

TOP 100 golf COURSES IN NORTH CAROLINA

We're pleased to present the North Carolina Golf Panel's annual listing of the state's top 100 courses. The panel, which has ranked courses for more than 20 years, comprises more than 150 professionals, coaches, notable amateur players and business leaders. Everyone's opinion differs, of course, and we always welcome your feedback.

Along with the top 100, our writers have spotlighted three individuals who are having a major impact on North Carolina golf.

It takes special talent and painstaking attention to detail to restore or renovate a golf course created by a master like Donald Ross. Kris Spence is more than qualified in that regard. He has become the architect of choice when North Carolina clubs want to return their courses as closely as possible to the original.

Kelly Miller has led Pine Needles Lodge & Golf Club for 34 years while also establishing a strong record as an elite amateur golfer. The venerable Southern Pines course is said to have been Ross' favorite to play. But Miller, even with his reverence for the game's traditions, knows that the desires of younger golfers will help shape the resort's future.

Zach Peed and his entrepreneurial family are breathing new life into Dormie Club, a critical success when it opened near Pinehurst in 2009. Unfortunately, the high-end course started amid the worst recession in generations, which hammered the golf industry especially hard. After hanging on by a thread for several years, Dormie's original mission of being a destination course for golf aficionados is being fulfilled by the Nebraska-based publishing family.

