

GAME CHANGER

New management company making a positive impact at Santa Barbara Golf Club • **By JOEL BEERS**



Gently rolling fairways are a staple of Santa Barbara Golf Club

Though Santa Barbara Golf Club has been around since Dwight David Eisenhower was U.S. President, it has never seemed newer.

And with a new management company at the helm, the experience at the club has never been better, either.

“Our team has led a cultural change in guest service and attention to guest experiences that has made a big difference,” said Lance Merrihew, Vice President of Sales and Marketing for CourseCo, which took over management of the course in July.

The biggest changes revolve around CourseCo’s approach to customer service.

“People have a lot of choices

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when they decide to play golf,” Merrihew said. “We want them to have an experience at our golf course that is so good that they come back time after time.”

Customer service isn’t the only thing that has changed at the city-owned course that opened in 1958.

The scenic, fully mature layout with some 1,600 trees has been made better by improvements made last year, which include tee and bunker renovations, an improved irrigation system and an overall “attention to detail throughout the course, including daily bunker raking and mowing and rolling of the greens,” said General Manager Randy Shannon.

Though it’s not the longest (the par-70 layout stretches 6,037 yards from the tips), the Lawrence Hill-designed course features kikuyu grass fairways — a staple of Riviera Country Club to the south — laid out over rolling hills with grand views of the Santa Ynez foothills and the Pacific Ocean.

“The course sets up in a way that makes you use every club in your



Santa Barbara Golf Club is a par-70, 6,037-yard layout from the tips.

bag,” Merrihew said. “So it’s fun and challenging.”

The examples are plentiful.

The par-3 8th hole, for instance, is a 195-yard slightly downhill journey toward a two-tiered green guarded

by two greenside bunkers. But, like many holes on the course, Shannon says, the length is deceiving, as it generally plays into an ocean breeze.

Another par 3, the recently lengthened 16th, now stretches over 200

yards. You need to carry a creek and try to position your tee shot on a large green with bunkers to the left and right. Once again, you’re hitting into the breeze, which makes this one

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COVER STORY

of the most challenging holes on the course, Shannon says.

Then there is the final hole: a par-5, uphill 482-yard trek whose augmented length is tempered, in part, by beautiful views of the aforementioned foothills.

“We see a lot of similarities between Santa Barbara Golf Club and Pacific Grove Golf Links (a CourseCo-managed property along the coast in Northern California),” Merrihew said. “Both are courses that rely on local play during the year, but benefit from being the most affordable and best experience in the market for those out-of-town guests looking to have a great round of golf.”

Santa Barbara has much more to offer off the course as well. As part of an upgrade to the practice area there are new range balls and a new ball machine. Golfers can also take advantage of 12 shiny new sets of Titleist rental clubs if they want to leave their sticks at home.

Combined with Mulligan’s

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Grill, top-notch junior golf programs such as Russ Morrison and The First Tee, and PGA golf instruction, it all adds up, in Shannon’s words, to this:

“We are the best value in the greater Santa Barbara region. And with continued improvements in course conditions, service levels, and amenities, we will continue to be known as the best place to play in Santa Barbara.”

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