



# GRAA

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

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

- **Instruction: Golfers Aren't Aimed Where They Think They Are -** National PGA Teacher of the Year Mike Malaska looks at his range targets, looks at his golfers' stances and sees a mismatch. His technique to fix misalignment can be a scorecard lifesaver.
- **Video File: Got a student who is hitting it well on the range but not scoring?** That golfer may be kidding himself, and one Florida instructor has a way to fix the problem.
- **Public Range Profile: Building a Rural Range (and a Dream) in Upstate New York -** For a well-traveled young PGA Professional, buying a down-trodden range in the region where he grew up brings a chance to create his own destiny.
- **Traffic Builders: City Folk, Simulators and a Demo Day That Lasts Two Week -** An indoor practice facility in New York City brings instruction to the core of the Big Apple, while a forward-thinking Florida facility takes the demo experience to extremes.

Don't forget, the 2012 Awards process is now open. Apply today in the following categories!

- 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*

Keep it fun and thanks for supporting the GRAA.

Best Regards,

Rick Summers  
CEO & Publisher, GRAA  
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*Golf Ranges: Where the Fun Starts*

# Golf Range



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

Volume 20, No. 9  
September 2012

P R A C T I C E • T E A C H I N G • F I T T I N G • M A R K E T I N G

## **In this issue:**

- **Sweat Equity in Upstate New York**
- **Player Development at a Dallas Muni**
- **Solve Students' Alignment Problems**

## **Successful Women's Clinics**

**Understand the Mindset,  
the Goals and What Works**

















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# Golf Range

M A G A Z I N E

Volume 20, Number 9

September 2012



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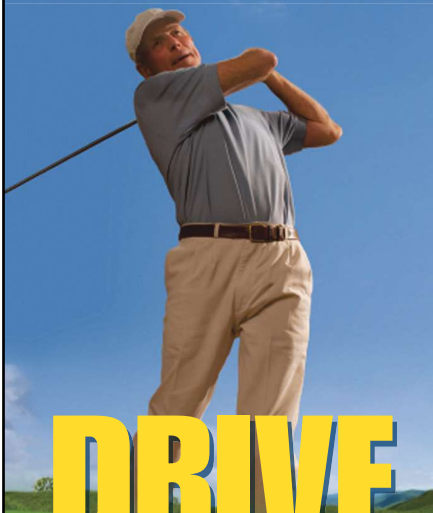
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## Taking a Gamble, Living the Dream

I had the chance to meet many of you when we relaunched the Golf Range Association of America during Demo Day at the 2012 PGA Merchandise Show. On that beautiful late January day in Orlando, Fla., I was fortunate to meet and talk with hundreds of owners and professionals from the golf range industry.

One of the most interesting conversations I had, however, was with someone who wasn't in the golf range business. Or he wasn't yet, at least. His name was Lucas Cohen, and he was a PGA Professional from upstate New York. He stopped by to say hello at the GRAA tent on the range at Demo Day, and we had a great conversation about his hopes of buying a range of his own. Lucas explained how it had been a dream for years to own a range where he could follow his dream of teaching golf, growing the game and providing a place for people to enjoy hitting balls.

I thought Lucas had some great ideas, and I admired his passion. We exchanged phone numbers, and I pledged to call Lucas in the spring to see how his plans were coming along. I never doubted Lucas' commitment, but I was still unsure whether he'd be able to follow through on his range dream. Maybe he hadn't found a suitable range property, or perhaps he'd been offered a job as a head professional or golf instructor at another facility.

When I called Lucas in April, there was noise in the background. It turned out he was driving—driving a range picker on his newly purchased range, which he'd named New York Golf Park. His young son, Sager, and his Labrador were riding along with Lucas, and I could hear the excitement and pride in his voice as he told me about the hard work he was putting into the property, which he'd purchased roughly a month after we'd met at Demo Day.

For more details about how Lucas became a golf range owner, please read the profile of Lucas that starts on page 32 of this month's *Golf Range Magazine*. I'm glad to see this young man make his dream a reality, and equally glad for the golfers around Greenport, N.Y., who can now enjoy the fruits of Lucas' labor. Plenty of hard work still lies ahead, but visitors to New York Golf Park can already see there are cars in the parking lot, golfers hitting balls, and the sight of a dream coming true.

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*Golf Ranges: Where the Fun Starts*

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# Exclusive New GRAA Survey Data— Drawing a Map of Your Market

Your association's recent consumer survey continues to yield insights. Geographically speaking, here's what it says about how far range patrons travel to get their golf fix.

BY TONY STARKS

**T**he town of Decherd, Tennessee sits among channels and lake inlets west of Chattanooga. By 2016 it will be home to a massive Nissan engine plant, currently under construction. Between now and then, an entrepreneur will surely come along and build a golf range of some type to serve a burgeoning population of well-paid plant workers.

Of course, it will help to know which direction most of them travel to and from their housing. The number of workers and their pay scale would also be important to know. Even a market factor like when the shifts are scheduled and how many workers each shift will employ is of value.

When a local market or population center gets redefined by one massive addition, it may seem comparatively simple to analyze revenue potential. Most operators of golf ranges and courses are long-established in a location that is either static or evolving slowly. But knowing the people in your midst is always valuable for a business whose trade is heavily based on location.

With this installment of our regular research column, the goal is helping you measure the potential traffic at your range, beginning with the basic map of your surrounding area. Check the accompanying chart, noting percentages and travel times. They are based on a scientific sample and by all rights should give you important answers as you overlay them on your own local map.

Just bear in mind that not all populations are equal. Factors like age distribution, income, gender, or even

ethnicity could strongly influence that market's potential for a well-operated range. Survey data from the GRAA indicates that approximately 32 percent of frequent range users travel 10–15 minutes to get to their favorite range. Another 31 percent travels five to 10 minutes.

We suggest you take a well-marked map of your local area and draw concentric circles, with your facility at the center, showing the radius of a 10-minute drive, a 15-minute drive and a 30-minute drive. Identify the other

How far do you travel to your favorite range?	
<5 minutes	16%
5–10 minutes	31%
10–15 minutes	32%
15–30 minutes	18%
>30 minutes	3%
Not sure	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

ranges or golf facilities within that radius so you know who your biggest competitors are, and then research what they're doing in terms of marketing. Are they advertising in local newspapers or publications, do they have a presence within the nearest Chamber

**Offering [use of] your facility can correlate into strong word of mouth marketing and elevate your community status.**

of Commerce? If they're pursuing these steps, you certainly should be, as well. Then take it a step further by doing what they're not.

Identify as many unique marketing opportunities as you can within your sphere of influence. Maybe it's a high school whose golf team needs a place to practice. Offering your facility can correlate into strong word of mouth marketing and elevate your community status. Or maybe it's a local business that's willing to promote your facility to their employees in exchange for discounting their corporate outing. Whatever the case may be, look for these types of opportunities inside your sphere of influence.

