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BY DESIGN



Excellence in Golf Design from the American Society of Golf Course Architects

Perfect practice

Unlocking a facility's potential to
drive participation and revenue

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Perfect practice

Practice facilities can offer a lot more than a pre-round warm up. Toby Ingleton finds out how ASGCA architects are helping golf clubs to revamp their ranges in a bid to attract more golfers

New practice facilities at Wigwam Resort in Arizona have helped generate additional revenue

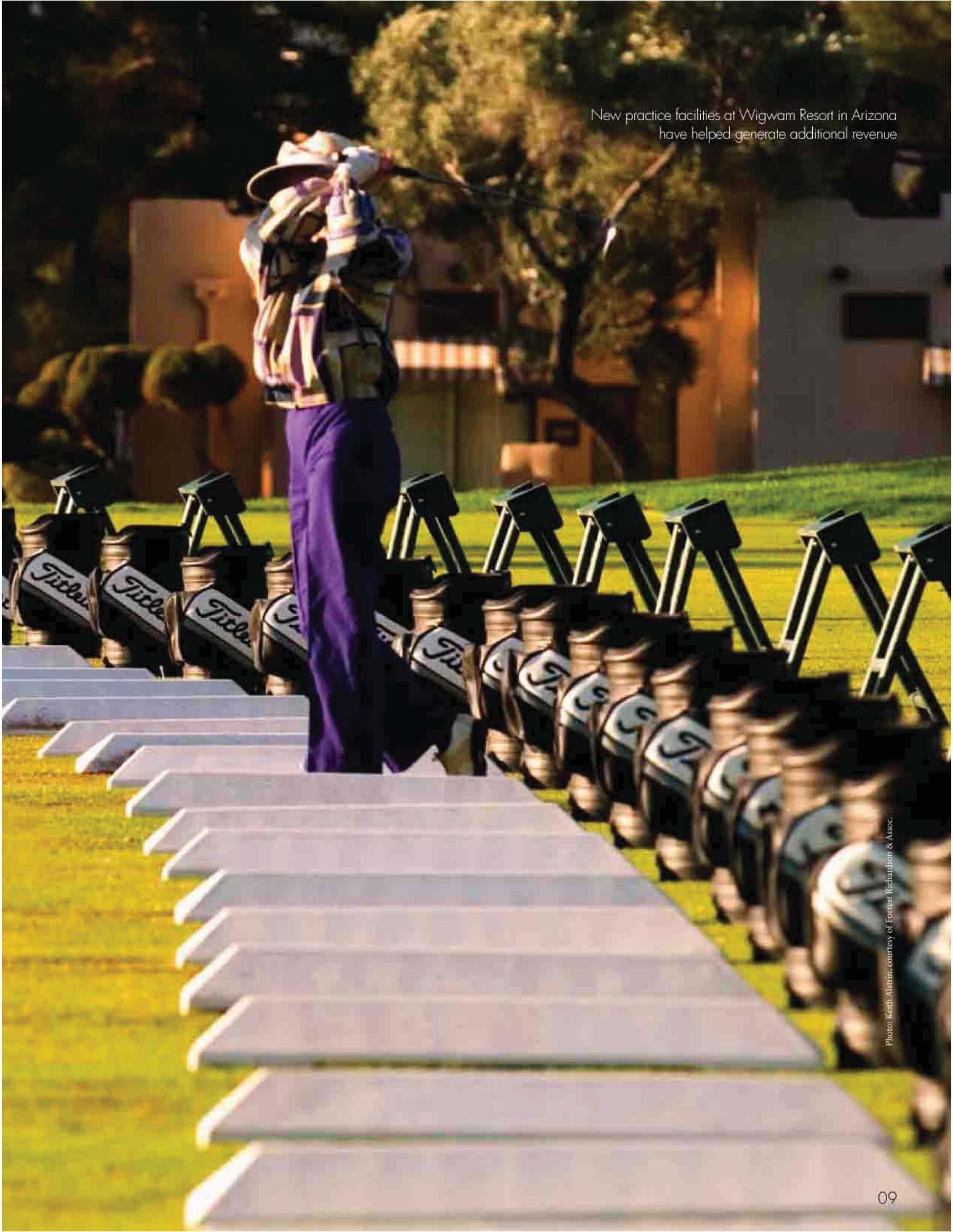


Photo: Keith Alstrin, courtesy of Forrest Richardson & Assoc.

