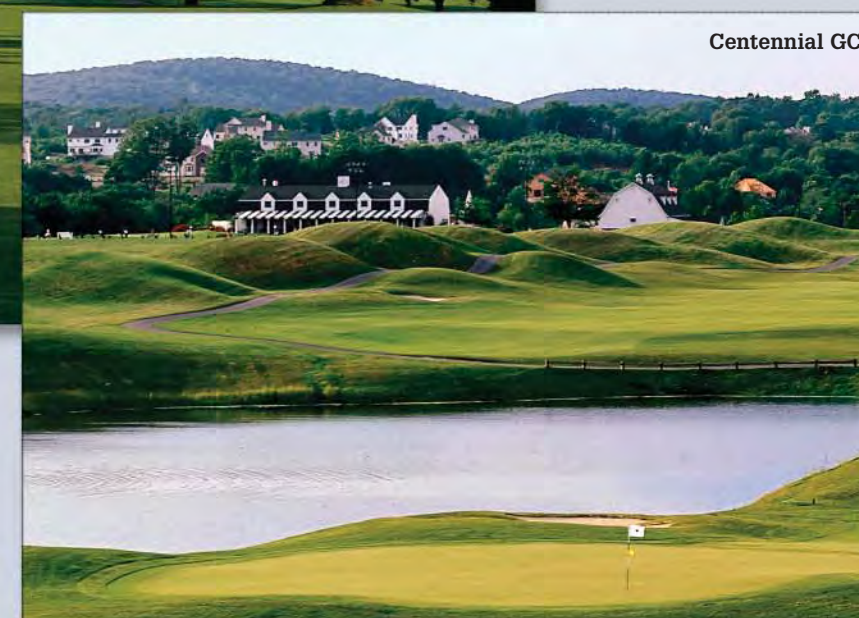


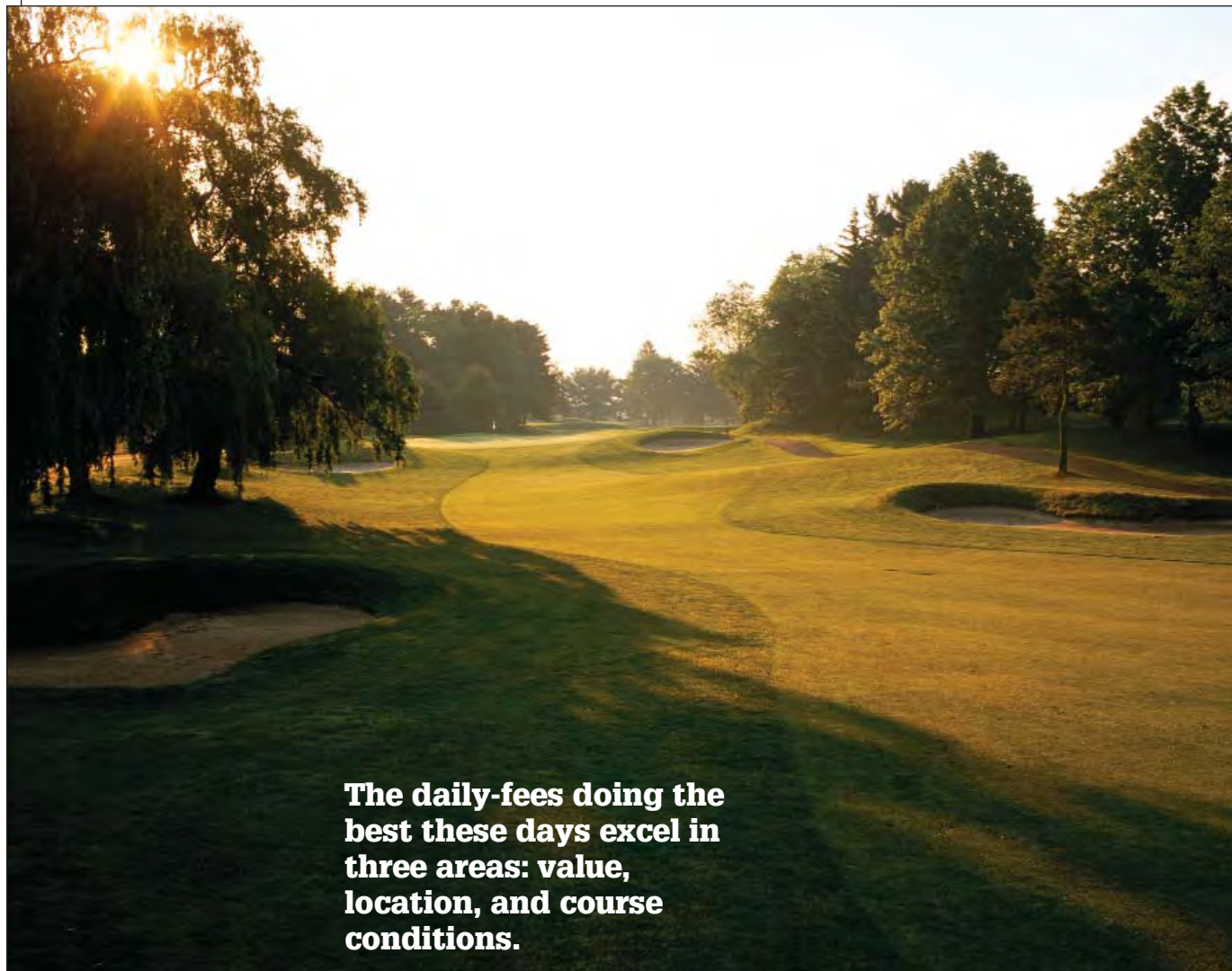
Public Welcome



The daily-fee courses of the Met Area are in better shape than ever, and offer golfers unprecedented choices and outstanding value **BY RAY TENNENBAUM**

Next year's U.S. Open at Long Island's venerable Bethpage Black is the second of three consecutive Opens on public courses, coming on the heels of the thrilla at La Jolla, a.k.a., this year's Tiger-Rocco duel at Torrey Pines. The USGA promises to continue the trend with Opens scheduled at Pinehurst Resort in 2014 and the brand-new Washington state muni, Chambers Bay, in 2015. It's yet another signal that despite the economic challenges facing the game, public golfers are enjoying a mini-renaissance in terms of the quality and variety of courses they have to choose from.





The daily-fees doing the best these days excel in three areas: value, location, and course conditions.

The 10th hole at Bergen County's River Vale, a course that has undergone a maintenance overhaul.

The Met Area, rightly regarded as a bastion of private club excellence, has a long and storied history in public golf (Van Cortlandt Park, in the Bronx, is the oldest public course in America). Local daily-fee golfers have a cornucopia of options. Pound Ridge Golf Club [*The Met Golfer*, June/July 2008], created by Pete and Perry Dye, opened in July and has set a new standard for fiercely challenging upscale daily-fee play in a spectacular setting of woods and meadows. Other notable daily-fee highlights include Long Island National and Hamlet Willow Creek on Long Island, as well as Centennial in northern Westchester County and Grossinger's in the Catskills. Over in Bergen County, after a million-dollar upgrade in drainage and irrigation and maintenance, semi-private River Vale has emerged as a lush oasis. "It's the best it's ever been," says River Vale golf professional John Kaspar.

The daily-fees doing the best these days excel in three areas: value, location, and course

conditions. On Long Island, Lido Golf Club general manager Steve Rofrano was pleasantly surprised by the course's business this year: "We've done much better than we expected, and I attribute that to our location near the beaches. What we're seeing down here is due to the economy—people who would normally shuffle off to the Hamptons for a few days are staying home. We're down from what we did five or 10 years ago but we had a wonderful summer."

Patriot Hills, a well-regarded muni owned by the Rockland County, N.Y., town of Stony Point, is a hilly, scenic and interesting layout that has seen its rounds increase every year since it opened in 2003. "We've been quite fortunate," says head pro Dave Fusco. "There have been a few key parts to that—one is that you can make it here from the George Washington Bridge in just 30 minutes."

Farther up the Hudson Valley, Links at Union Vale head professional Rudy Napora is

JIM KRAJICEK



Serene and well-kept, Sterling Farms in Stamford, Conn., is a model muni in one of the region's fastest-growing cities.

pleased about business—but cautiously so. "We were worried this year because of the economy and the spike in gas prices." Despite those factors, rounds at Union Vale are up, continuing a trend that started in 2005. "I'm hoping it's the product we're offering. Our golf course really does offer private club conditions, and we haven't out-priced ourselves."