Here in this presidential election year, the phrase "all politics is local politics" is worth remembering. For golf ranges, it's equally true that all marketing is local marketing – and well worth doing with baseline knowledge plus some creative energy. ■

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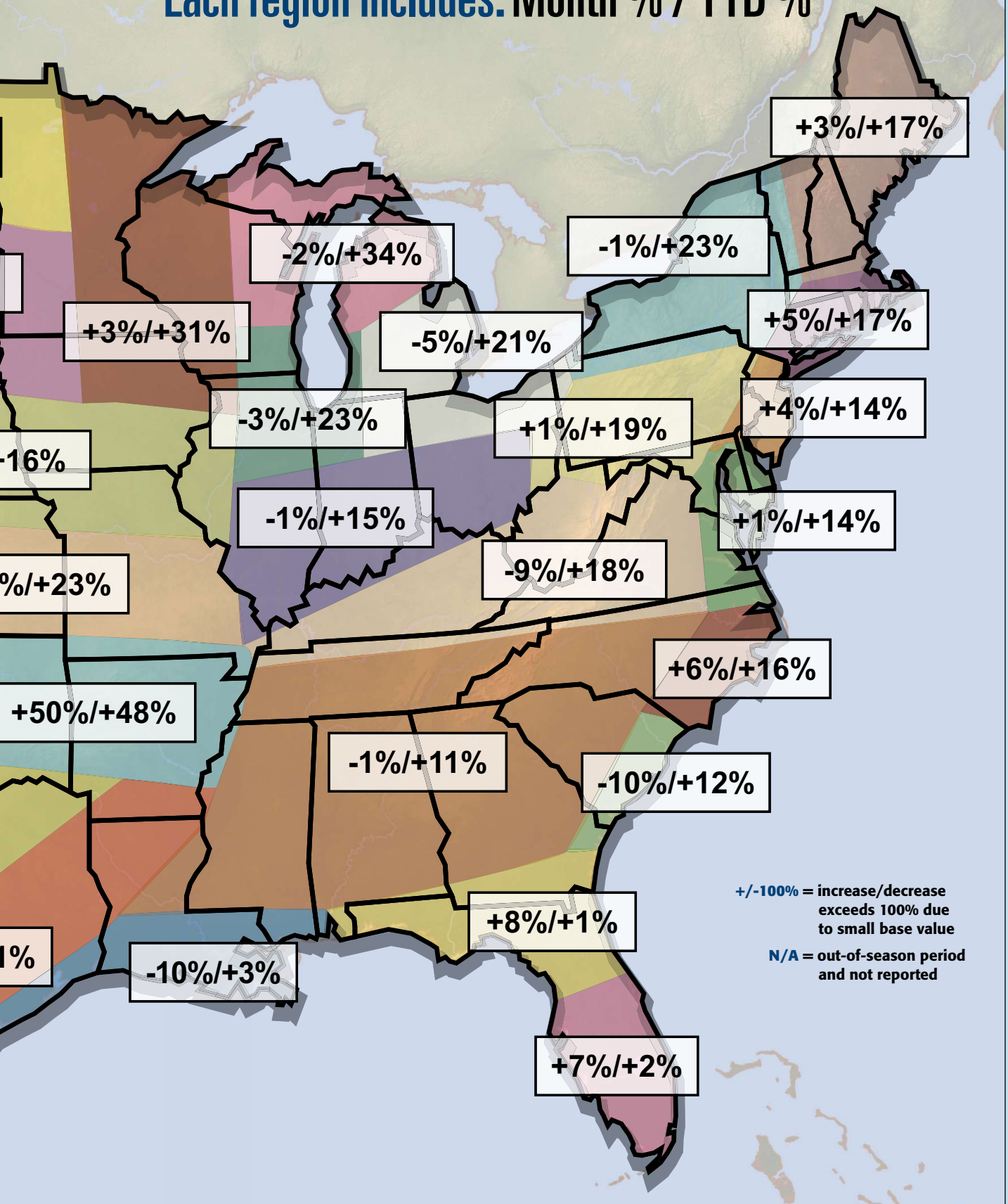


In cooperation with Pellucid Corp, a leading industry insight and information provider, each month *Golf Range Magazine* will present research which demonstrates how the weather has impacted the number of "Golf Playable Hours" in multiple regions of the country. While ranges may be somewhat less influenced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

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

# Golf Playable Hours: July

## Each region includes: Month % / YTD %



**+/-100% = increase/decrease exceeds 100% due to small base value**

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



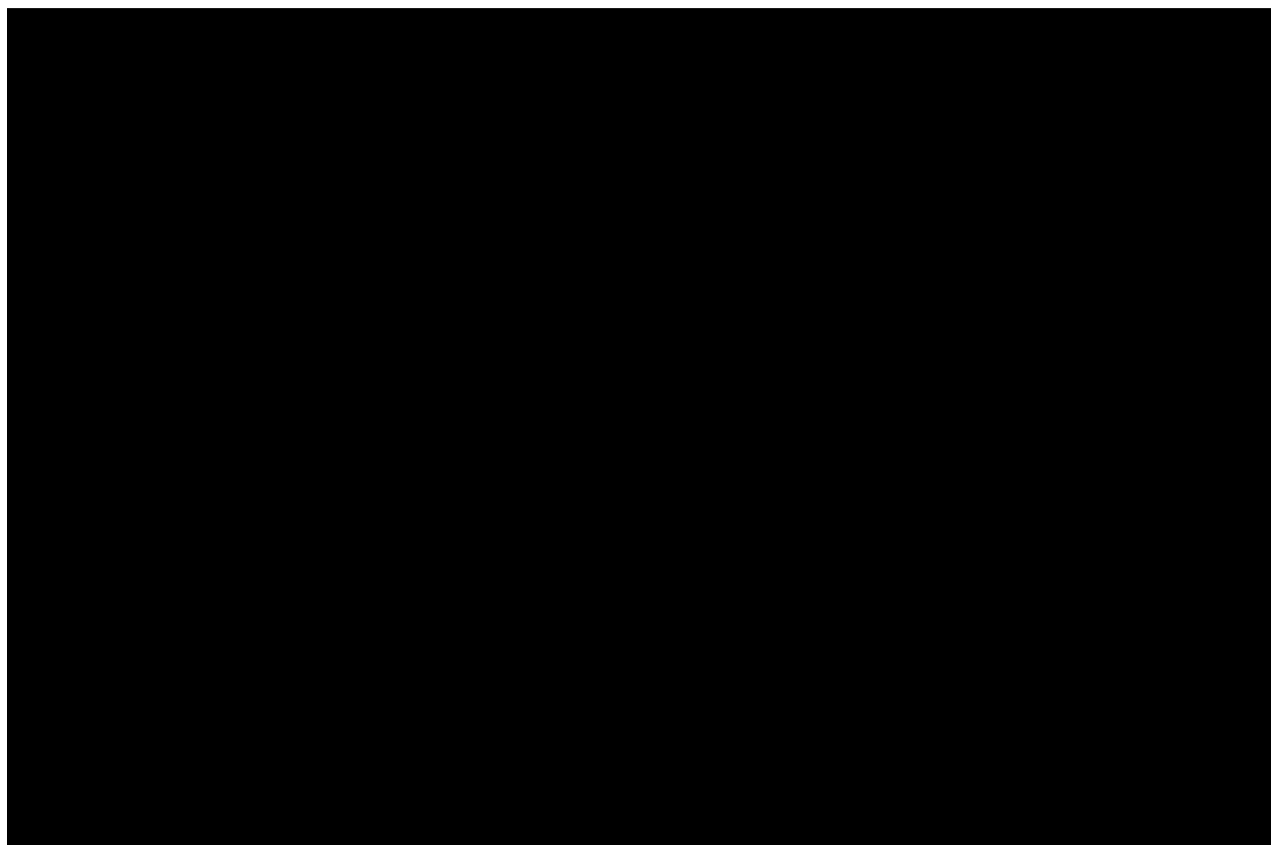
# Practicing with Pressure Creates a New Range Experience