One trait shared by most golfers—whether young or old, expert or absolute beginner—is a desire to improve. Combined with the widely-held belief that more people would play golf if it were cheaper and quicker to play, it's no wonder that many golf clubs are taking a closer look at their practice facilities.

Whether they comprise a driving range, putting green, short game area, short course or some combination of all of the above, a club's practice facilities can have a huge impact on its appeal to members and guests. But what makes a good practice facility design?

According to Art Schaupeter, ASGCA, feedback is critical. "Everything that gets designed into the practice facility needs to be done with the focus on providing feedback to the golfers. They need to have a real clear view and idea of

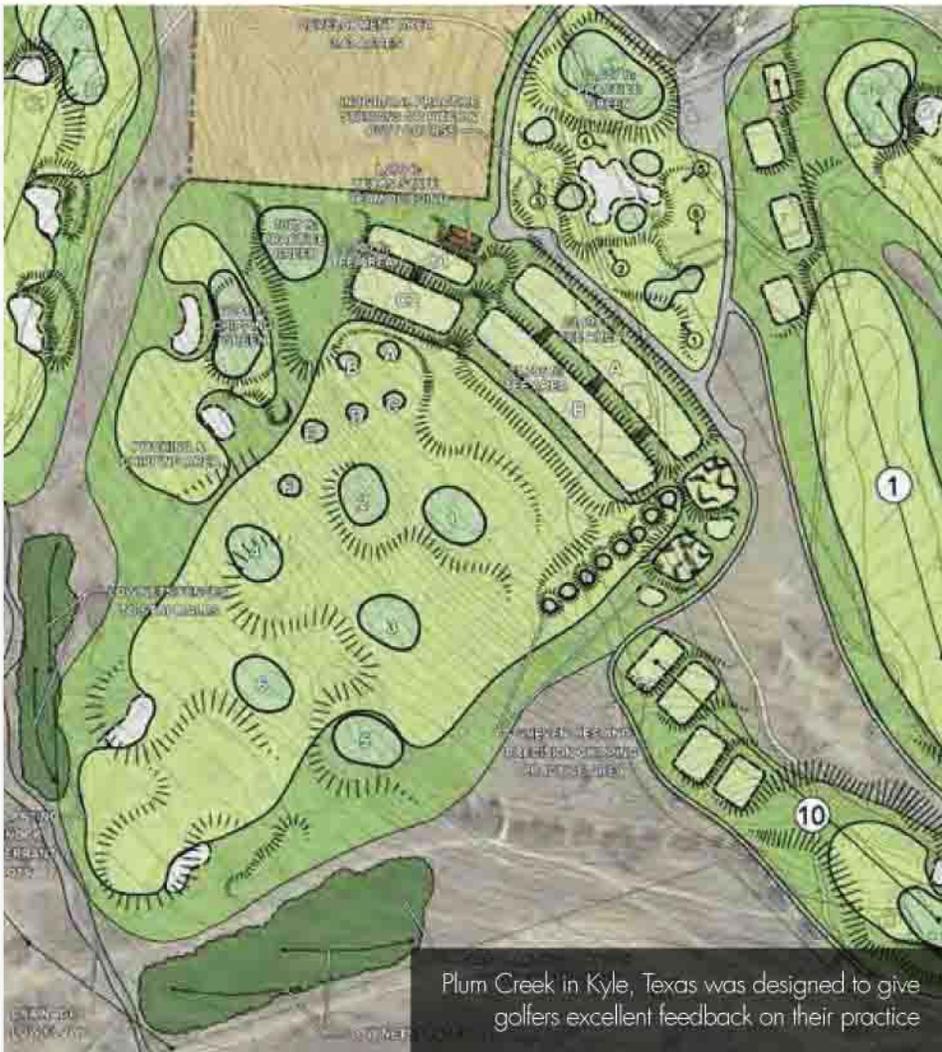
what each of their shots do so that they can learn and improve, so that their time using the practice facilities is truly useful and applicable to what they want to do on the golf course."

