

Golf Range



M A G A Z I N E

Volume 21, No. 7
July 2013

P R A C T I C E • T E A C H I N G • F I T T I N G • M A R K E T I N G

New Practice Palace

'Performance Center'
at Mistwood a Hit

Also in this issue:

- Quick Golf at Princeville
- Instruction's Economic Impact
- Club and University Partner Up
- Carl's Golfland: Updated Classic



At Mistwood, Clear Intentions to Build Revenue on the Range

Among Chicagoland golf operators, nobody has invested more boldly of late than Jim McWethy. His new Performance Center at public-access Mistwood Golf Club is earning raves all around. **BY LEN ZIEHM**





Choosing a “Scottish farmhouse” theme, the architect who designed Mistwood’s Performance Center included every possible game-improvement amenity plus a luxurious halfway house.



Jim McWethy won't give out the financial particulars on his various golf ventures, but it's no secret that the owner of Mistwood Golf Club in Romeoville, Ill., has spent big-time lately. Within the last three years he commissioned Michigan architect Ray Hearn to renovate his already well-respected 18-hole course, then he added a spectacular new Performance Center to the public 18-holer. It opened this spring to rave reviews.

In between those projects McWethy purchased the Ditka Dome (named after Mike Ditka, former coach of the Chicago Bears) in nearby Bolingbrook. He used his Mistwood staff to help in its remodeling, and it has reopened as a much updated indoor golf facility with the flexibility to offer other attractions as well. The dome, renamed McQ's, is a relatively minor project compared to what was done at Mistwood. That project represents by far the boldest move among Chicago golf operators in a declining economy.

"There were times we weren't sure about it," admits McWethy, "but we think it'll be a success. We took a big step and created something way different from what the competition is doing. We have something nobody else has."

The original course, a Hearn design that opened in 1999, was always considered one of Chicago's best and has been the longtime home of the Illinois Women's Open. McWethy became its sole owner in 2004. "We started fixing things," he said. "It started dawning

Best in class: Mistwood's version of the covered hitting bay.

on me what a wonderful layout we had, but things didn't move very fast until 2010. It's been a long, expensive process," he says. "We hope we're right. Our goal is to make this one of the finest public golf facilities in the Chicago area."

That goal has already been accomplished. The new course is better than the old one and has a new trademark—20 sod-wall bunkers. Only one other Chicago layout has such striking bunkering. Attractive bridges, adorned with Lannon stone, have also enhanced the overall appearance of the now 7,040-yard par-72 layout. McWethy closed Mistwood early the last two years and opened a bit later than most of the other Chicago public courses this spring. The August closings in 2011 and 2012 enabled Hearn to more easily

put the finishing touches on his elaborate renovation. The slightly delayed opening this weather-hampered spring was done for the same reason.

"Some areas held a little more water than we wanted," says director of golf Dan Phillips. "We did some drainage work and some irrigation. We wanted to make sure everything was perfect."

Now it is. The new layout opened with greens fees of \$70 on weekdays and \$90 on weekends (seniors and juniors pay \$46 and \$56 respectively). Not only is the course ready for a big season, but the long-awaited 5,000 square-foot Performance Center has become the talk of the Chicago golf scene. It is truly spectacular and has added a new dimension to what golfers can do when they visit Mistwood. "We expect to be open throughout the winter for instruction, club fitting, hitting balls and just socializing," says McWethy. "It's a neat spot. To a small

extent we're competing with McQ's, but there should be enough people who would prefer this. We can satisfy people either way."

"We'll be open all winter for practice, instruction, club-fitting and socializing."

—Jim McWethy

Initially the Performance Center has doubled as a halfway house. It's not your average halfway house, though. It has a full-service bar and snack shop along with eight flat screen televisions. "We can put on anything we want,"

says Phillips. "No one has done this before." The finished product, designed by Elmhurst architect Daniel Wohlfeil, has 11 heated hitting stations for all-seasons practice, two teaching bays with state-of-the-art technology, a putting lab, a club repair room and a turf room for private events. Wohlfeil's design goal was to create "a unique experience, an image that is memorable and lasting." He did that by creating the look of two Scottish farm houses.

Golfers can do a lot of things in the Performance Center. Upscale dining is one option, and the bar area is friendly and welcoming. Sophisticated equipment and a quality teaching staff, increased notably by the hiring of Illinois PGA Teacher of the Year John Platt, can help players improve their games and find clubs and balls that are best suited for them.

"What's really new to the operation

John Platt, an Illinois PGA Teacher of the Year honoree, checks a student's grip at the top.



BRIAN WALTERS



Data points from a Trackman session give Mike Baldwin the makings of a complete diagnosis and action plan.

is, we can do all custom club fitting,” says Phillips. “We can put any head from any clubmaker into any shaft.” There are separate areas for club fitting and club repair. Club fitting options include Fujikawa shafts. Mistwood is one of that company’s few dealers. Fujikawa produces some of the most popular shafts for tour players and doesn’t sell to traditional consumers. Over 50 grip options are also available.

“Overall we’re utilizing state of the art technology,” says Mike Baldwin, director of the Performance Center. TrackMan ball flight analysis, SAM Putt Lab and Quintic ball position putting analysis are invaluable tools in both teaching and club fitting. All of it is portable, so it can be used on a strictly outdoor range as well as when players are hitting from indoors to outdoors. The range itself is over 300 yards in depth, and it was also part of Heam’s remodeling effort. “It’s really contoured now,” says Phillips. “It looks

a lot like the golf course, with some hills, some bunkers. When you hit into the practice greens it feels like you’re on the course.”

While indoor space is available in case of inclement weather (mats in front of the Performance Centre are also an option), the outdoor range is as spacious as it needs to be for big events like the American Junior Golf Association’s Midwest Players Championship, conducted in June, and the Illinois Women’s Open, which returns July 31–Aug. 2.

“Thirty-two spaces are available all the time,” says Phillips, “but we can have as many as we need to. We can get everybody on the range before our outings.” In addition to Platt and Baldwin, the teaching staff includes Phillips, head professional Visanu Tongwarin and Chris Ioriatti. All are Mistwood veteran instructors.

“As a whole, our goal is to offer a complete performance experience,”

says Baldwin. “We can work on every aspect of your game. We can make any tweak from the club performance side and the player performance side. We try to create an overall experience that is memorable, makes you better and touches every level of performance there is, and we want to have some fun doing it.” The size of the parking lot was also doubled in size, to accommodate 240 cars, and the last phase of the improvement process – the building of a new clubhouse – is in the planning stages. Work won’t begin immediately.

“We’re putting more lipstick on the old clubhouse,” says McWethy. A woman’s locker room has been created (minus a shower). That improvement will have to be it for this season, but don’t expect the building of a new clubhouse to be very far down the road. Mistwood has been on the cutting edge of all things golf in the Chicago marketplace for the last few years – it looks to stay that way. ■