The lament, “I’m hitting it great on the range but it doesn’t translate to the course,” has been around forever. On Steve Whidden’s lesson tee that perception gets put to an interesting and valuable test.

**I**n warmups, many a weekend golfer uses their last two or three range balls to simulate the drive on the first tee. It’s a useful little exercise—in fact it captures an idea that some teaching professionals are embracing on a larger scale. Glen Albaugh, a California sports psychologist who has worked with tour pros like Scott McCarron, uses the phrase “block practice” to describe many successive shots hit with one club toward one target. He uses “random practice” to indicate a series of specific shots that a player is asked by his coach to hit in no particular sequence.

Another twist on this concept is what some call the rehearsed round of golf, which a student works through without ever leaving their hitting bay. PGA Master Professional Steve Whidden, who runs the Steve Whidden Golf Academy at Rosedale Golf & Country Club in Bradenton, Fla., considers this a great leg up for the student’s scoring ability and a fine technique for expanding your instruction reper-

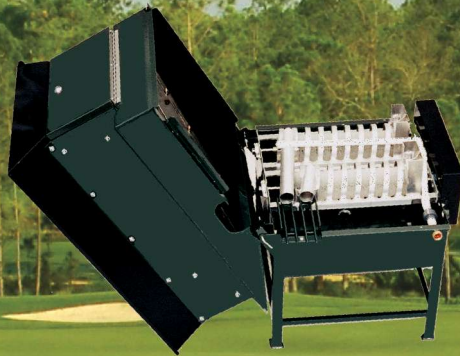
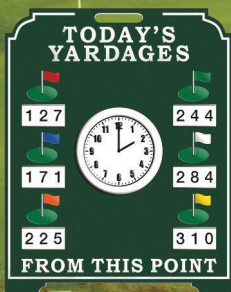
toire—for fun and profit. Named the 2010 PGA Southwest Florida Teacher of the Year, Whidden does a fine job describing his nine-hole on-range playing lesson of sorts in this short video. Give it a look and test out the concept on one of your regular students. It’s an approach that is said to be extra valuable as a golfer gets close to the date of a significant competitive round. ■





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# A Wide Range of News

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

The **Golf Range Association of America** is getting set to bestow accolades on the top range facilities and top growth-of-the-game teaching professionals in America. The GRAA has revamped its awards program to include four categories instead of two. These new 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

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. You can start the application process right away at [www.GolfRange.org](http://www.GolfRange.org) (See AWARDS option in top navigation bar)....

Here at the GRAA, actively promoting the awards program has helped us build our online presence. The **social media footprint of the Golf Range Association of America** has expanded from reaching 185 people in May to reaching 439 people three months later. On Twitter, which has become a vital tool for connecting with PGA Professionals and passionate members of the golf industry, GRAA currently has 412 followers. The increase in followers came from a focus on being more active and aggressive in tweeting, retweeting and interacting with other accounts. Tweets on the account center mainly around getting followers to apply for the upcoming *Top Range Awards* by providing the proper link, deadline and other information. The Facebook page, which has grown in "Likes" by 85 percent in the past three months, provides similar daily updates and keeps members of the golf industry directly connected. You can find GRAA on Twitter - @GolfRangeAssoc - and on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/GolfRangeAssociation](http://www.facebook.com/GolfRangeAssociation).... Missing that four-footer or snap-hooking a drive into the weeds isn't the end of the world, although golfers sometimes feel that way. To help bring back perspective, you could ponder the doings of 16-year-old golfer **Brady Lucas of West York, Pa., who has beaten cancer - twice**. Originally diagnosed in 2005, Lucas was cleared in 2008 before having the Leukemia return again just two years later. After bone marrow transplant, Lucas is again free of cancer. Lucas began golfing as a small

The number of businesses **Greg Norman** has created is seemingly approaching the number of golf tournaments (91) he won during his stellar playing career. For all the Great White Shark has done on the course, including a pair of British Open Championships, he has outdone himself as a commercial force. Norman has been or is involved in businesses that include clothing, sunglasses, beef, wine, restaurants, land and housing development, GPS systems, golf course design, turf, and event promotion and operation. Golf instruction is one of Norman's latest endeavors, as last month marked the grand opening of the **Greg Norman Champions Golf Academy** facility at Barefoot Golf Resort's driving range in North Myrtle Beach. The 10,000-square-foot building has been in the making since Norman first put his name on a smaller golf instruction facility at Long Bay Club in the spring of 2010.

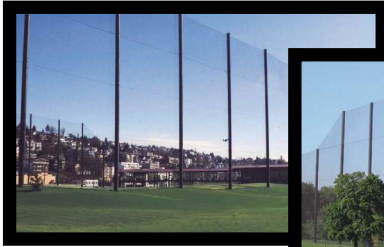
child, but the bout with his disease left him fatigued and unable to practice regularly. Today he shoots in the low 80s and looks forward to contributing to his high school team this season.... History's greatest Olympian will take to the driving range to see if his skills from the pool can translate onto the greens. Michael Phelps, the 22-time Olympic medalist, is the next celebrity to appear on **Golf Channel's "Haney Project"**. The show will air this

month.... The **Los Angeles Angels MLB team recently partnered with the Tiger Woods Foundation** to host an event honoring eight of the Foundation's scholars and staff members. The event was meant to raise awareness for TW Foundation programs, many of which strive to bring golf to underserved students. The event was held on Friday, Aug. 5 prior to baseball action between the Angels and the Seattle Mariners at Angels Stadium. ■

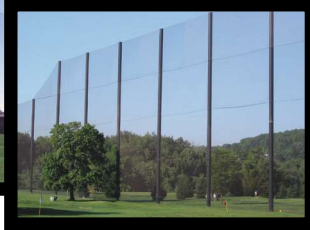
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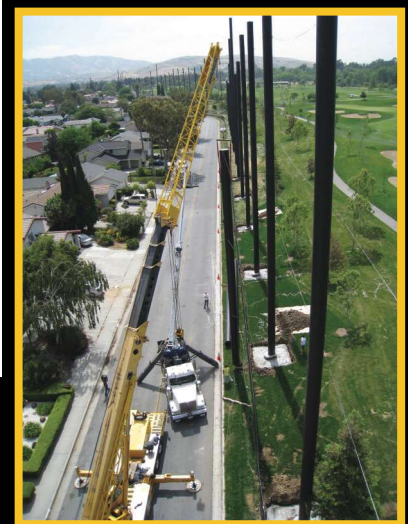
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# City Folk, Simulators and a Demo Day That Lasts Two Weeks

This month an indoor practice facility in Manhattan brings instruction to the core of the Big Apple and a forward-thinking Florida facility takes the demo experience to extremes. **BY TONY STARKS**

**H**elping your students excel at the game of golf is done through various methods and in various settings. Whether it's indoors, outdoors or on the course, the goal is the same: Steady or even rapid development of a student's ability and passion for the game of golf.

