



CRYSTAL FALLS GOLF CLUB

CRYSTAL CLEAR

Georgia's Newest Club Leaves No Doubt About Its Place in the Market

BY PATRICK JONES

DENIS GRIFFITH HAS LEFT A PRODIGIOUS IMPRINT ACROSS THE NORTHERN SWATH OF GEORGIA. The former president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects has designed such well-respected courses in the state as Brasstown Valley Resort in Young Harris, St. Marlo in Duluth and Chateau Elan. The latter, located in Braselton, is where Griffiths has based his design business. The diverse terrain in these rolling parts of Georgia has provided the perfect palette for Griffiths' preference for applying minimal changes to the existing topography.

His firm has also created notable layouts around the country and in destinations like England, Japan, South Africa, Thailand and the Philippines. Griffiths holds the honor of being the only American architect to design a course in St. Andrews, Scotland.

But it is Georgia that has served as Griffiths' most favored landscape. He has recently added yet

another design to his statewide portfolio of courses. Crystal Falls Golf Club in Dawson County, which opened in 2007, is his latest contribution.

Griffiths was hands-on at Crystal Falls Golf Club. "He was on site all the time – at least four of five days per week during construction," says Dirk Dill, head pro and manager of the private club located off Highway 369. Crystal Falls was developed by Dawson Cherokee Capital. It is located on property adjoining Hollis Latham Reservoir and is approximately 20 minutes from both Canton and Cumming in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. The residential component of the club will eventually include 400-plus homes starting in the \$800,000s and rising into the \$2 million-plus range. Crystal Falls Golf Club features a marina on the shores of its 411-acre lake. The marina clubhouse has provided a frequent setting for weddings, receptions and other catered events.

The par-72, 7,050-yard course incorporates many of the design staples for which Griffiths is known.

"Denis included a lot of mounds and strategically placed his bunkers around the course, which can provide some challenges," says Dill. "The course is surprisingly flat for being so close to the mountains, and it is fairly open, but there are three or four holes on the course where he has really tightened things up by bringing water into play. He gives you a lot of choices. You can try to cut off some of the holes, but you had better be careful. The greens are fairly big and, with a couple of exceptions, they are not undulating at all. The putting surfaces are very fair."

Crystal Falls Golf Club opened as a semi-private club for its first nine months but switched over to a private facility in September 2007. Among its nearest competitors are Big Canoe Golf Club in Jasper, Gold Creek Golf Club, also in Dawsonville, and a slew of recently opened private clubs in the northern reaches of Fulton County, including The Manor Golf & Country Club and the Georgia Tech Club. They are all competing for golfers looking to move far enough away from Atlanta's congestion while remaining close enough to reach back to its numerous amenities when desired. Also within easy reach are some of Georgia's most notable mountain destinations. One of Dawson County's natural wonders is Amicalola Falls, the highest waterfall on the Eastern Seaboard. Springer Mountain, the southernmost terminus of the Appalachian Trail, is a short hike away from the falls.

"It's a great escape from the city, that's for sure," says Dill. "It's far enough away so that you feel like you are out in the country. You ride up the road to come up here and you wonder where you are before you come to the front gate. It's a nice, quiet, relaxing place to be. You can definitely get away from the pressures."

Crystal Falls Golf Club offers several

membership types, including individual, family and corporate arrangements. The latter allows up to five members. The dues are affordable, starting at \$175 per month with range dues included. The relatively new club has temporarily waived its initiation fees as it looks to increase its rolls from approximately 400 current members to a level where it can close memberships in the 650 range.

Griffiths has designed several memorable holes at Crystal Falls Golf Club. No. 5, a 491-yard par 4, is the course's ultimate risk-reward. "More money is won and lost on this hole than any of the others on the course," says Dill. A lake runs down the right side of the fairway, but a 275-yard tee shot from the back tees carries the water. "Most golfers cannot hit that shot," says Dill. "Denis provides a good landing area on the left side to lay up. You really have to focus on what your game plan is before playing No. 5."

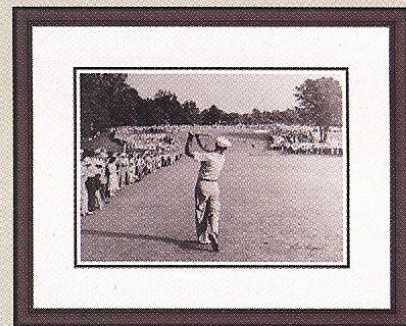
Also on the front side, Griffiths created a visually intimidating tee shot on No. 9. Several drivable pot bunkers distract the sight line of golfers seeking the landing area on the downhill hole that doglegs to the left.

The shortest par-3 hole is No. 11. It plays to only 135 yards from the longest of the five sets of tees, but it is surrounded by bunkers. The green surface falls off the back and the sides. "It is a small green so you have to be accurate," says Dill. "It is downhill so most players will be hitting a 9-iron or a wedge, but you better hit it tight."

The most picturesque hole on the course is No. 18, particularly looking at it after pulling the ball from the cup after experiencing yet another one Denis Griffiths' memorable Georgia creations. The vista from the green back down the fairway offers a panoramic picture of the nearby mountain peaks.

"It is an unbelievable view," says Dill. "Denis did his usual great job in designing this course." ■

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