Union Vale's good fortune has coincided

with the loss of two courses in Dutchess County: Carvel Country Club, open for play only sporadically since 2007, is shutting down as its owner, the Durst Organization, seeks approval for a development plan which would scale back the existing course to a nine-hole executive course.

In the nearby town of Amenia, Silo Ridge has closed to the public, but Millbrook

On an Upswing: Spook Rock

Spook Rock, in Suffern, N.Y., is proof that a well-run muni provides good news for everyone involved. "The town has invested in the course since the day it first opened, and they've always been willing to make capital expenditures," says Spook Rock director of operations Dan Colvert.

Co-head professional Tony Musto also finds he appreciates the town's support and guidance. "When I first came here four years ago, I sat down with the town supervisor [Christopher St. Lawrence], and he said 'The only thing I want is to go to the golf course and see juniors there.' Now, we offer a full-day junior camp for 8-14 year olds. Which is also good because you get parents hitting balls and playing—it's a snowball effect."

Spook Rock brought in an LPGA instructor, Joyce Fried, to work as co-head pro with Musto, and her involvement with a national girls' program has gotten more youngsters involved. "Now, you come up to the

range and you see kids everywhere," says Musto. "Last year almost a third of my lessons were for juniors."

Colvert cites course architect Stephen Kay's redesign, which was a five-year



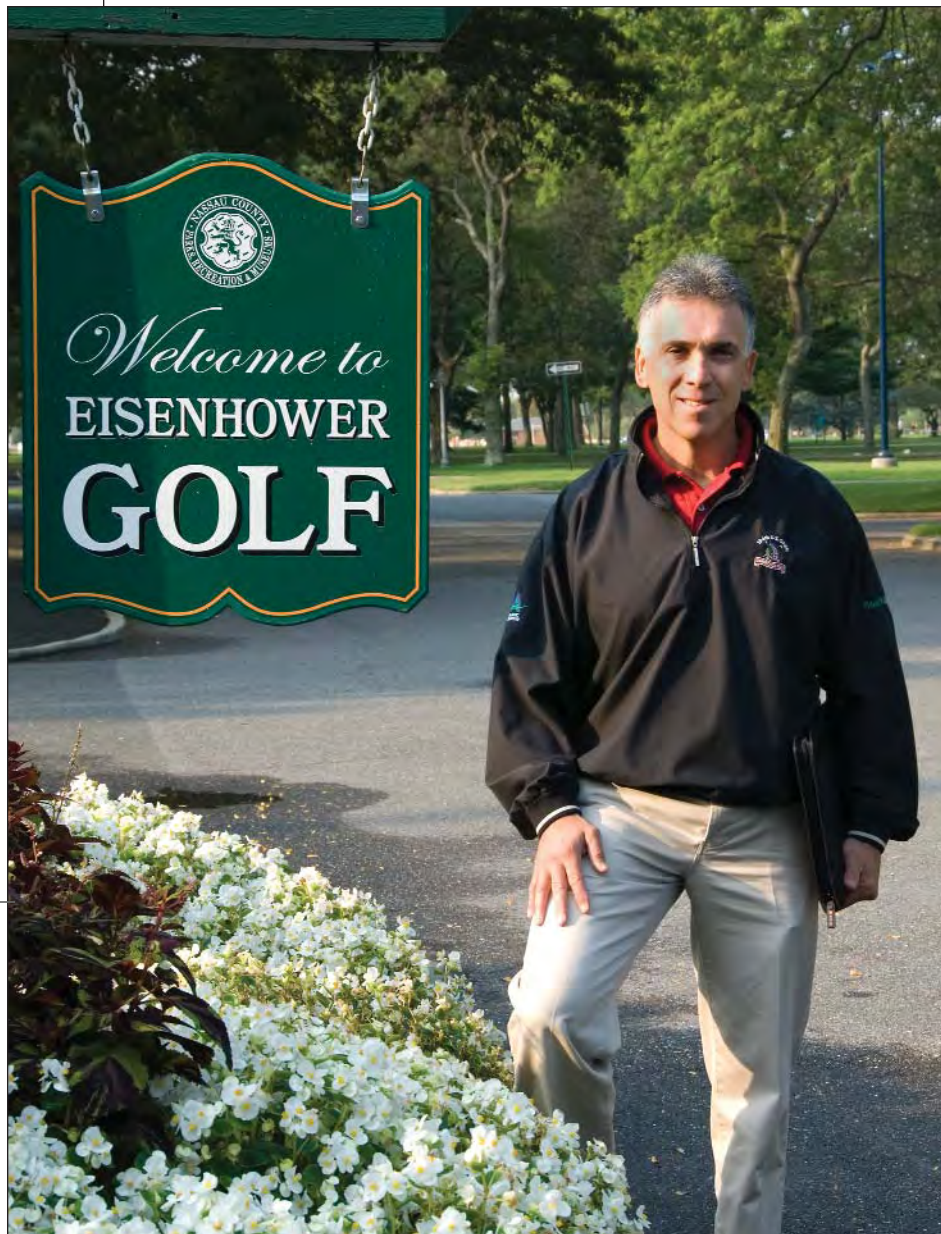
project. "It made quite a difference in the way the golf course plays for both better players and high handicappers." Last season, Spook Rock installed a \$1.3 million irrigation system; when the current overhaul of the practice facility