## Made in Manhattan

Does the use of an indoor golf simulator count as a trip to the range? There are plenty of folks who might shake their head at that question, but there's at least one facility wholeheartedly saying yes to it.

Manhattan is the most populous of the five New York City boroughs, and

the concrete jungle isn't really an ideal spot for a driving range or golf facility (although we would be remiss to not mention the famed Chelsea Piers Golf Complex, located atop the Hudson River). That is why golfers in New York City are often out of luck when it comes to available opportunities to work on their game, especially during

the winter months.

Enter Golf Manhattan (*pictured above*), which brings a country club feel to an indoor practice facility in a city environment. Located in the heart of New York City on East 25th Street, this golf lounge provides golfers an opportunity to practice or play a round of golf on the facility's about Golf PGA Tour simulator. Jeff Neubauer, founder of Golf Manhattan, has a technology consulting background, which led him to start the indoor golf operation in August of 2009. His urban golf enclave is where you would go for lessons with PGA Pro-



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professionals using accurate simulators. Based on the information collected, including ball speed, club speed and launch angle, instructors can better help students improve their swings.

PGA Director of Instruction Thomas Sutter loves the fact that the simulators make his job at Golf Manhattan a year-round position, as students don't have to rely on weather for a lesson. "It provides my students the opportunity to continue with their practicing, and 50 percent of my students are fairly new golfers," Sutter says. "So instead of seeing them so sporadically and having it be like they're starting over all the time, they get the chance to grow and improve as golfers despite being stuck in the cold weather during winter or battling the metropolis that is New York City."

Golfers also enjoy the privacy of this unique facility. Unlike a lesson on the range at a typical club, students feel at ease when working with Golf Manhattan's instructors because each lesson takes place in a one-on-one setting. Once students are ready to hit the course, they can use the simulators to play a round of golf by choosing from over 50 real layouts including—natu-

rally—Pebble Beach, Sea Pines Resort and The Old Course at St. Andrews. Not bad for never having to leave the city.

## A lesson series on a simulator **never** has to be interrupted.

Another attribute driving Golf Manhattan's success is its social atmosphere. The facility hosts events accommodating up to 10 guests for full-service parties including catering and contests with prizes. The private lounges hold up to four golfers and four spectators who want to relax and play a few holes. The cost is per hour, not per person, giving the guests the freedom to play as much or as little as they like.

### Extended Test Drive

Grey Oaks Country Club in Naples, Fla., has had success with the traditional demo day model. You know the drill,

in which an array of staff bags displaying all the late-model drivers, fairway woods and hybrids tempts golfers to sample the sticks and check their performance. Maybe alongside are a few fitting carts to help players ID their optimal specs, and as a finishing touch a few tables of drinks and refreshments. It's a good model, proven to work.

But in 2011 Karl Bublit, PGA director of golf at Grey Oaks, decided he would add a twist to the demo club program in order to boost equipment revenue. With the assistance of TaylorMade, Grey Oaks offered members two-week demo sets, where they could essentially test drive a complete set of TaylorMade irons. "It gives them an opportunity to utilize an entire set of clubs a few times as opposed to taking out a 6-iron and a wedge, or just hitting a few shots on the range," Bublit says. "As a result, they feel like they can do a better job deciding if it's right for them."

A key aspect of these demo sets was that each was custom fit for that golfer. Rather than using a standard set, the irons were altered as needed so that each member who tried them could decide if these were the right irons for their game over the long run. "Any time they can get it in their hands and use it for a few rounds, that means a lot to them," Bublit says.

There was a level of risk involved in this promotion. Grey Oaks brought in more product than normal and put up a fairly significant amount of money upfront. However, TaylorMade offered to help with the cost of those that weren't sold after the season. Still, Bublit did everything possible to get the word out to his membership to ensure a successful promotion.

"We tried to reach our customers every way possible, from email blasts to handouts on the first tee and signage throughout the club," Bublit says. In the end, Grey Oaks sold 60 sets of TaylorMade irons in 2012, which is a staggering amount considering they sold only 10 the prior year. And the used demo sets that were not purchased could still be sold at a discounted price, lessening the urgency to make the initial sale. ■



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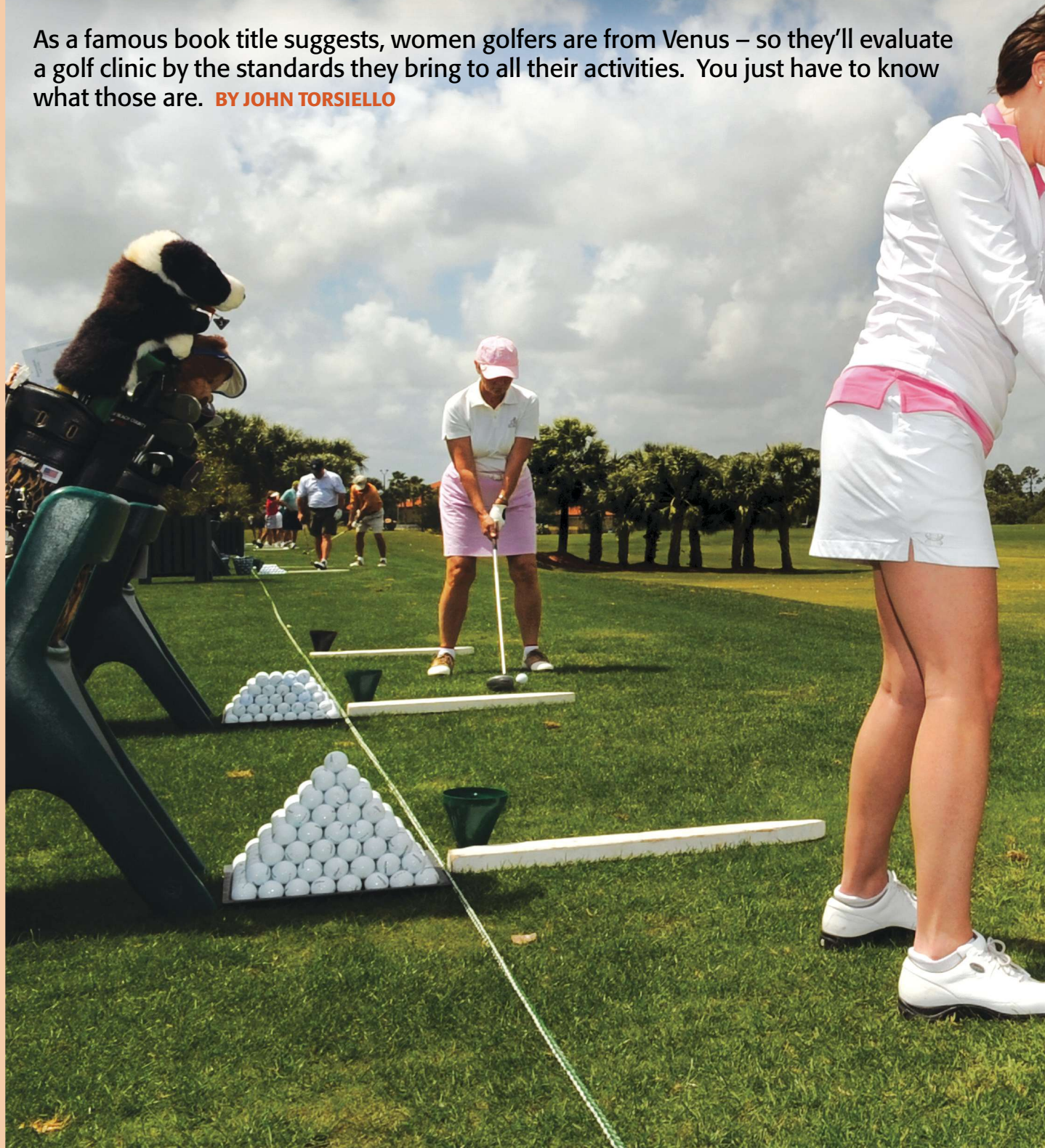
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# When a Women's Clinic Works, Credit Attitude and Awareness