Schaupeter has recently completed an overhaul of the practice facility at **Plum Creek**, a public course in Kyle, Texas. Their existing practice range was a perfectly flat field with no distinguishing character, making it ideal and valuable for development. His master plan saw adjustments to the first and tenth holes so the practice ground could be relocated to a high, sloping area in the middle of the property, adjacent to the clubhouse.

"The elevated tees give the players a complete view of exactly where their shots land relative to the targets for their iron practice. To simulate tee shots, two long bunkers have been positioned out in the range 30-40 yards apart so as to create the width and look of a standard fairway on the golf course. At one end of the range tee, precision pitching targets have been positioned on ten yard centers from 40-to-100 yards so that players can work on exact distance control," he says.

Many architects feel that the key to a good practice facility is its ability to replicate a full range of shots that

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Plum Creek in Kyle, Texas was designed to give golfers excellent feedback on their practice



golfers will experience on the course. “The only limitation a golfer should have is his or her own imagination—especially practicing short game shots, from varying lies, angles, conditions, distances, elevations, turf or sand,” says Nathan Crace, ASGCA Associate.

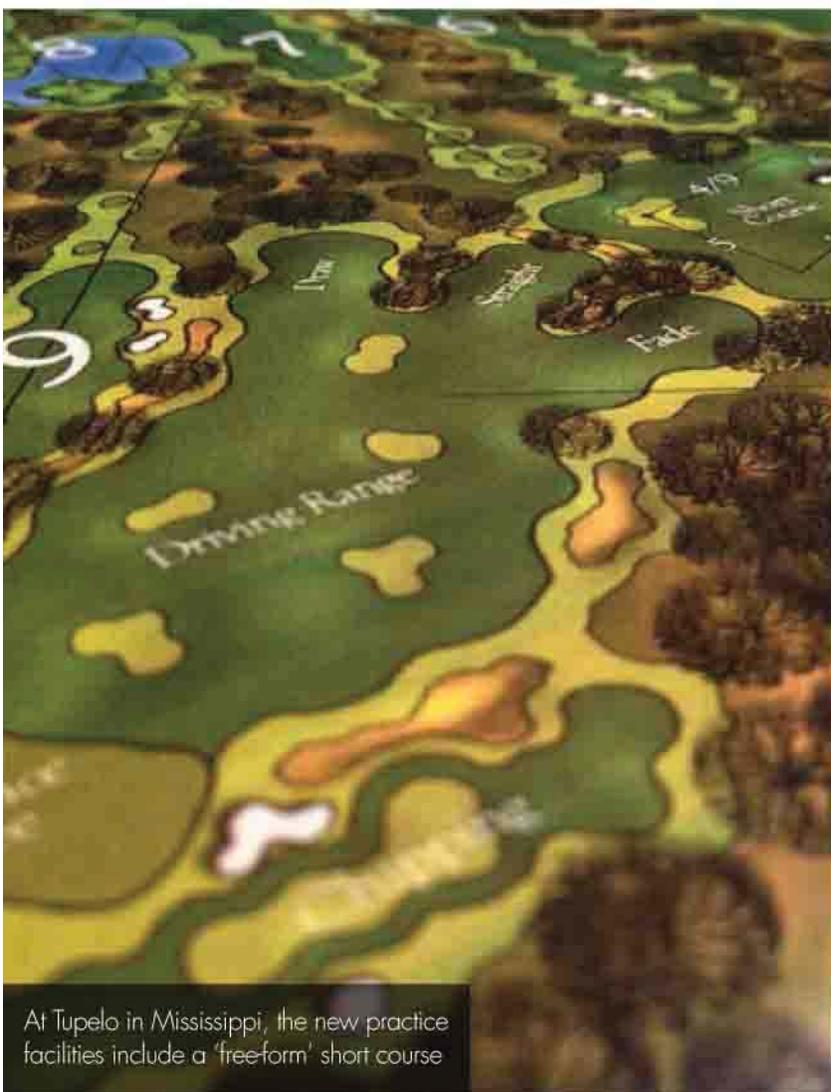
One of a number of short game projects Crace has recently completed is at **Tupelo CC** in Mississippi. During the master planning process, he and superintendent Jim Kwasinski identified approximately six acres of scrub and brush between the back of the existing driving range and the fifth tee that had been unused since the club was founded. “Jim said ‘It’s too bad you can’t use this for something,’” says Crace. “I agreed, but while we stood there it came to me like an epiphany—we could put two double greens and a triple green in that area and make a short course out of it.”