is completed, the driving range will have five fully-grassed target greens and a new drainage system to keep it in top condition.

Colvert views Spook Rock through a savvy but sympathetic eye. Some years ago, he made the decision to start golfers at nine-minute intervals, instead of the roughly seven minutes that were in place. "I've seen a slight drop in rounds as a result, but I think we have more quality rounds," he says. "The pace of play improved dramatically when we went to nine minutes—it's four hours or less the first few tee times on a Friday, Saturday or Sunday, and it gets up to 4:30, 4:40 sometimes—but six-hour rounds don't exist anymore." That's an appealing fact to public links golfers accustomed to long waits and long rounds. And it's just another example of a muni that, like an increasing number of courses in the Met Area, is doing everything it can to improve the experience for its customers.

—R.T.

TOP: EVAN SCHILLER



The staff at Long Island's Eisenhower Park is led by Gene Contino (above), who has overseen upgrades to the venerable Red Course (right).



Ventures is planning an Ernie Els redesign as part of an ambitious luxurious resort which will include a vineyard, equestrian center, skeet range, and other high-end amenities.

These closings, and others that might follow, do signal a dark side to all the positive news. After years of being under-supplied (especially compared with other regions of the country), the Met Area saw a number of up-scale daily-fees open in the last 15 years, to the point where there is now an over-supply in some areas. In these difficult economic times, some of those courses may not survive.

Municipal courses, however, represent tremendous value, and consequently most are doing very well. Most are also in better shape than they've ever been thanks to investment from local, county and state governments. The governing models vary but the results are the same: from Fairfield to Monmouth, from the East End to the Lower Hudson Valley, munis are thriving, bringing new golfers in to join the not-so-new golfers enjoying the links every chance they get.

Rounds at munis, as you might guess, are largely up. "We're up about three percent over last year," says Alan Roberts, head pro at Hominy Hill in Colts Neck, N.J., standard bearer of the Monmouth County Parks System's golf courses. "Last year we did 30,000 rounds, and this year we'll probably do 31,000," says Montauk Downs head pro Kevin Smith. Nassau County's Eisenhower Park will do "7,000 rounds overall more than last year," according to Gene Contino, superintendent of golf operations at Eisenhower Park.

Sterling Farms in Stamford, Connecticut, is a prime example of a self-sustaining muni—and proof that, when properly operated, municipal golf courses generate more rev-

enue than they cost. It's run within the Stamford city government under the independent jurisdiction of a nine-member board. "It's a very unpolitical atmosphere," says executive director Paul Grillo. "Everybody's there to help the golf course." Eleven percent of the facility's gross revenue goes to the city as rent, but the rest of the money Sterling Farms generates—after paying for all its own expenses, like insurance and payroll—goes back into the golf course.

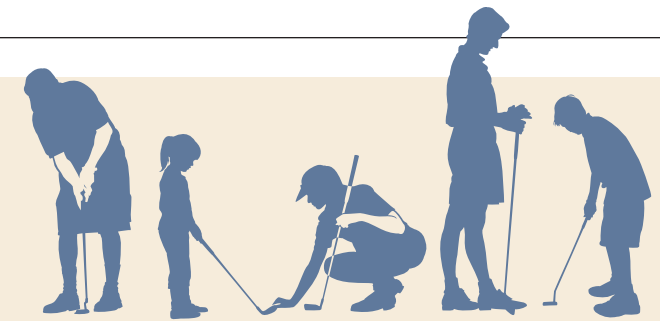
Some ten years ago, Sterling Farms hired architect Robert McNeil to put together a master renovation plan, and over the last few years they have reworked all the tees and greens on the front nine, with the back to follow in the years ahead.