As a famous book title suggests, women golfers are from Venus – so they'll evaluate a golf clinic by the standards they bring to all their activities. You just have to know what those are. **BY JOHN TORSIELLO**







An intermediate-level student receiving instruction from Suzy Whaley during a Women's Golf School at the PGA Learning Center in Port St. Lucie, Florida.

MONTANA PRITCHARD/THE PGA OF AMERICA





**G**olf professionals who successfully run clinics for women have a little secret: They don't take the approach they use in clinics for men and simply rehash it. Women golfers are a different audience, in most cases. Any golf experience they truly enjoy and appreciate will feel different from what works for a male audience.

One lens for observing this dynamic is the research of Alison Armstrong, an author who has been designing and leading workshops for 20 years. Co-founder of PAX Programs Inc., Armstrong begins her seminars by contrasting two mental conditions: Diffuse Awareness and Focused Attention. The former describes female brain activity and the latter describes what happens in the male noggin. It all harks back to ancient tribal life, in which women undertook highly varied tasks and activities in and around the settlement while men pursued a very specialized activity—basically, the hunt—out in distant territory.

Yes, the old hunters-versus-gatherers split is worth understanding even when you're staging something as modern-day as a golf clinic. That's because knowing your audience is always job No. 1. If you want someone who can enter an environment and take in a lot of impressions and information during a short period, get a female. If you need someone who can tune out most stimuli while laser-beaming on a single goal, get a male.

These truths are central to Armstrong's teachings. Obviously, all females and all males can learn the brain patterns native to the other sex, and millions have, but it's a crossover act, not the path that comes naturally.

So, if you set up the range or clinic area with aesthetic treats for the eye, women will notice and be pleased by it. If your pace is a little slower than it is for a men's clinic, that's probably good. Remember, women spread their attention more widely and "gather" more impressions. If the program gives attendees more of a chance to know other participants and learn what is on their minds, that too adds to the experience.

Brandon Evans is general manager of Village Greens Golf Course in Woodbridge, Ill. and coordinator of an innovative program for women there. Evans says his mission statement is fairly simple: To get women comfortable on and around a golf course while having fun.

At the beginning of each class, Evans and his staff tell participants they can usually fit each student in the

group into one of four categories. These are:

- determined not to be left behind when everyone else plays in the next corporate golf outing
- trying to keep up with family and/or friends who play regularly (they want to be part of the fun)
- returnees who have tried golf in the past, or
- attending the clinic against their will to placate a well-meaning spouse.

"Success in all these cases," Evans says, "is getting them off the range and onto the golf course." He believes a once-a-week, clinic/lesson for women of an hour or two in length is "just right." The classes he runs are billed as 75-minute sessions occurring once weekly. "But we never end on time," confesses Evans. "We tell them that if their husbands plan on having dinner ready for them when they get home, they should call and say they'll be late."

Ed Gibson, director of instruction for Spirit Golf Management, says setting the mood for women's clinics or group lessons is vitally important. He conducts a spring "get together" to go over schedules and make the ladies feel comfortable with the staff at Makefield Highlands Golf Club, a semi-private in Yardley, Pa. It is basically a meet and greet, and that evening Gibson has sign-up sheets for anyone interested in clinics. He is usually there along with other staff members to introduce themselves, briefly go over the dates and the schedule for the clinics, and set the mood where the women are made to feel comfortable.

"Once the ladies are here at Makefield for a clinic we usually meet in front of the golf shop or on the putting green and we then have a little introduction session," says Gibson. "I welcome everyone, introduce other instructors, check everyone in, and make sure to throw in a little joke or two to break the ice."

Gibson says the success of the clinics at Makefield Highlands has "been tremendous in repeat customers for myself and other instructors." He has also seen a marked "increase in dollars" for the facility. He adds, "I have





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booked personally a number of playing lessons, series of lessons, and club fitting opportunities just by the relationships we have established with our students.”

The Dana Rader Golf School in Charlotte, N.C., has several options for female players: a beginner school that is six nights spread over two weeks with the purpose of introducing women to the game; clinics that range from two to three hours and focus on skill development and coaching; and a women-only three-day school. The latter is a full dose of comprehensive instruction including on-course guidance, full swing and short game, how to practice and more, all during 15 total hours.

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**“Women participants are informed that they can pay when they ‘feel like the class is worth it,’ and no one has abused that privilege.”**

**—Brandon Evans**

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Julie Cole, managing partner of the school, explains what’s offered thusly: “We have built our reputation on making sure every instructor is trained for private and group instruction and that they know how to do presentations, how to demonstrate, how to communicate content.”

Women spend their lives much closer to the teaching and learning environment than men do, so it’s always wise to connect with that experience. For example, at the Dana Rader school, where programs are developed with motor learning in mind along with a coaching aspect, women in the clinic are naturally interested in how that all works. “We spend hours training our staff for consistency, organization, and

teaching skills,” says Cole.

Steve Cloud, director of instruction for Lyman Orchards Golf Club in Middlefield, Conn., says the main objective of women’s clinics is to make golf fun and educational. Lyman Orchards offers classes for beginners to advanced golfers. A “Golf Fore Women 101” unit introduces golf to women who have never played before. Golf Fore Women 201 is aimed at those who have played before but not recently and need to review the fundamentals. The “301” class at Lyman is for advanced players who truly want to improve.

