

CHARLIE HARRISON ♦ THE 'COW PASTURE' ♦ SOUTH CAROLINA

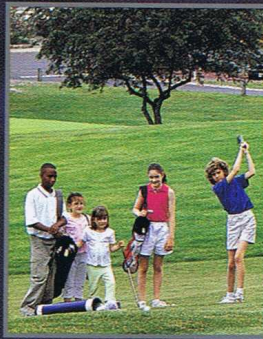
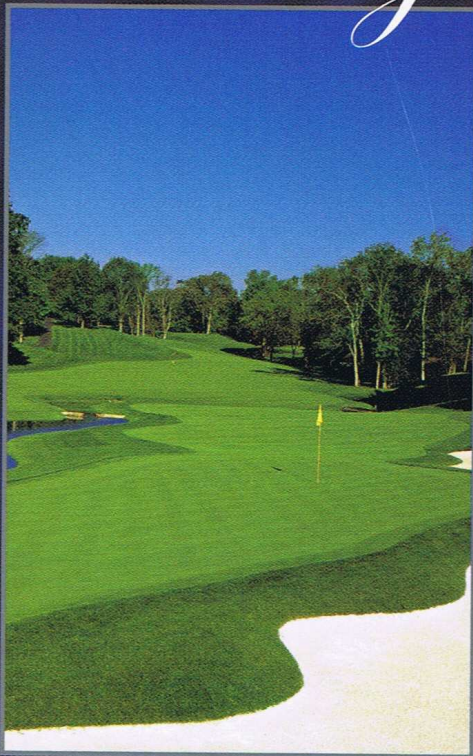
GolfStyles

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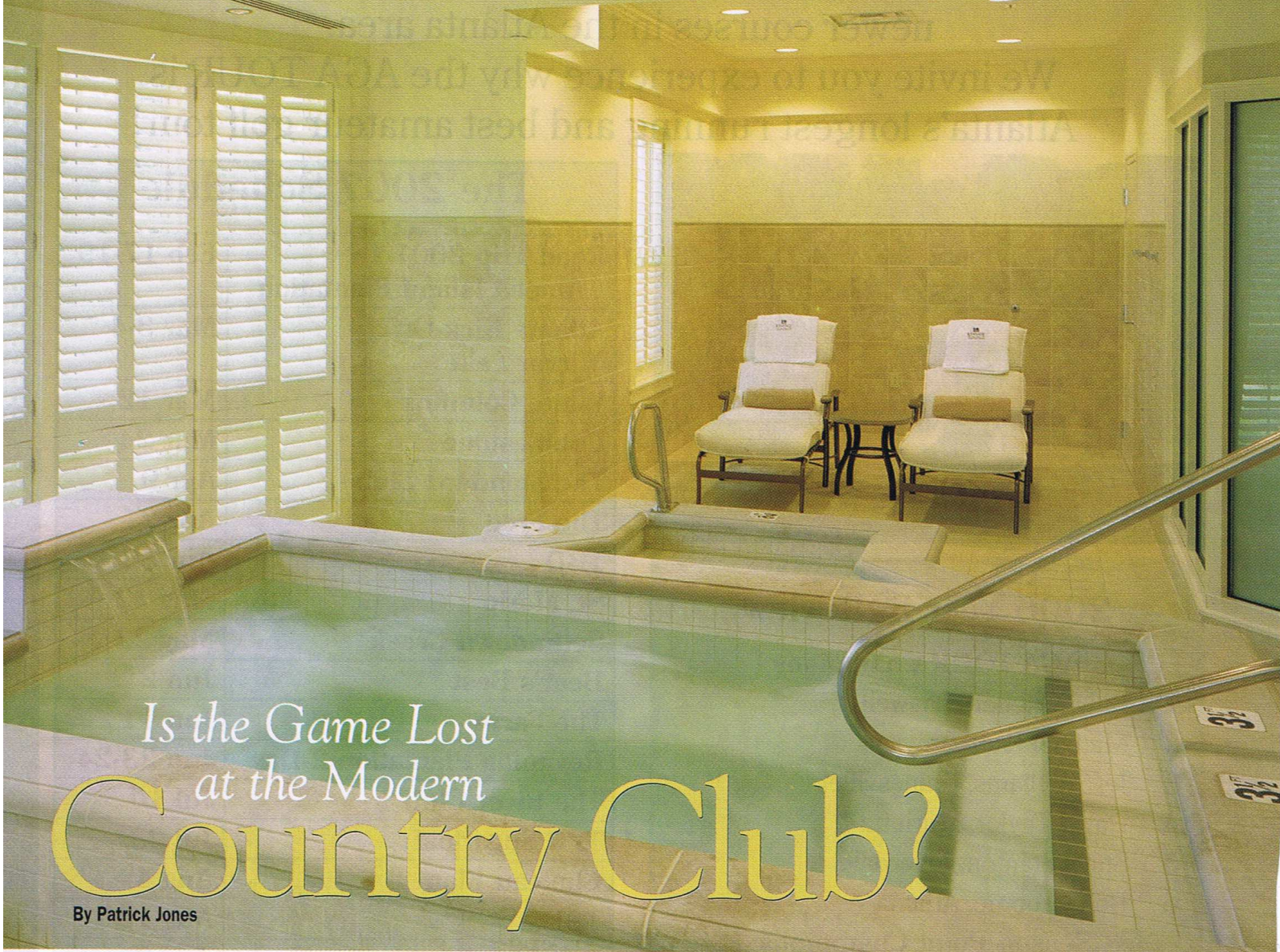
Atlanta

