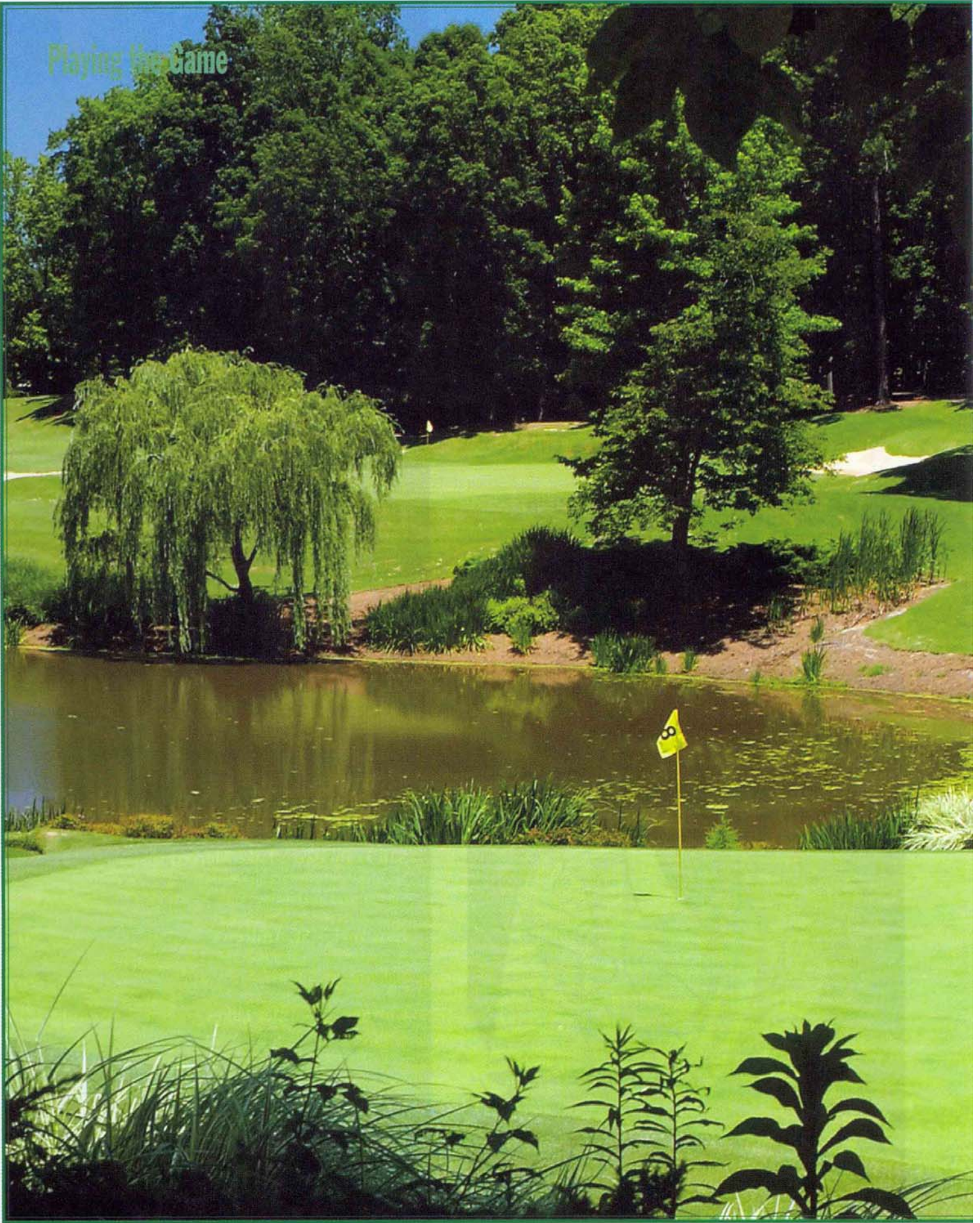