Cloud sees a lot of serious intent among his women clinic-goers. “They are determined to improve and enjoy their time learning golf,” he says.

You have to remember the value proposition with your female clinic participants. Running the family budget—a task so often handled by the female—will influence spending patterns strongly. Every expenditure on recreation amounts to an investment—one that has to make sense. At Village Greens, Brandon Evans offers a money-back guarantee and often entices people into his program by having them try a class with no obligation. Participants are informed that they can pay when they “feel like the class is worth it” and reports “nobody has taken advantage of us yet,” adding: “We’re not in it for the short-term financial gain anyway.”

In keeping with that long-term focus, Village Greens also offers a buy-one-get-one-free or 50 percent off enrollment on subsequent classes or next year’s classes. That’s a strong enticement to get the players to come back and perhaps bring a friend. The efforts have paid off. Evans reports that almost three quarters of participants return to the course to play, thus generating several hundred new rounds.

Golf has sold itself to the hunter mentality for a couple of centuries, and developed a slew of customs, beliefs and traditions that work for that market. Now it’s time to shift the mindset over to a gatherer mentality. It only takes a slight awareness and attitude shift to do it, and the potential rewards are huge for those who can. ■





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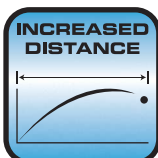
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# Construct a Practice Station to Cure Alignment Errors



BY MIKE MALASKA, PGA

**Y**ears ago when I was a competitive player, the teacher I worked with kept telling me that I was pulling all my shots. I didn't agree, because I was sure I was starting my shots on line. So we went to the side of the range where I was practicing, and my teacher had me line up to hit a shot to the right of a large telephone pole that was several yards in front of me. He told me to hit a 5-iron shot; if I was really starting the ball on line, I'd miss the pole; if I was pulling the ball, I'd hit it. I was so sure of myself I decided to hit a driver – and hit the pole right in the center.

What I learned that day is what I try to teach my students: When you address the golf ball, your eyes are way inside the target line, which creates a discrepancy in where you think the ball needs to start. People think the ball needs to start on a path that is

straight from the ball to the target, but the ball really needs to start to the right in order to stay on line. To illustrate and reinforce this lesson, I build a visual practice session for my students that you can emulate in teaching this important lesson.

**Mike Malaska**, PGA Director of Instruction at Superstition Mountain Golf and Country Club in Gold Canyon, Ariz., and the worldwide director of instruction for Jack Nicklaus Golf Academies, is the 2011 PGA Teacher of the Year. He also serves on the Advisory Board of the Golf Range Association of America.











Building a practice station to help teach alignment and path is all about getting the student to consciously trust where the ball needs to go, and to get their subconscious to also buy into it. You need to train the student in both areas—if they don't get this on the subconscious level, their mind won't let their body execute the swing. So I use

sticks and nets to show the path the ball needs to start on and to provide obstacles to hit around. It's all about seeing what it looks like to start the ball on line—it doesn't look correct to most people, but it is.

Golf is a very precise target sport, like shooting a gun or throwing darts. But in those other activities, you're

standing directly on the target line—and in golf, you're standing inside the target line. If you were going to shoot at a target by holding a gun way out to the side of your body, you'd be very inefficient. That's what golfers are faced with, and why you can't rely only on down-the-line video to show students what they need to do. Having a practice station that shows where you really need to start the ball—what it looks like, what it feels like, how to align your body to the target line—is a way to help your student's brain understand how to start the ball on line and create the trust they need to hit the ball consistently well. ■

## SEEING IS BELIEVING

Using a visible teaching setup, such as this practice station concept, attracts attention to your instruction. Any time I set it up, or use any other large teaching aids on the lesson tee, I get so many people who walk by and want to try a few swings. They're curious, and they want you to explain what's going on. That's a great chance for you to ask them where they think the ball needs to start, let them take a few swings and see what it is you're teaching, then invite them for a full lesson. You've done more than just spark their interest—you've created a learning environment, and given them confidence in your teaching ability.

*This story originally appeared in the February 2012 issue of PGA Magazine and is used with permission.*



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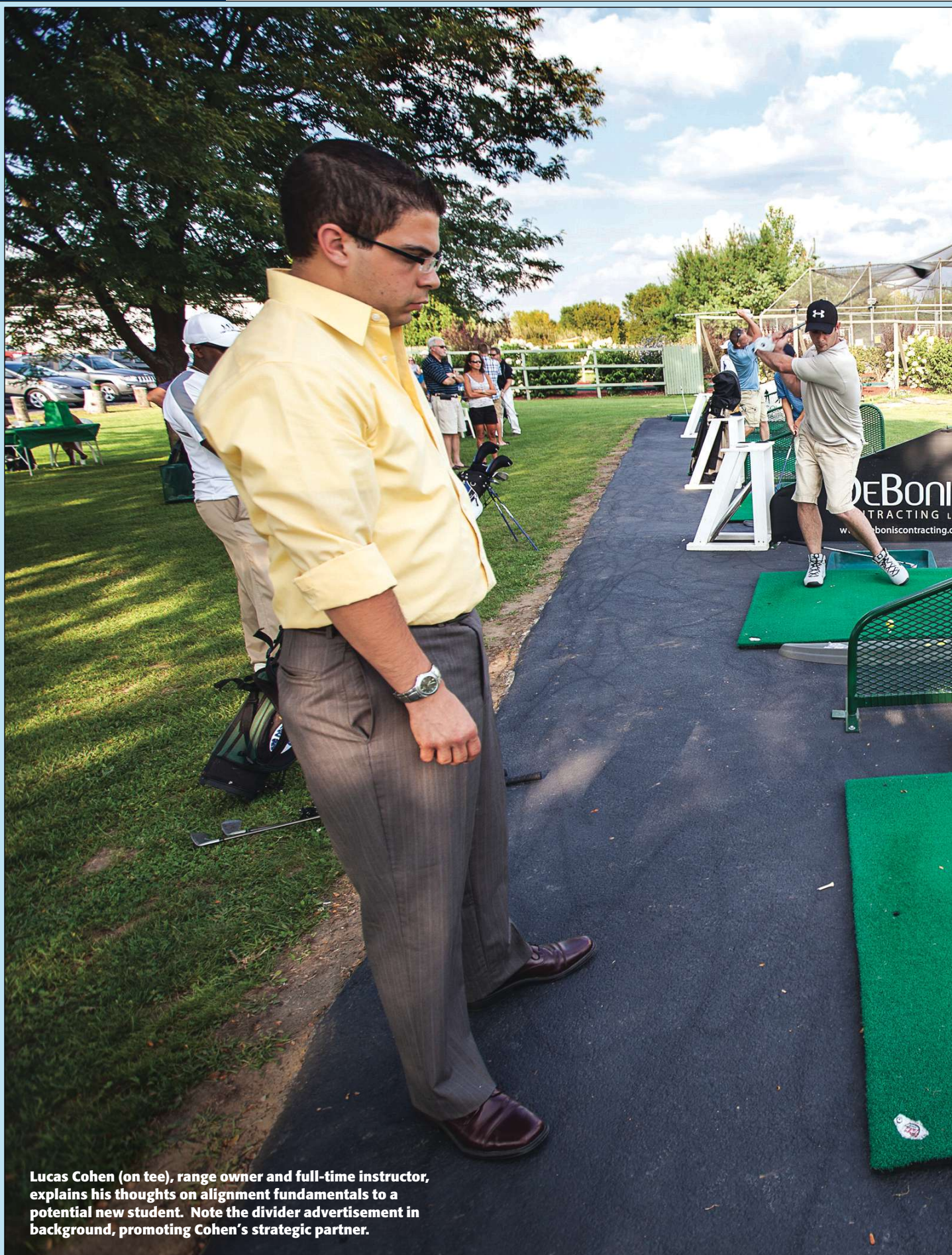