An Edition of GolfStyles

The 21st Century Country Club



Yes, golf is still part of it, but the modern club caters to families with kids' movie nights, nurseries, fitness facilities, and, believe it or not, manicures and pedicures. What's next, blue jeans? Well ...



Is the Game Lost at the Modern Country Club?

By Patrick Jones

This is a tale of two Georgia golf clubs. One club is sequestered from view behind wrought-iron fencing and matured landscaping near the heart of the city's most desirable in-town location.

A notable, long-ago deceased course architect sketched the course by hand. The original plans for this private layout are framed on the mahogany paneled walls of the grillroom. There is tartan carpet underfoot. Lobster bisque highlights the chef's seasonal lunch menu. Luxury automobiles fill the

parking lot. The main entrance is guarded around the clock. It is an established golfing haven for the city's business, political and social elite. Despite initiation fees that surpass mortgage balances on most starter homes, membership roles remain full. The nouveau

rich sit on the waiting list, pining for the privilege to join.

This club has been financially set for generations. With an endless supply of moneyed patrons, its future prospects appear ordained.

The other Georgia club is newly opened in the exurbs amidst hay bales and horse pastures off a hard-to-find highway. It, too, has aspirations of someday going



WITH CLUBS ADDING SPAS AND NURSERIES, IS GOLF TAKING A BACK SEAT AT THE MODERN COUNTRY CLUB?

private. But the reality is that there are no immediate guarantees of profit even with memberships supplemented by public-access play.

There is no sprawling English Tudor clubhouse with manicured grounds at this club. Prospective members must buy into blueprints and an artist's rendering. The pro shop is temporarily crammed into a double-wide trailer. Mud-caked construction equipment sits idly in a corner of the parking lot. A high-profile PGA Tour player lent his signature name to the course, but a talented, lesser-known local designer provided the yeoman's work.

Homebuyers get more for their money in this outlying area, but disposable incomes, for the most part, are less. Membership drives include posting initiation fee specials at eye-level on locker room bulletin boards.

The post-9/11 conservative spending funk is still having a trickle-down effect at this socio-economic stratum. The club's solvency remains at stake for the foreseeable future.

The established clubs are easy to pinpoint. For Atlantans, Peachtree Golf Club and Druid Hills Country Club are among those matching the elite criteria. There are scattered others in Georgia with this gentrified status. They are tucked away under stately oaks in a town near you.

The recently launched wannabe private clubs, meanwhile, are popping up everywhere – sometimes directly across the street from one another. The marketing arms of clubs at this oversupplied level do battle with slick brochures and flowery ad prose: *Come Home To Where You And Your Family Belong...At Our Premier, Awe-Inspiring Community...With Its Pristine Championship Golf Course...That Will Fulfill Your Every Want, Need And Desire...Through Eternity...Come See Us Now While Membership Opportunities Remain...Your Mom Would Approve....*

Some clubs are relying on ever-



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THE MODERN COUNTRY CLUB

narrowing niches to lure a loyal base, such as college affiliations or favorite pro football teams. The impressive new Rees Jones-designed Georgia Tech Golf Club outside of Atlanta is a prime example.

Clubs, by their very nature, are about bringing together like-type

maintaining stable membership bases in outlying transient neighborhoods is a formidable task.

While the established private clubs bask in their compounding equity, recently launched clubs must carve untapped niches, push the envelope on time-honored traditions and



OLD AND NEW: ESTABLISHED CLUBS LIKE DRUID HILLS AND NEWER ONES LIKE THE GC OF GEORGIA MUST ADAPT TO THE GOLF ECONOMY

people, but with the gangbuster competition just how vertical does the market need to be?