One particular innovation would set this apart from most short courses, as Crace explains: “As we got into the actual design studies, I decided to intentionally omit one thing that originally had the green committee thinking I was crazy: tees. This reduced maintenance and allowed the area to be more free-form and less structured. You practice what you want when you want at your pace. One day you could work on green side bunker shots, one day you can work on wedge approach shots,

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Emulating Augusta

The **University of Illinois** has this year opened a new outdoor practice area to complement its state-of-the-art indoor facility. Golf coach Mike Small and alumnus Steve Stricker both admired the practice range at Augusta National, so ASGCA Past President Jeff Brauer started the project by placing an aerial image of the Augusta range onto their site. It was a good fit, and Brauer set about developing the design. “The key element was the dual fairways with trees between to set up both draw and fade options on the subtle dogleg,” says Brauer. “We then added tees on every corner so golfers could practice in any wind direction, and to target greens at multiple distances. While central Illinois is pretty flat, we did have one hill in the north east corner, so we put a green up there to practice the uphill job shots. There was one tree, and we left it for practice over, under and around. The putting green is about 13,000 square feet, and configured from level, for stroke practice, to all sorts of rolls, tiers and valleys.”



At Tupelo in Mississippi, the new practice facilities include a ‘free-form’ short course

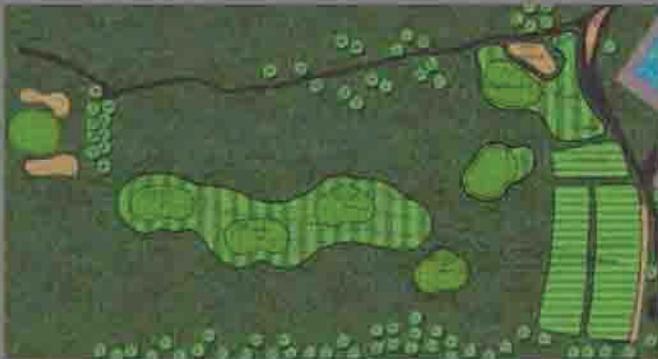


Augusta National’s range was the inspiration for the new facilities at the University of Illinois

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Getting a golf 'fix'

Cascade Hills Country Club in Grand Rapids, Michigan, decided to upgrade its practice facilities to address growing demand for a quicker golf experience. "With evolving time constraints for families and their use of the club, many turned to spending short periods on the driving range to get their golf 'fix' in, versus up to four hours on course," says Adrian Joliffe, head golf professional at the club. "In order to fulfil that demand, a redesign was necessary to maximize the entire space." Bruce Matthews, ASGCA, created a design that would transform its worn hitting area into a visually interesting and inviting space that could accommodate multiple golfers of all skill levels. Matthews has incorporated a 55-yard short game area, 6,000-square-foot green and 4,500-square-foot practice bunker, plus a dedicated lesson tee separated from the main practice tees. Brick pavers that were reclaimed from a previous clubhouse renovation have been used as surrounds for the artificial tees. The project has achieved its objectives: "The response was immediately positive from the first posted drawings to the membership," says Joliffe. "Use of the practice area continues to grow along with the membership. The ability to use the space in all weather conditions with the addition of the artificial turf space allowed us to stay open longer into the fall, open earlier in the spring, and open on Monday afternoons when the driving range had normally been closed for the day."