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**Lucas Cohen (on tee), range owner and full-time instructor, explains his thoughts on alignment fundamentals to a potential new student. Note the divider advertisement in background, promoting Cohen's strategic partner.**



# Ten Acres and a Chance to Call the Shots



**For an entrepreneurial young PGA professional, buying a downtrodden range in upstate New York has offered a chance to create his own destiny**

**BY EVAN ROTHMAN**





**O**n a warm April evening, Lucas Cohen sat bone-tired on a bench at his newly purchased driving range in Greenport, N.Y. The 34-year-old teaching professional and newly minted entrepreneur had just completed another long day of landscaping and assorted gruntwork. His chocolate Labrador, Kobe, looked on questioningly as Cohen began to weep. Along with the fatigue he was feeling a wave of joy that triggered the tears. In any direction that he looked he could see a long-nurtured dream becoming reality.

“No more ‘Can I do this?’” was, he says, the thought passing through his head at that moment. A risk-taker tends to experience a moment of psychic breakthrough around his or her business venture, and this was Cohen’s. Sitting again on that same bench – now freshly painted and

warmed by a summer sun – he responds to a reporter’s questions by sharing the gist of what he told himself in that teary-eyed moment: “No more asking permission.”

**Golf needs to connect with athletic kids who play team sports and young couples who haven’t started their families yet – the batting cages and mini-golf course (above) at New York Golf Park attain both those player-development goals.**

Cohen is an upstate New York native and was raised less than 10 miles from his new range, at least until age seven when his parents divorced. That precipitated a move to South Florida and its four-season golf weather, which suited young Lucas well. He was a fixture on the fairways until he turned his attention, as teenage boys often will, to cars and girls. Upon graduating with a degree in graphic design from Santa Fe College in Gainesville, Fla., Lucas underwent an identity crisis.

“I wasn’t looking forward to sitting behind a desk looking at a computer screen for the rest of my life,” he says.



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"I like talking to people way too much."

Encouraged by his parents to consider a career in golf, Cohen wound up enrolling in the Professional Golfers Career College in Temecula, Calif., where in 18 months he got an Associate's degree in golf management. This began a typically itinerant career path for a young assistant, with stints at well-regarded country clubs, resorts, and teaching academies in Massachusetts, Colorado, New Jersey, Florida and Maine. He continued his education in every aspect of the business – merchandising, turfgrass maintenance, tournament coordination, food-and-beverage, club fitting. All of it held his interest but teaching the game was where his passion lay.

Striving for greater success and responsibility came naturally to Cohen, who eventually received PGA of America certification. His skill set well developed, Lucas began the grinding task of applying for head-professional positions. Jobs at the kinds of high-end private-equity clubs he most admired were extremely difficult to get any kind of inside track on. He

began to grow weary of coming in second for positions he wasn't even sure he wanted.

"I always thought I wanted to be a head pro, but that comes with the stress of having 300-plus bosses," Cohen says. He continued assessing

**"I don't mind taking a gamble — especially when I'm betting on myself." —Lucas Cohen**

his prospects, meanwhile making the occasional trip to see family back in the Hudson Valley. In 2008, on just such a visit, Cohen spied a "For Sale" sign in front of 10-acre golf range. The property was beautifully situated between a horse farm and a produce stand on a well-trafficked county road, with glimpses of the Catskill Mountains in the middle distance. Cohen inquired

about the price. To his disappointment, the ownership was asking more than double what the business seemed to be worth, especially given an almost total lack of record-keeping to buttress such a high valuation.

An entrepreneur needs some sense that the property he's considering will be worth the money he invests. That is, if he actually has some money. There was no tall stack of investible cash among the shared assets of Lucas and Missy Cohen; meanwhile there was a newly arrived child – their son Sager. Still, Cohen returned to the property to inquire about it the next year, and the year after, and the year after that, even as its condition grew more threadbare. Finally, in late 2011 – just before the birth of Cohen's daughter, McKenzie – the property's asking price was halved to just over \$200,000.

Cohen took the plunge, renaming his new purchase New York Golf Park. The business plan he then set out to execute was more in his head than written down, more about swift, dramatic change than number crunching. He



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Very impressive form from a golfer wearing flip-flop sandals is one of the sights you'll see at a standalone range in a rural location.

had assessed the competition for practice and instruction, finding a dearth of it for area public golfers. The guy who “likes talking to people way too much” was sure he’d be doing that non-stop, and expecting the personal touch at his facility to quickly start building loyalty.

A local contractor who had been a childhood pal, Justin DeBonis, refused payment for the improvement work he did. This included helping tear down the range’s existing maintenance shed and building a new one, as well as remodeling and repainting the golf shop. DeBonis ended up accepting some motocross equipment as a token of Cohen’s appreciation. Several other old friends have helped out, as well. An uncle, Bennett Cohen, was pruning tree branches manually dur-

ing a recent visit.

Naturally, Cohen himself has been working 12-hour shifts seven days a week, cutting back or digging out overgrown hydrangeas, dogwoods, azaleas and ornamental pear trees that threatened to envelop the miniature-golf course. He has personally painted every bench and garbage can, installed new target flags, mowed the target greens, and so on—all the while fitting in 20 lessons a week, conducting golf schools and clinics and promoting the business via online and print media.

Still, there are workers on the clock and materials being purchased. On a recent afternoon asphalt contractors and local kids with wheelbarrows full of cedar mulch were on-property. “I spent the \$80,000 I had in my cost budget for the year by the end of July,”

Cohen says. “Then again, I’ve accomplished most of what I wanted to get done.”

Indeed, an infrequent visitor to the range in its previous incarnation (as this writer was) is quickly struck by all of the changes Cohen has made by mid-season. There is new netting between the range and road that went up during an uncomfortably windy day, because the boom rental was already paid for. Sandblasted and repainted bay dividers now gleam in the sun on their fresh blacktop pad. Behind each bay are white wooden bagstands bought on the cheap from a previous employer and spiffed up. At one end of the tee line is a new synthetic-turf putting green. The mini-golf course had been so overgrown with foliage you may have thought Army camouflage experts had worked on it. Now it’s in pristine condition, with new putting surfaces and fresh gravel for drainage, along with repainted and reinstalled stone borders.