"We have almost 8,000 residents of the city who have golf passes," says Grillo.

"And it's highly discounted—they pay \$23 for 18 holes, as opposed to non-residents who pay \$50. We keep the golf course in as good a condition as we can for them because they're the ones who actually pay the money for the place to be in good shape, and they're our bread and butter."

Long Island golfers also have a lot to be proud of—and their municipal courses are repaying that pride by making sure they stay up-to-date and enjoyable. In the old days, hiring costly outside contractors was the only way to rebuild holes. But investment in equipment at state and county parks has made improvement much more cost-effective than in the bad old days. Quality conditions keeps golfers coming back.

The mood is really good at Eisenhower Park. Forward tees have been built on all 18 holes of the White Course, and the Blue Course now has two forward sets of tees. Says Contino, "We're trying to incorporate something for everyone." The effects of the improvements at Eisenhower are most noticeable in course conditioning. Contino explains, "We've made a lot of progress. We hired professionals from the industry. I've got four PGA pros here, and my greenskeeper, Ben Orlowski, has



A Taste of "the Smith" and "the Wheel"

By John Steinbreder

I am at the H. Smith Richardson Golf Course in Fairfield, Connecticut, and I am about to start my first round there ever, even though I grew up just a couple of miles away. So here I am, 52 years old and getting my first taste of "the Smith," as it is affectionately known.

As I take some practice putts among the course's regulars, I hear the starter say to me, "You're next." I scramble over to No. 1, where I meet up with my playing partners. One is an old friend, Tyler Luciani. He takes time off from his home building business each Thursday to play the Smith with a Lexus dealer named Tom and a lawyer named Rich. And this week, he is graciously including me in his foursome.

Tyler has told his friends that I am a member of a place that does not employ tee times, and has also pointed out that I am so sheepish to admit my failure to play the two nearby municipal courses—the Smith and the 36-hole Fairchild Wheeler—that I am committed to teeing it up at both this summer. It was never an outright aversion to public golf that kept me away. Rather, it was the comfort and ease of a club I had joined 27 years ago, where course conditioning was five-star and groups played in less than four hours.

Still, I must confess to longtime concerns about teeing it up at our munis that no doubt helped keep me away. Would the layouts be any good? What kind of shape would they be in? Would I be waiting on every shot? And I have those very same fears as I drive to the Smith that day.

Truth be told, I also wonder how well a long-time country clubber is going to fit in. So, I am feeling a bit abashed and more than a little precious (in my Seminole-logoed glove and Cypress Point shirt) as I watch Rich take a mighty swipe at his ball on the first fairway, thinning it badly. It ricochets off a nearby tree, nearly hitting us, and he sighs: "I am not a morning person." I chuckle, relieved by the common bond of golf humor. Suddenly, I feel very much at home.

The Smith measures 6,662 yards from the tips, and it is laid out on rolling woodlands with views of Long Island Sound. The price for a round is right: \$22 for Fairfield residents, or as low as \$12 if you join the men's club and pay an additional \$300 in annual dues.

I like the layout, which demands an ability to move the ball both left and right. Every fairway lie is good, and the undulating greens are healthy and true. I love the short par-fours at the beginning, Nos. 2 and 4, as well as the approach shot into the seventh green, which is tucked into a leafy corner of woods so quiet you want to picnic there.

Best of all, however, is the pace of play. We do not wait once to hit a shot, yet allow ourselves plenty of time to abuse each other about our bad swings and tell a joke or two.

It feels much the same way at "the Wheel" the next day. That facility, straddling the Fairfield/Bridgeport line, is where native son and Hall-of-Fame golfer Julius Boros used to play. While it definitely has a more hard-nosed aura than the Smith, it too, boasts a lovely wooded setting with rolling hills. I play the front nine of the par-71 Black Course with Randy Taylor, who heads the First Tee facility here (a joint venture of The First Tee of Metropolitan New York and The First Tee of Connecticut), as well as Tyler and Brad Worthington, the head pro at the nearby Brooklawn Country Club and a regular on this course when he was a kid. I can't help but smile when my drive lands in the middle of the fairway of the fourth hole and then hits a rock that suddenly sends it at a right angle into the woods. "Welcome to the Wheel," Brad says.