Cascade Hills has seen a significant growth in the use of its practice facilities since the redesign

and another day take your kids out to play three or six or nine or however many par-three holes after work."

Clubs don't need to rely on an epiphany to work out how best to approach an overhaul of practice facilities.

The Club at Mirasol in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida commissioned a comprehensive study to determine how the entire facility was used and should be used. "The findings informed our work for the practice facility," says Drew Rogers, ASGCA, who oversaw a complete renovation and reorientation of the practice range, short-game facility and putting greens at this 36-hole club, formerly home to the PGA Tour's Honda Classic.

The new practice facility bears all the markings of a true collaboration of club, architect and superintendent. From a design perspective, there is elegance and efficiency: Rogers took a two-tier tee and made it single-tier, increasing square footage by 20 percent. He added a second putting green to reduce turf stress and provide players more elbow room. Perhaps most important, he created a seamless flow of traffic, where players park once and use the new range, short-game area and putting greens without getting back in a cart.

"The practice facility has become one of the primary drivers of golf usage here at Mirasol," says director of golf course maintenance Michael Thomas. "Members increasingly hang out with their buddies, have lunch, hit balls and don't necessarily even go out on the golf course—that's the trend we see.

"The new practice facility is right over the cart path from the new grille room, which is now under construction. That's no accident. The new grille won't be called the



19th hole, but it will serve that purpose. It's going to be a great place to hang out. I've got 795 golf equity members and almost 70,000 rounds of golf and I have a lot of people to whom that's a big deal."

Within Mirasol's two-acre short game area, every imaginable pitch to be found on all 36 holes has been replicated for practice purposes. "Drew even created a place to practice hitting out of a fairway bunker to a target green guarded by a bunker," Thomas said. "I've never seen that option. Being able to practice that shot? Pretty phenomenal."

"The real challenge was studying all these strategies on both courses, recreating them and giving the entire experience a sense of place and flow. Today, you can immerse yourself in that experience, before a round or merely as part of a practice session. And you can walk through the entire sequence—putting, short game, full shots—on foot, at your own pace. It's a complete golf experience all its own," says Rogers.

But do investments in practice facility design provide a return on investment?

At the **Wigwam Resort** near Phoenix, Arizona, an overhaul of the practice facilities has delivered substantial additional revenue. "The 54-hole facility suffered from an undersized practice range that could, at best, accommodate just 10 players at one time. Length was also an issue as the range area was wedged in between holes and limited to 225 yards," says Forrest Richardson, ASGCA.

The architect worked with the club to reconfigure portions of two of the courses, improving holes while freeing up space for new practice facilities. "Not only does the resort now have an improved golf experience, but the expanded

