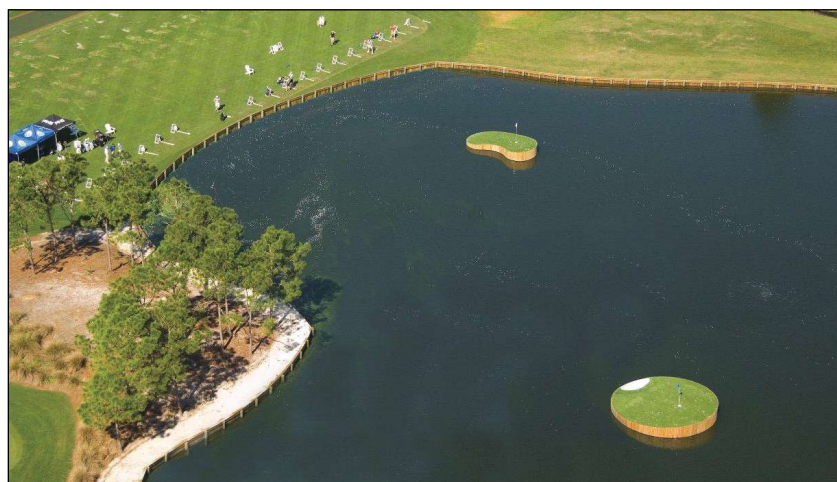
Coeur d’Alene’s floating green gives us a glimpse of what aqua ranges can and should aspire to in the future. That’s the informed opinion of Matt Gault, owner of the New Hampshire-based manufacturing firm Aqua

Greens. “Aqua driving ranges can go where traditional ranges can’t,” says Gault. “It’s one of the high-potential options for the future growth of golf and the reach of the game—it’s really an untapped area. From an entrepreneurial point of view, the building blocks are finally all there.”

## Floating greens in unusual places like car dealerships and theme parks extend golf’s reach.

The building blocks Gault refers to are golf balls and synthetic turf—he also feels justified in making a claim for the proven quality of his company’s 21st-century floating targets, which are carefully engineered for performance,

Celebration Golf Club lets practicers work on their short shots with fun and focus by positioning Aqua Greens at 30 and 75 yards.



endurance and easy maintenance.

“The floater balls people experienced years ago were garbage,” declares Gault. “The floater you can buy today is a great product—especially for people who really use range time effectively. It performs like a standard range ball on a shot designed to go 200 yards or less—after that you get some reduced carry.” When you accept this premise about using a range to practice in the wedge-to-7-wood end of the bag, an aquatic surface and a high-quality floating green dramatically add to the fun and feedback. According to Gault, a mid-1990s advancement in the synthetic surface meant that a good shot would hold and even dance on the floating green comparably to the real-life effect. That means hitting the green would hold great satisfaction, while missing it would be dramatic—similar to pros’ misses at TPC Sawgrass No. 17—but also very informative, because the splash showed clearly how close or far away the miss was.

One segment of the Aqua Greens client base people wouldn’t expect is private owners—wealthy golfers with ponds on their residential estates—and businesses like the multi-brand car dealership with a “campus” property in Salem, Ore., on which is set up an Aqua Green on a five-acre lake that serves as a hub with the dealership buildings surrounding it. Capital Auto Group is planning, in Gault’s words, to “incorporate our large island green into their sales strategy.” To make that



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happen, Capital Auto invested \$41,000 to buy a custom 30-by-35-foot island green with infilled turf that allows the ball to react as though it were hit to a real land green. The island also includes two sand bunkers.

Anyone interested in what's possible for range development and for golf's "reach," as Gault puts it, should understand how much business Aqua Greens does in the area of event marketing and sports-related promotions. It's evident in the way a company like Red Bull creates buzz with golf exhibitions using floating greens that feature endorsees Ricky Fowler and Lexi Thompson. This is a fairly common practice by Red Bull, one that Gault says will typically get plenty of media attention. "Depending on the market we're in, it's a very good bet these events will make the local news at 6 o'clock—showing golf in a fun and different way that obviously helps."

When land costs are at a premium, it makes sense to have golfers hit their practice shots into a liquid target. That's certainly the case at The Islands Golf Center in Anaheim, Calif., where the various target greens are anchored

in a 10-acre county-owned reservoir. Owner Michael Green maintains a landside pro shop, lighted hitting stations and a short-game and putting

## Ponds don't need mowing, seed, chemicals or fertilizer, an obvious cost advantage for them.

green. And, a couple of times a day, depending on how busy it gets, he sends out one of his crew in a boat equipped with a front net that can be dipped down to scoop up floating balls, plus a pool skimmer for balls stuck in those hard-to-reach places. The boat also has some netting around the operator's cabin for safety against golfers who like to aim at range pickers.

Floater balls are wholesaled at roughly the same price as land-range

balls (they boast either an air-filled center or one made with a buoyant material), come mostly from China or Korea and have the usual extra-tough Surlyn covers, which are, according to one manufacturer, algae-resistant.

Of course, a floater ball will carry about 8-10 percent less than a solid-core range ball, but most practice-range hackers won't notice much of a difference. Besides, most customers have so much fun making big splashes, or trying to land a ball on the deck of a floating target green, they hardly care.

And yes, there is a way to present golf instruction in a serious vein, even when every shot strikes H<sub>2</sub>O upon landing. The Islands Golf Center range has two teaching pros on site: PGA professional Doug Abild and LPGA Class A pro Mary Rutledge, whose calendars are booked solid. "On normal ranges, it can be hard to see where your ball lands among all the other balls lying on the ground," explains facility manager Green. "But the pros tell me that their students like to be able to pinpoint where their shots splash down. In a way, it's a superior visual feedback device." ■



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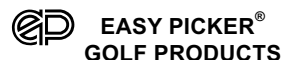
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