I like the downhill approach shot to the green of the par-four sixth so much I enthusiastically describe it as a poor man's version of the 13th at Pine Valley. The Brooklawn pro nearly doubles over in laughter, saying he has never heard anyone compare the Wheel to the #1-ranked course in the world.

I know it is time to go as I carry my bag back to my truck. But the fact is, I would rather keep playing. Here, or at the Smith. It is golf, no matter where you tee it up. And I love to play golf.

In the Bronx, the restored clubhouse at Pelham/Split Rock is a sight unto itself.



worked at Shinnecock and Winged Foot. We've got a horticulturist, and top-of-the-line golf carts. Simple things...little things that people enjoy. People like coming here."

Just down the road from Eisenhower, one can ask the question: does American public golf have a better story than that of Bethpage State Park? The USGA funded the renewal of the Black Course in 1997 and '98, but the other courses have benefited from the investment and attention. Over the years, the Red, Blue, and Green courses have been upgraded gradually, hole by hole.

"When we did the Black, the whole course was done in one shot," says Bethpage State Park director Dave Catalano. "For the other courses, it was more gradual. We'd renovate a hole or two on the Red—redo the bunkers and the bunker surrounds on that particular hole, and redo the tees. On the Blue we'd construct some new tee boxes and improve a drainage problem that existed for 25 years."

"That's what our mission is: to provide high-quality, low-cost recreation. And I think we do a pretty good job." —Bethpage director Dave Catalano

Catalano, a Farmingdale native who started playing Bethpage in 1967, gets emotional talking about Bethpage's comeback. "Back in the 1930s, Robert Moses labeled Bethpage as 'The People's Country Club.' From my perspective, I think we finally delivered on that promise in the late 1990s, when the conditions of the golf courses matched their design and architecture. The public has become the beneficiary because now they have excellently-maintained golf courses at a economical price. That's what our mission is: to provide high-quality, low-cost recreation. And I think we do a pretty good job."

Montauk Downs, Bethpage's sister facility in the state Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, has been benefiting from a little help from its friends. Five years ago, head pro Kevin Smith coordinated an effort among a group of devoted Downs golfers to help the state maintain and upgrade the course. At the first "Friends of Montauk Downs" gala in 2002, Rees Jones announced he would assemble a master plan—once again working for free as he had for Bethpage, and cementing his reputation as perhaps Long

(continued on page 39)

SPECIAL ADVERTISING SUPPLEMENT

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The Reunion Grande tower houses luxurious accommodations and restaurants.



What to Know Before You Go

Ginn Reunion Resort is located southwest of downtown Orlando, just 25 miles from Orlando International Airport. The Orlando area enjoys a temperate year-round climate, with an average winter highs in the mid-70s and lows in the 50s – comfortable for golf, and warm enough for the pool and water park.

overlooking the golf courses, there's something for groups and families of all sizes at Ginn Reunion Resort.

"This allows our guests to fully customize their experience with us," Bonell says. "If you're coming down as a couple, you can stay in a cozy villa. Or if you're bringing a group or a couple families, you can get a large house and have plenty of room for everyone – and all the furnishings are top-notch, such as flat-screen TVs in every property." Many of the homes have private pools, and Ginn Reunion Resort also has a Water Park with two water slides and a lazy river that is a year-round family favorite.

In terms of golf, Ginn Reunion Resort boasts a unique "triumvirate" of designers for its three courses: Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer and Tom Watson. The IndependenceSM Course is Watson's first Florida design, and the

The resort's fully furnished villas include full kitchens and plenty of space.



rolling, bunkered terrain is what you might expect from a player who won five British Opens. The LegacySM Course, designed by Palmcr, rolls through preserve areas of woods and water. Each spring, the front nine of The Legacy and the front nine of the Independence combine to create a composite course for the LPGA Tour Ginn OPEN[®], a heralded tournament won this past year by Lorena Ochoa before an enthusiastic gallery. The Legacy and Independence courses each opened in 2003 and are served by a large, stunning clubhouse with a full-service golf shop and locker rooms.

The newest addition to the trio of courses at Ginn Reunion is The TraditionSM, a design by Jack Nicklaus and his son, Jack II. The Tradition opened in late 2006 and is generating buzz as one of Orlando's top new courses. The Tradition will soon have its own clubhouse facility complete with golf shop and dining.