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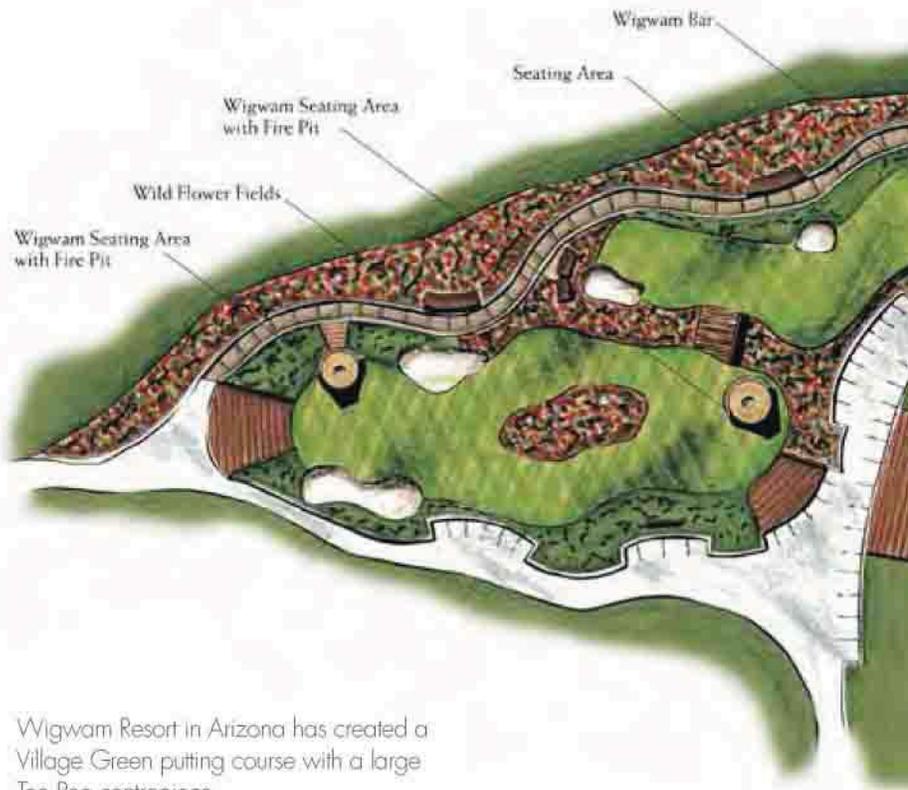
Driving participation

Traverse City Golf & Country Club has a rich history that sees it celebrating its centenary in 2015 as one of northern Michigan's finest clubs, with an 18-hole course designed by Tom Bendelow. The club recognized that investing in its practice facility would help retain existing members and attract new ones. So with the help of Ray Hearn, ASGCA, it set about transforming all of its practice facilities—a driving range and a practice chipping and sand bunker area. "The club has seen an increase in range revenue and new member growth," says Hearn. "The range has also succeeded in introducing more women and juniors to the club."



New practice facilities are helping to drive golf participation at The Club at Mirasol

By investing in its practice facilities, Traverse City has retained existing members and attracted new ones

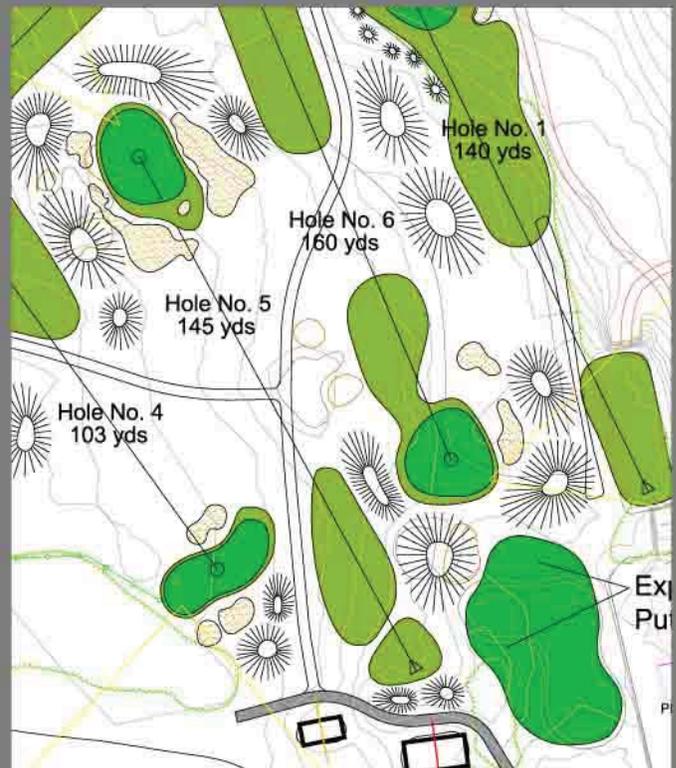


Wigwam Resort in Arizona has created a Village Green putting course with a large Tee Pee centrepiece