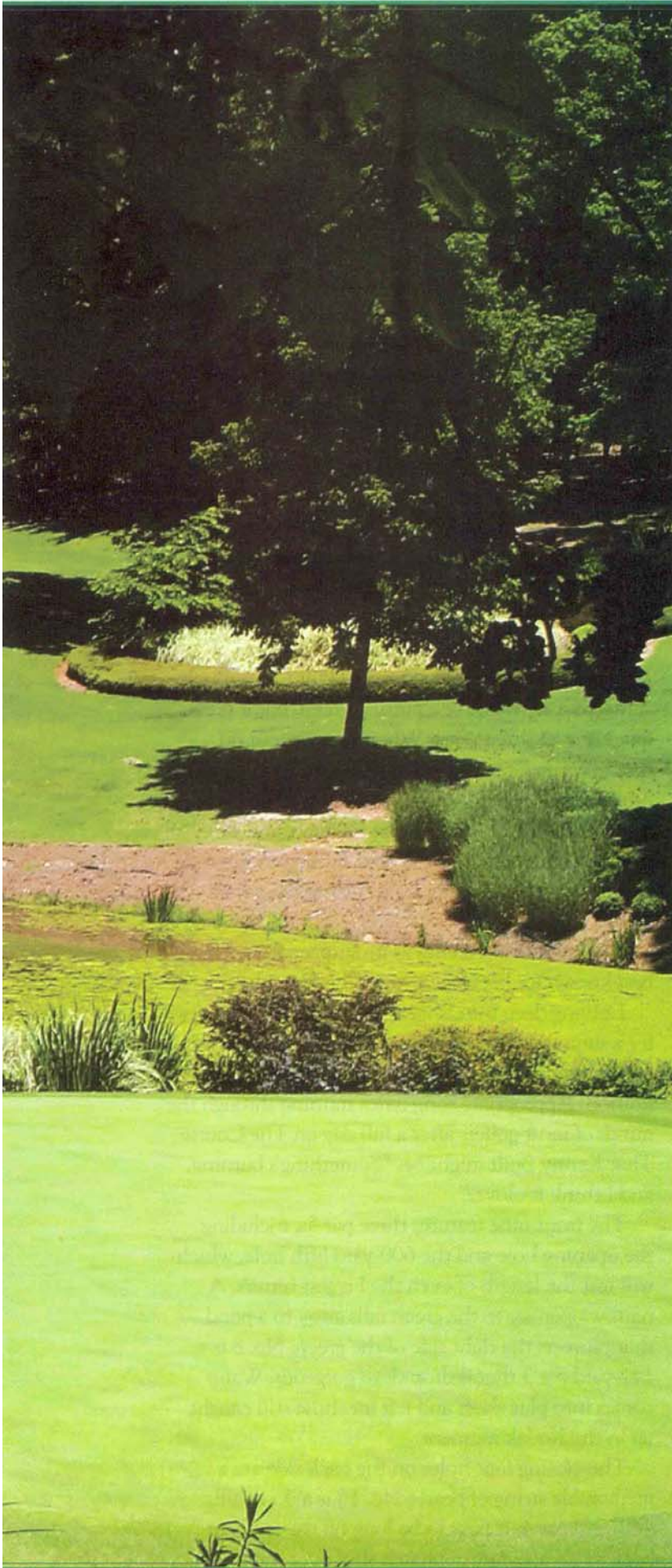