The advent of sophisticated data mining marketing software conjures the possibility of someday receiving targeted membership mailings from the Lactose Intolerant Golf Links at Cud Pastures, or to the Elvis Impersonators Country Club on Hound Dog Hill.

Pointed parody aside, it is a struggle for continued existence among newer clubs in Georgia. Attracting and

steadfastly monitor the pulse of demographic trends to survive – much less to thrive.

“The challenge today is how to differentiate your product from the others...to make the experience so compelling that people want to purchase full memberships in your club,” says Mike Tinkey, deputy chief executive officer for the National Golf Course Owners Association (NGCOA), which is headquartered in Charleston, S.C.

Tinkey researches trends and stumps the country with his knowledge. He provides strategic, proactive business and marketing advice to benefit the bottom lines of golf course owners looking for an edge.

One of his top recommendations is to focus on the entire family unit.

Tinkey, quoting Peter Yesawich, chief executive officer for one of the country’s leading travel and leisure marketing agencies, says that people want to “reconnect with what is important in their lives.” And, for the majority, that means spending more time with their spouse and children.

“Smart clubs today that understand the value of families are going to offer family programming,” says Tinkey. “A lot of kids play golf because their parents play. With two parents and two kids, or even a grandparent joining in, there is a natural foursome. They play together as a family. A lot of clubs don’t get that. But there are also a lot of examples of where it is happening and where it is filling the parking lots.”

Another leading trend that savvy clubs can latch onto is assisting their membership reduce the stress in their lives, says Tinkey. Quoting from his research, Tinkey says that twice as many people prefer to relax at health spas on vacation rather than play golf.

As clubs recognize and respond to this demand for alternative lifestyle programming, spas have begun to spring up next to pro shops. Cardio, fitness, stretching, Pilates, yoga, and even pedicures and massages now complement the 18 championship holes.

“Clubs needs to think of themselves as a one-stop shop with golf at the core,” says Tinkey.

Kathy Miller is the membership director at Governor’s Towne Club in Acworth, one of the Atlanta area’s newest private facilities. The course is a collaboration between two-time U.S.

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GolfStyles offers a comprehensive list of private clubs in Georgia with their amenities, location and contact information.

Location	Club	Phone	Wait	Facilities	Location	Club	Phone	Wait	Facilities
Moultrie	Sunset CC	229.890.5555	No	S, T, Fishing	Sea Island	Ocean Forest GC	912.638.5834	NA	Golf only
Newnan	Canongate on White Oak	770.251.6794	No	S, T	Sharpsburg	Canongate GC	770.463.3342	No	S, T
Newnan	Newnan CC	770.253.9856	No	S, T	Snellville	Summit Chase CC	770.979.9000	No	S, T
Peachtree City	Braelinn GC	770.631.3100	No	S, T	St. Marys	Osprey Cove GC	800.352.5575	No	S, T, F
Peachtree City	Flat Creek Club	770.487.8140	No	S, T	St. Simons Is.	Frederica Golf Club	912.634.6900	No	Golf only
Peachtree City	Planterra Ridge GC	770.487.8141	No	S, T	Statesboro	Forest Heights CC	912.764.9817	No	S, T, F
Pooler	Savannah Quarters CC	912.450.2280	No	S, F	Stockbridge	Eagles Landing CC	770.389.2000	No	S, T, F
Richmond Hill	The Ford Plantation GC	912.756.5666	No	S, T, F, E, Fs, C	Stone Mt.	Smoke Rise G&CC	770.908.2582	No	S, T, F
Rocky Face	The Farm GC	706.673.4546	No	Golf only	Suwanee	The River Club	770.271.2582	No	S, T, F
Rome	Coosa CC	706.234.7131	No	S, T, F	Thomasville	Glen Arven CC	229.226.3702	Yes	S, T
Rome	Horseleg Plantation CC	706.291.2406	No	S, T, F	Tifton	Spring Hill CC	229.382.6745	No	S, T, TC
Roswell	Ansley GC (Settindown)	770.640.4620	Yes	Golf only	Toccoa	Currahee Club	888.560.2582	No	Golf only
Roswell	Brookfield CC	770.993.1990	No	S, T, F	Valdosta	Valdosta CC	229.242.3706	No	S, T, F
Roswell	CC of Roswell	770.475.7800	No	S, T, F	Vidalia	Vidalia CC	912.537.4623	No	S, T
Roswell	Horseshoe Bend CC	770.992.2310	No	S, T	Villa Rica	Canongate Mirror Lake	770.459.5599	No	S, T
Savannah	The Landings Club	912.598.8050	No	S, T, F	Waynesboro	Waynesboro CC	706.554.2262	No	S, T
Savannah	LaVida CC	912.925.2440	No	S	Woodstock	Capital City Club	770.667.6303	Yes	Golf only
Savannah	Savannah GC	912.232.2156	Yes	S, T	Wrightsville	Johnson County CC	478.864.3301	No	S, T

KEY: PR=practice range; D=dining; SW=swimming; T=tennis; HC=health club; PT=paddle tennis; RQ=racquetball; M=marina; SK=skeet; C=curling; S=salon; L=on-site lodging; CR=croquet; EQ=equestrian center

Open champion Curtis Strange and designer Mike Riley.