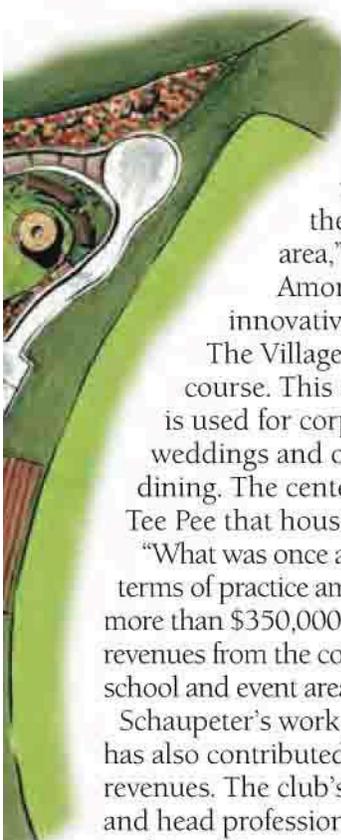
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A tribute to Colt

Tom Clark, ASGCA, has served as architectural consultant to **Hamilton Golf and Country Club** in Ontario, Canada, for more than 25 years. The West and South nines of the 27-hole club were designed by Harry Colt and are considered to be one of Canada's finest courses. The club had moved its driving range, initially for the Canadian Open, onto a natural basin where part of its original short course was located. The members enjoyed the new range so much that it became permanent, and they asked that a new short course be designed. Clark's idea for a tribute to Colt was well received. With the help of *Golf Digest's* architectural editor Ron Whitten, Clark created six new holes that include many of the legendary designer's ideas and concepts, and can attach to three holes left from Colt's original short course. The short course includes some of Colt's most famous par threes, including the tenth at Pine Valley and 'Calamity,' the 14th at Royal Portrush. "The new holes are utilized not only by beginners, women and children, but also seasoned practitioners to hone their short game," says Clark. "The majority of play is in late afternoons and evenings when the kids are out of school or the sun is lower down, but it is definitely an attractive addition around the club area and is utilized by the pro shop for all kinds of clinics."



Clark's short course design at Hamilton was inspired by the great holes of Harry Colt



practice area can now accommodate more than 90 players when using both ends of the 330-yard range area,” says Richardson.

Among the most innovative additions was The Village Green putting course. This special event area is used for corporate outings, weddings and overflow resort dining. The centerpiece is a large Tee Pee that houses a bar and grill.

“What was once a money loser in terms of practice amenities, grew to more than \$350,000 in new annual revenues from the combined range, golf school and event area.” adds Richardson.

Schaupeter’s work at Plum Creek has also contributed to rising club revenues. The club’s golf manager and head professional Ken Holubec explains: “Our range revenue has increased by 40 percent, junior camps and clinics have tripled, and we were

able to attract Texas State University to use the club as their home course,” he says. “Without question we’re growing the game, with more dads and moms coming out with their kids to practice and play. Golf outings have increased by 12 percent, and our player development program, non-existent in 2012, now has 130 members.”

The new facilities at Tupelo CC have also driven participation. “A number of new members at the club have mentioned that the practice facility and short course were the determining factor in their decision to choose the club over the competition and the existing members are proud to show it off to their guests,” says Crace. “The facility is used heavily by members, new members have joined because of the facilities, and juniors are making use of the short course daily, both with their families and on their own.” ●

An ASGCA architect can reconfigure your club’s practice facilities to help drive participation growth. To find an architect in your area, visit www.asgca.org/members

First Links program provides cost-free evaluation by ASGCA member

The ASGCA Foundation/USGA First Links program was created for golf course owners/operators interested in reconfiguring their layouts and/or devoting open land to smaller scale facilities to allow new players to ease into the game. First Links provides grants—more than two dozen thus far—to applicants to pay for visits by ASGCA members to evaluate golf facilities for their potential to develop a short course or practice area, or to otherwise modify their existing layouts to welcome new players. ASGCA member consultants follow up their one-day visits with a site evaluation report describing ideas for layout or open land reconfiguration.

Complete information is available at <http://asgca.org/firstlinks>

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