All three courses were built to challenge the world's best golfers – in addition to hosting an LPGA Tour event,



Kids love splashing around in the resort's Water Park (above), while Tom Watson's Independence Course (below) has bunkers reminiscent of the British Isles.

Ginn Reunion Resort also is also a host for Pro-Pro Series events for PGA Professionals prior to the PGA Merchandise Show each year – but are still forgiving enough for occasional golfers to thoroughly enjoy. Because the three courses are only open to resort

guests and property owners at Ginn Reunion Resort, they don't get overcrowded or overplayed like many Florida courses.

"The big benefit of being open only to property owners and resort guests is that our three courses are always in



IMAGINE THE BEST ELEMENTS OF A VACATION TO ORLANDO: plentiful golf courses; sunny weather; world-famous theme parks and family attractions. Now imagine enjoying them with all the comforts and conveniences of home: large, luxurious accommodations; golf courses that aren't overcrowded; an atmosphere as intimate as your own club.

Ginn Reunion[®] Resort has found a way to transform this imaginary vacation into a very real destination that is miles away from the ordinary golf vacation. This 2,300-acre Florida resort has three championship golf courses by legendary designers, conditions and service that rival the best private clubs in the country, and an atmosphere where you never feel crowded, and you never need to reach for your wallet.

"Because our facility is essentially a private facility for members and resort guests, it is completely tipless and cashless," says Peter Bonell, Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Ginn Reunion. "That makes it great for

group trips and family trips, where you know that everything your group or family does on the property is covered under one tab. Our visitors who have a club membership back home appreciate this system, and it makes them feel right at home."

It becomes clear that Ginn Reunion Resort is different from other resorts starting with the lodging options. There are no "standard" hotel-style rooms at the resort. Instead, the resort exclusively offers fully furnished suites, villas and private homes as its guest accommodations. From one-bedroom suites in the majestic Reunion GrandeSM tower to five-bedroom estate homes

With three outstanding courses and a variety of luxurious lodging options, Ginn Reunion Resort is the ideal place for your next group golf trip.



great shape," Bonell says. "The course conditions are unreal because we're able to keep the number of rounds played pretty low, not like some places that get overrun in the winter months. We always have championship conditions. As we like to say, it's not resort golf, it's championship golf."

Ginn Reunion Resort recently added another golf legend to the property when Annika Sorenstam chose to open her first golf Academy there. ANNIKA Academy™ is a boutique-style teaching academy modeled after the teachings that propelled her to the World Golf Hall of Fame. Led by Annika's golf instructor, Henri Reis, and her fitness instructor, Kai Fusser, ANNIKA Academy combines golf and fitness instruction to help golfers become more powerful and efficient.

"Henri and Kai have helped me continue to raise the bar to heights that I never thought possible," Sorenstam says. "I am confident that their simple techniques, along with our facility, will

help others reach their potential as well."

The ANNIKA Academy has a spacious 5,400-square foot facility built to house small class sizes of six to eight golfers. The facility includes the latest in video analysis and Callaway Golf clubfitting technology, along with two indoor hitting booths, access to a spacious driving range and short-game area for outdoor lessons, and a state-of-the-art fitness center for customized workouts. Several packages are available for guests of Ginn Reunion Resort who would like to experience the ANNIKA Academy's approach – including limited sessions with Annika.

Ginn Reunion Resort also has a wide variety of dining options, from gourmet dining at Forte™ to more casual poolside eateries. The Cove is a newly renovated poolside paradise where you can watch sports, relax by the water or play a game of pool, while the Eleven™ bar atop Reunion Grande offers rooftop dining and drinks with a panoramic view of the

Orlando area.

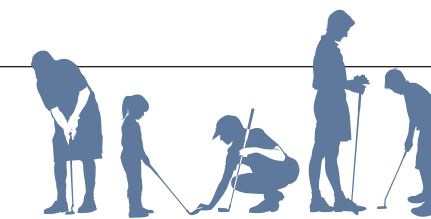
Of course, Orlando is known as an outstanding family destination, and Ginn Reunion Resort makes it easy to enjoy the area's attractions for the entire family. The resort is only six miles from the main entrance to Walt Disney World Resort®, and not much farther are Universal Studios® and Sea World®. Ginn Reunion Resort offers vacation packages that take care of details such as accommodations and theme park tickets, as well as offers a resort credit to the many amenities.