Miller says the local market has “definitely been receptive” to their members-only offering since its opening in 2004. Governor’s Towne Club adheres to Tinkey’s new-world philosophy of providing an all-inclusive experience.

The club has two pools, a full health club and spa and eight tennis courts to cater to members who play on recreational teams in the Atlanta Lawn Tennis Association, better known as ALTA.

“The interest in membership at Governor’s Towne Club has been building as our different facilities are completed,” says Miller. “We offer a unique opportunity to come out and play a Curtis Strange golf course

absolutely anytime with no wait, and we offer a lot of other things that go along with the membership.”

Pilates, yoga, weights, cardio and massages are some of the staples at the spa. The club has its own baseball field. The golf course has par-3 tees on every hole, which adds some variety for accomplished golfers, a good learning environment for beginners and juniors, and a quick, fun golf outing for families.

Staying abreast of the country’s fluid demographic trends, and adjusting accordingly, is another indispensable survival tactic that the NGCOA’s Tinkey preaches. He pointed out that one in five American households does not speak English as their first language; half of those speak Spanish. Fifty-one percent of the buying power

in America is held by women, according to Tinkey. He says census statistics predict that by the year 2050 more than 50 percent of the country’s racial makeup will be non-white.

“Clubs need to look at their population of affluent people who can be members of private clubs and see if their membership represents that,” says Tinkey. “And, if it doesn’t, see how (making those adjustments) can fit into the culture of their club.”

Clubs also need to make sure they are meeting the needs of the various age groups. The Baby Boomers are currently at the forefront, but Generation Xers and the Millennials (those born between 1980 and 2000) represent the future for golf clubs. The time to start nurturing those groups into the culture of golf and meeting

their needs with appropriate programming is now, says Tinkey.

He presents Kingwood (Texas) Country Club as a prime example of an inventive club transferring its newfound knowledge into practical applications.

One of the club's innovations is to provide four-seater golf carts.

"It sounds strange, but it's not if you think about it," says Tinkey. "There's no need for two carts when the 90-degree rule is in effect. Women like to travel together and talk to each other. Families like to be together instead of in two different golf carts."

Some of the most successful Tournament Players Clubs now offer daycare. Other courses around the country let kids play for free. Some clubs that are "really on the edge," says Tinkey, appeal to teens by playing loud music on the tee boxes at specially designated times. Another of his real-world examples is a club that staged a cookout, followed by a putting and chipping contest at twilight, followed

by a golf cart "drive-up" movie played on an inflatable screen on the first fairway. Popcorn and drinks were delivered to the golf carts.

"It generated a wonderful memory and family experience," says Tinkey. "People are looking for that family togetherness. It was something new and novel. Ideas like that can introduce people to golf for the first time if clubs are smart."

John Beckert, chief executive officer and president of ClubCorp, the nation's largest operator of private clubs, offers advice that aspiring Georgia clubs would be wise to incorporate into their mission statements. Tinkey utilizes Beckert's quote in his presentations.

"In my opinion, private clubs will continue to be golf driven but will increasingly be about value, building relationships and enriching lives," says Beckert. "Although we cannot predict exactly what the club of the future will look like, we can work to create innovative programming, but unless it

is relevant to the members and we can continue to help them connect with family and friends, it does not matter. People join private clubs to become a part of something bigger."

The well-to-do sequestered club behind the wrought-iron fencing and matured landscaping can, for the foreseeable future, continue to bank on its proven traditions.

The contemporary club in Georgia, meanwhile, must learn how to react quickly, fluidly and flexibly to the needs of today's golfers to ensure its future prospects.

"Clubs need to reflect on where people spend their leisure time and how they want to spend their leisure time, and be able to provide programming for profit instead of the build it and they will come mentality," says Tinkey. "Just having a great facility and thinking, 'Well, I've opened the doors. Why shouldn't they be here?' That's just not the case anymore. Clubs need to reinvent themselves to stay successful." ♦