Playing the Game





BEAVER DAM FARMS NO. 8 GREEN WITH NO. 5 IN THE BACKGROUND

The Beaver

*Luxurious, Exclusive
and Now Accessible*

BY PATRICK JONES

Most golfers looking to tune up their game at home feel fortunate to have a hitting net in the garage. Most are relegated to dropping a drinking glass sideways on the carpet to roll in a few putts. A pipedream fantasy is stepping out of the house to the first tee with 18 holes of championship golf laid out before you – no tee times, no distractions, no one in sight except the personal friends you’ve invited over for the day.

At Beaver Dam Farms, you can be one of those personal friends.

The golf course and surrounding property formerly owned by country-and-western crooner Kenny Rogers is now open for play. Any Tom, Dick or 21-handicap willing to part with \$250 of discretionary income can spend the day playing Beaver Dam Farms. All day.

Rogers built the 386-acre nirvana in the rolling farmlands outside of Athens with proceeds of record sales surpassing 100 million thanks to pop hits like “Lucille” and “Lady.” He sculpted 18 holes all for himself and his golf-loving buddies in his super-sized backyard. And like Rogers, you can have the course almost to yourself.

Rogers moved from his Colbert estate and sold Beaver Dam Farms to Las Vegas businessman Wes Adams for \$10.5 million in

2003. The new owner is offering limited – very limited – public access to the 6,300-yard golf course.

The chances of interminable waits on the tee or dysfunctional groups behind hitting into yours are non-existent. With the exception of larger planned group outings or corporate retreats, only 12 golfers per day (that's three foursomes for those keeping score at home) are allowed to play. Some public courses offer slim six-minute staggers between tee times, and the most upscale courses start groups at



BEAVER DAM FARMS PHOTO

BEAVER DAM FARMS

Colbert, Georgia

800.351.6027; beaverdamfarms.com

Par 70	6,300 yards	70.4	139
Par 70	5,945 yards	68.6	133
Par 70	5,438 yards	72.1	137

Rates:

\$250 per day

Directions:

Every golfer who signs up to play is sent an e-mail that includes directions.

10-minute intervals. Beaver Dam Farms builds in a gaping six-hole buffer between groups. And your daily fee, while bordering on extravagant, gives you the run of the course for the day. You can hit flops 'til you drop or the sun sets over Oglethorpe County.

The only other living creatures golfers may encounter during a dawn-to-dusk golfing frenzy are Haagen and Dasz, the property's resident Chocolate Labrador Retrievers. Dasz may even choose to be your pards, as he did with me, riding shotgun in the golf cart for the entire back nine after getting a good rub behind the ears at the turn.

Beaver Dam Farms is far from being a renovated

bovine pasture with 18 flagsticks stuck in the ground. Most do-it-yourself courses have "homemade track" written all over them. But Rogers had the means and the desire to do it right. The layout is pleasing to the eye and lovingly tended to by golf superintendent Gary Morris and his full-time grounds crew of 10. With less than 3,000 rounds played in a year, the course is maintained to immaculate standards. It has the flow of a professionally designed course, though Morris said Rogers was "99.9 percent" responsible for its layout.

The par 3s are some of the finest this side of Augusta National, which is 100 miles away as the Titleist flies. No high profile course designer was brought in to consult on the Beaver Dam Farms project. Based on the results, one was not needed.

"(Building the course) was a hobby to Kenny," says Morris, who has been the property's overseer for almost 25 years. "He really didn't have any intentions when he first started to build 18 holes. It started out with just one putting green, but it grew quickly over three years. When he went out on concert tours, it became his passion to go and look at other golf courses to get ideas to bring back. He would return with some things he liked, and we would image them into the next holes we were building. It was shooting from the hip the whole way."

That revelation comes as no surprise from a man best known for his biggest hit, "The Gambler."

Delving deep into Rogers' extensive discography for a summation of the Beaver Dam Farms course harkens to his days as the front man for The First Edition. Appropriate song lyrics running through the minds of most golfers after a full day on The Course That Kenny Built might be, "Something's burning, and I think it's love."

The front nine features three par 5s, including the opening hole and the 600-yard fifth hole, which will test the length of even the biggest hitters. A narrow opening to the green falls away to a pond that protects the right side of the green. No. 8 is a 141-yard par 3 that is drop-dead gorgeous. Water comes into play short and left for those still caught up in the Kodak moment.