"You can spend all day at one of the parks, then come back and unwind in a house instead of crowding into a hotel room," Bonell says. "Having the extra room is great for the kids, not to mention for the parents." Ginn Reunion also offers a Kids Crew™ day camp experience for children ages 4–12, which is offered 365 days a year – and gives Mom and Dad a chance to enjoy some quiet time on the course or at the resort's boutique spa.

Speaking of The Spa, the offerings have been revamped with the environment in mind. The Spa has moved to the use of energy-saving equipment and recyclable materials, and is now offering a line of "green" spa treatments that utilize organic ingredients. These include the Tropical Escape treatment, which uses papaya extract and vitamin A to rejuvenate your skin, and the Tropical Oasis treatment, which uses extracts of mango and passion fruit to brighten and tone the skin. The Spa at Ginn Reunion Resort offers tranquil, personalized service, right down to the iPod each guest is given to use during their visit. ●

Getting More Information About Ginn Reunion Resort

For further information regarding Ginn Reunion Resort, please call 888-418-9610, or for reservations call 888-418-9611. For group golf reservations, please call Senior Golf Sales Manager Sally Livingston at 888-418-9614.



Public Welcome

(continued from page 34)

Island golf's best friend of all.

Since then, the state has matched the Friends' contributions, keeping the Downs on healthy footing. To date, superintendent Charlie Reidlinger has overhauled nine holes. What does that mean? "Basically we renovated the bunkers, wherever Rees has indicated—and either eliminated or added bunkers on some holes. We strip out the entire green complex—not the green itself—and re-shape where the bunkers are going to be and construct from there. Same thing for the tees—we completely strip them, re-grade them, and build additional tees if necessary." If it sounds like a lot of work, that helps explain why Reidlinger wanted to single out one critical part of Montauk Downs' rebirth: his crew. "They just have complete pride in their work—they care so much about it."

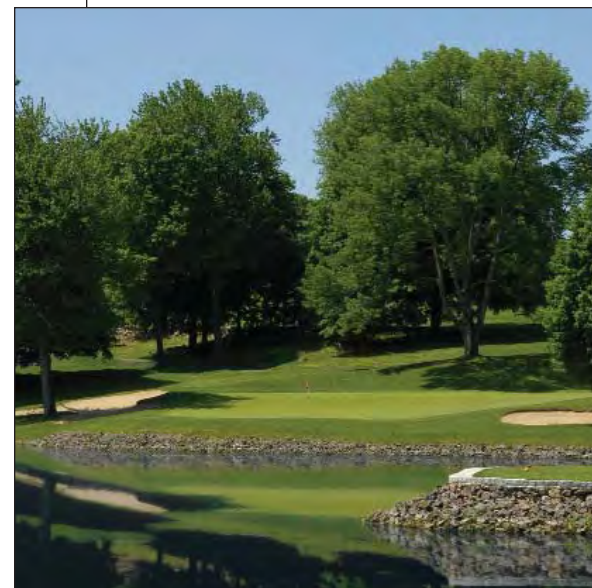
In Bergen County, New Jersey, the Department of Parks is nearing completion of a master plan to renovate all its courses, including installing new sprinkler systems and lengthening the tees. Since the county began with the Red 9 at Rockleigh seven years ago, "we've been notching them off," says Bergen County Parks general manager Kevin Purcell.

The New York City munis also continue to thrive. Renovations are nearly complete at both the Pelham/Split Rock (Bronx) and Dyker Beach (Brooklyn) clubhouses. The Pelham/Split Rock building houses a full restaurant and a brand-new golf shop, along with a full-featured banquet facility: the main room can hold 90 for a sit-down dinner, using a separate event kitchen, and the pavilion will seat 220 for birthdays or weddings.

Reworked at a cost of \$8 million, Dyker Beach's clubhouse has two large event rooms. ("It'll be like having a party at a mansion," says Dyker Beach catering manager Dawn-Marie Gallagher.) A full-service golf shop and restaurant and will open soon.

All these are just part of the feast for the public that is Met Area daily-fee golf. ■

Ray Tennenbaum is a lifelong public links player. He writes from his home in Brooklyn, New York.



Top to bottom: Danbury's Richter Park has long been one of the best public courses in the Northeast; Public golfers flocked to Bethpage Black for the 2002 U.S. Open; the renovated greens at Montauk Downs are better than ever.

MIDDLE: USGA/JOHN WUMBERT