Next up, if all goes to plan, is an enclosure against the weather at the back of the range, a reconstructed front of the range, and a membership option to create value for enthusiastic customers. “I want this place to feel like a private club,” Cohen says, knowing the casual atmosphere of his range couldn’t be compromised no matter how many memberships were taken out.

Even more noticeable than the physical alternations is the air of optimism surrounding New York Golf Park. For that, credit Cohen’s enthusiasm and salesmanship. “Not being scared to give stuff away for free” is central to his first-year approach: “I just want to bring people here,” he says. “Once they see how nice it is, they’ll come back.” He seems to know every customer by name—even “Mike,” a golfer who hadn’t visited for months but was greeted cheerily by name when he picked up a large basket.

“I’m looking at this as a long-term thing,” Cohen says of his startup business. “I don’t mind taking a gamble—especially when I’m betting on myself.” Golf keeps saying it needs more “welcome centers” to keep growing the game—you probably shouldn’t wager against the success of this one. ■



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# Instruction Lures Lapsed Golfers

At a Dallas municipal run by Tony Martinez , the range and practice center, in his words, "needs to be a first-class factory for building golfers" **BY DAVID GOULD**





# (and Helps Retain the Regulars)



The plush turf at Keeton Park's range, unexpected at a municipal facility, is one way Martinez and his crew "over-deliver to attract golfers we wouldn't otherwise see."





**W**hen it's early in a fourball match and you see your partner not just standing comfortably over 8-foot putts but rolling them at the hole with proper pace, you'll likely whisper to yourself: "Oh good, he's feelin' it."

That's how the greater Dallas golf market and enthusiasm at Keeton Park Golf Course was affecting Tony Martinez early this season – the facility's PGA Head Golf Professional and director of instruction was definitely feelin' it. One indicator in particular had his attention, and that was players who had seemingly gone inactive.

"I was hearing from people in that 'lapsed golfer' category who were looking to return," says Martinez. "They're out there and they would like to be back playing. We just need to be ready for them with the right programs and the right attitude." Martinez also drew some important conclusions from what the point-of-sale reports said about demand for new gear. "In the first three months of 2012 we had our best quarter

for merchandise since 2004," he reports. "Rounds played were up 17 percent in the quarter versus 2011, which will tend to drive all categories of revenue, but I saw a little extra energy in that merchandise number."

A Tucson native who has become a force for positive change in the Dallas city golf system, Martinez is a bottom-line golf operator who lives by the belief that teaching feeds the industry with fee-paying, lunch-ordering, driver-purchasing, tournament-entering golfers. You'll find the names of touring professionals in his lesson book, but bottom-up golf promotion is Tony's signature style. It's an approach that has

made him invaluable as a member of our Advisory Board here at the Golf Range Association of America.

Keeton Park Golf Course, the Dallas municipal he oversees, is known for its cautious but steady program of capital improvements. The range at Keeton Park now has an eye-catching rock wall bulkheading two of the short-target greens, giving players a make-or-break definition to how well they are controlling distance on short pitches. There are Adirondack chairs along the tee line, bagstands, club cleaning units and sand barrels to help heal the high-quality natural turf.

It's always being tweaked, but when the Keeton Park practice center got its major renovation in 2009, a grand opening drew attention to the improvements. Bleachers were erected, multiple pro clinics were put on,

Getting some of his PGA Tour amigos into the act, Martinez let tour star Anthony Kim turn on the charm with this group of newer golfers.





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there was music, contests, a master of ceremonies (Martinez took the microphone) plus gear demos and prize giveaways. "We had a chance to set ourselves apart in this area of practice and instruction, versus other benefits the golfer is looking for," Martinez notes.

In conversations with colleagues and contacts nationwide, he keeps tabs on trends and new ideas with potential to help golf meet its future goals. Tony shared some of his current views on just those topics.

The golf industry's problems have been talked about a lot—how do you view them?

Our instruction and player development approach is just okay, and it needs to be great. One problem we've created is that we've made the instructor the star. I can see how it happened but it doesn't fit the paradigm anymore. Things have to swing around and become student-centered. What the new golfer or the next student is thinking about, aspiring to, looking for—that's what has to be important, not

the instructor being on a magazine cover. That's vanity. We've been telling the customer what golf has to be, as viewed through our lens.

**"Instruction builds golf participation, but the teacher can't be the star. The process has to focus on what works for the student."**

**—Tony Martinez**

What are you doing to change it?

We come here every day to put the value on the student, the new golfer, the player we're trying to develop. The objective is to listen to someone and read them as well as possible, so their

response is: "These people get who I am." It may sound kind of out-there but our job is to facilitate self-discovery through golf. When the golf ball gets caught flush and flies straight, that is joy every time. People want that joy and they need it, and we're here to help them find it.

Ball flight that inspires a newer golfer is probably more likely to happen on the range, would you agree?

It could happen on the range or on the course, but players start on the range so we need to have it happen there. We could lose them before they get comfortable enough on the course to hit good shots. For that reason we've steered as much spending as possible toward the practice facility. We are in the business of producing golfers, and we need a first-rate facility to meet our production goals.

One encouraging sign that's been appearing is all the new concepts around marketing golf as a short-time-period activity. Where are you on that issue?



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We've got to do what we can to help people find their golf time window. Someone should do a traffic study in every U.S. city that reveals to golfers how stopping at the range at the beginning of their evening commute produces a "found hour" of time that can

change their whole day. Our facility is south of downtown and it provides the opportunity to hit balls while the traffic thins out – golfers are here on the tee instead of idling their cars in traffic. They get home at the same time whether they stop here or not. Not only that, they come in the door much happier than if they had commuted straight home. And this is the professional class we're talking about – customers we really want to

keep in our camp.

That's one thing about ranges – they can go upscale a lot easier than an entire golf course can.

Discerning players will recognize high quality in a practice facility right away, and the word of mouth tends to have some velocity to it – would you agree?

I could answer that best just by taking you to the Keeton Park range today, especially if you had happened to be there regularly years ago. The better our turf has gotten, the better the golf swings you see here. We're a municipal, but if we over-deliver in the area of range turf, we'll draw players you wouldn't expect to see.

• • • • •

Does it really work to invest in golf instruction and the practice "factory" for golfer-making? Tony Martinez says it does and backed that up with comparatives of his range's first-quarter revenues over several years. He was able to show them moving from \$7,500 in 2008, to \$10,000 in 2009, flat due to weather in 2010, to \$12,000 in 2011 and up to \$16,000 in 2012. Those are numbers, you would have to agree, that have a good feel to them. ■

Seven years ago, before economic woes set in, Martinez pushed to get capital funds directed toward range improvements (*above*). When the 2009 grand re-opening came along (*below*), having a first-class range was suddenly a vital means of holding onto participation.



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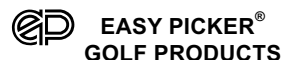
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