The closing four holes on the back side are a memorable string of pearls. No. 15 is a downhill, 440-yard par 4. It pays to be long off the tee here because an accurate approach shot over water is

required to find the peninsula green. The par 5 16th plays 545 yards from the back tees. Golfers cross a bridge to a tee-box island suspended in a pond. The final 130 yards of this hole are sharply downhill and require careful club selection.

Speaking of plunges, No. 17, a 185-yard par 3 cut from a forested hillside of hardwoods and pines, takes such a dizzying drop from the tee box that you would swear, for a hole at least, you were in the mountains of western North Carolina.

The 18th is a testy, 368-yard, par 4 that requires carries over water on both the tee shot and the approach shot. The green complex is fronted by a finger of a 17-acre lake. The setting for the round's final putt has been cultivated into such an oasis of waterfalls and greenery that you would not be completely shocked if a Tarzan movie broke out.

"Anybody who has come out to play the course says it's just a beautiful track," says Morris. "The land lays in a natural way that is perfectly suited for a golf course."

Some recognizable golfing names who have found their way to Colbert, Ga., include Payne Stewart, Lanny Wadkins and Hubert Green. Other professional athletes who have played Beaver Dam Farms include NBAers Michael Jordan, Larry Bird and Charles Barkley, along with former tennis bad boy Jimmy Connors. Smokey Robinson, Woody Harrelson and James Caan are a few of the show business glitterati to try their hand.

And, yes, because it is the obvious question to anyone who has followed Rogers' career, Dolly Parton has been to the property – but never slipped on a pair of FootJoys.

For those who fawn over flora, the Beaver Dam Farms golf course is a horticultural wonderland. It's like walking into a Pike Family Nursery and realizing that it's OK to whip out your Big Berthas and play a few shots between the crape myrtles.

"Many golfers say that the first time around the course, the combination of the waterfalls, the ornamentals and the overall landscaping of the course made it hard to concentrate on playing their game," says Morris. "It takes the second round during that day to really concentrate on the golf game. Most golfers just 'ooh' and 'aah' over the grounds their first time around."

The course has been spruced up even more

under the new ownership. All of the bunkers have been renovated as have many of the tee boxes. It was also rated for the first time in February with a 70.4/139 rating and slope. Adams and his LLC have purchased an additional 500 acres surrounding the current property. Whether the plan is to develop it into east Georgia's version of Callaway Gardens has not been determined.

Prominent on the property is a 15,000-square-foot home built and personally decorated by Rogers (off limits to golfers). Beaver Dam Farms also features a two-acre indoor equestrian center, two clay tennis courts and stocked lakes that come into play throughout the course.

When entering Beaver Dam Farms, golfers must buzz in at massive gates to be granted entrance to the compound. Don't be fooled that you are entering into a blue-blood realm. This is a friendly, down-home golfing environment. The lake house that serves dual purpose as the pro shop has a large pit with a giant rotisserie for groups interested in having pig pickings or Lowcountry boils. The property's main lake is stocked with largemouth bass and bluegill bream. Golfers are welcome to bring along their rods, reels and lures of choice if, during the day, they would rather land lunkers than blast from bunkers.

Several upscale villas, or bungalows, can be rented for \$250 per night, and corporate retreats of up to 50 people can be accommodated. The lodgings feature widescreen plasma televisions and Jacuzzi tubs that are the perfect depth for soaking away the aches from a 54-hole day. The villas surround a large pool. There is also a conference center for the benefit of workaholics experiencing PowerPoint presentation withdrawal symptoms.

Beaver Dam Farms hospitality managers Deanette Gullledge and Judy Williams are on site and at hand to cater to just about every need. Weddings are regular events on the grounds, and vacationers are welcome here, too.

"All of this," mulls Morris as he reflects on the evolution of the Beaver Dam Farms property and golf course over the past 25 years, "and all Kenny wanted at first was a single putting green."

Deprived golfers without the luxury of a private course in their own backyards should be grateful they can now borrow on Rogers' dream for a day. ♦