TOP NOTCH ERS



1. PINEHURST NO. 2
PINEHURST
PAR 72 | YARDAGE 7,497 | COURSE
RATING/SLOPE RATING 76.4/141
2017 rank: 1

**2. GRANDFATHER GOLF
AND COUNTRY CLUB**
LINVILLE
72 | 7,085 | 74.3/145
2017 rank: 2

**3. MOUNTAINTOP GOLF &
LAKE CLUB**
CASHIERS
70 | 7,126 | 73.9/145
2017 rank: 3

**4. THE COUNTRY CLUB OF
NORTH CAROLINA (DOGWOOD)**
PINEHURST
72 | 7,204 | 75.2/134
2017 rank: 7



5. OLD NORTH STATE CLUB
NEW LONDON
72 | 7,102 | 74.8/142
2017 rank: 4

6. QUAIL HOLLOW CLUB
CHARLOTTE
72 | 7,396 | 75.0/140
2017 rank: 6

**7. PINE NEEDLES LODGE
& GOLF CLUB**
SOUTHERN PINES
71 | 7,015 | 73.5/135
2017 rank: 5

8. CHARLOTTE COUNTRY CLUB
CHARLOTTE
71 | 7,335 | 75.9/146
2017 rank: 9

9. ELK RIVER CLUB
BANNER ELK
72 | 6,826 | 73.4/141
2017 rank: 8

10. PINEHURST NO. 8
PINEHURST
72 | 7,092 | 74.1/138
2017 rank: 10

11. WADE HAMPTON GOLF CLUB
CASHIERS
72 | 7,154 | 74.0/144
2017 rank: 11



**12. SEDGEFIELD COUNTRY
CLUB (ROSS)**
GREENSBORO
71 | 7,117 | 72.9/130
2017 rank: 13

13. CAPE FEAR COUNTRY CLUB
WILMINGTON
72 | 6,856 | 73.4/135
2017 rank: 14

14. OLD TOWN CLUB
WINSTON-SALEM
70 | 7,042 | 74.5/140
2017 rank: 16

**15. THE COUNTRY CLUB OF
NORTH CAROLINA (CARDINAL)**
PINEHURST
72 | 7,212 | 75.0/141
2017 rank: 18

16. EAGLE POINT GOLF CLUB
WILMINGTON
72 | 7,170 | 74.5/137
2017 rank: 17

17. OLD CHATHAM GOLF CLUB
DURHAM
72 | 7,210 | 74.0/131
2017 rank: 21

18. PINEHURST NO. 4
PINEHURST
72 | 7,117 | 74.2/135
2017 rank: 12

19. MID PINES INN & GOLF CLUB
SOUTHERN PINES
72 | 6,528 | 71.3/127
2017 rank: 19



20. RALEIGH COUNTRY CLUB
RALEIGH
71 | 6,816 | 73.7/135
2017 rank: 20

**21. BILTMORE FOREST
COUNTRY CLUB**
ASHEVILLE
70 | 6,606 | 71.5/127
2017 rank: 15

**22. ROCK BARN COUNTRY
CLUB & SPA (JONES)**
CONOVER
72 | 7,126 | 74.4/141
2017 rank: 23



**23. TRUMP NATIONAL GOLF
CLUB**
MOORESVILLE
72 | 7,037 | 74.2/140
2017 rank: 24

24. RIVER LANDING (RIVER)
WALLACE
72 | 7,009 | 73.5/141
2017 rank: 25

25. FOREST CREEK GOLF CLUB (SOUTH)

PINEHURST
72 | 7,067 | 74.6/143
2017 rank: 22



26. MACGREGOR DOWNS COUNTRY CLUB

CARY
72 | 7,003 | 73.4/134
2017 rank: 35

27. PRESTONWOOD COUNTRY CLUB (HIGHLANDS)

CARY
72 | 7,082 | 74.4/138
2017 rank: 28

28. GOVERNORS CLUB

CHAPEL HILL
72 | 7,062 | 75.1/144
2017 rank: 31

29. LINVILLE GOLF CLUB

LINVILLE
72 | 6,946 | 73.4/139
2017 rank: 26



30. COUNTRY CLUB OF LANDFALL (DYE)

WILMINGTON
72 | 7,026 | 74.3/132
2017 rank: 29

31. PINEHURST NO. 9

PINEHURST
72 | 7,125 | 75.1/143
2017 rank: 30



32. FOREST CREEK GOLF CLUB (NORTH)

PINEHURST
72 | 7,139 | 74.7/144
2017 rank: 27

33. HIGH POINT COUNTRY CLUB (WILLOW CREEK)

HIGH POINT
72 | 6,972 | 73.9/139
2017 rank: 33

34. TREYBURN COUNTRY CLUB

DURHAM
72 | 7,070 | 74.5/140
2017 rank: 34



35. HASENTREE

WAKE FOREST
71 | 7,074 | 73.9/139
2017 rank: 36

36. MYERS PARK COUNTRY CLUB

CHARLOTTE
71 | 7,120 | 74.3/138
2017 rank: 32

37. COUNTRY CLUB OF LANDFALL (NICKLAUS)

WILMINGTON
72 | 7,100 | 75.1/144
2017 rank: 37

38. FORSYTH COUNTRY CLUB

WINSTON-SALEM
71 | 6,784 | 72.8/136
2017 rank: 39

39. FINLEY GOLF COURSE

CHAPEL HILL
72 | 7,119 | 75.2/141
2017 rank: 41

40. GREENSBORO COUNTRY CLUB (FARM)

GREENSBORO
72 | 7,302 | 75.1/140
2017 rank: 40

41. DUKE UNIVERSITY GOLF CLUB

DURHAM
72 | 7,105 | 73.9/141
2017 rank: 43

42. THE CLUB AT IRISH CREEK

KANNAPOLIS
72 | 7,099 | 74.3/137
2017 rank: 42

43. RIVER LANDING (LANDING)

WALLACE
72 | 7,112 | 74.0/132
2017 rank: 46

44. BALD HEAD ISLAND CLUB

BALD HEAD ISLAND
72 | 6,855 | 73.7/143
2017 rank: 45

45. LEOPARD'S CHASE

SUNSET BEACH
72 | 7,055 | 74.3/140
2017 rank: 48

46. GASTON COUNTRY CLUB

GASTONIA
72 | 7,042 | 74.2/135
2017 rank: 57

47. PINEWILD COUNTRY CLUB (MAGNOLIA)

PINEHURST
72 | 7,446 | 76.4/139
2017 rank: 47



48. SCOTCH HALL PRESERVE

MERRY HILL
72 | 7,257 | 76.3/139
2017 rank: 50

49. DORMIE CLUB

WEST END
72 | 6,988 | 74.0/140
2017 rank: 44

50. HOPE VALLEY COUNTRY CLUB

DURHAM
70 | 6,671 | 73.1/133
2017 rank: 49

**51. TIGER'S EYE**

SUNSET BEACH
72 | 6,849 | 73.3/141
2017 rank: 51

52. SEDGEFIELD COUNTRY CLUB (DYE)

GREENSBORO
70 | 6,821 | 74.2/139
2017 rank: 52

53. THE KING'S COURSE AT MID SOUTH CLUB

SOUTHERN PINES
71 | 7,003 | 73.8/144
2017 rank: 59

54. BALSAM MOUNTAIN PRESERVE

SYLVA
70 | 6,859 | 73.0/145
2017 rank: 53

55. RIVER RUN COUNTRY CLUB

DAVIDSON
72 | 6,947 | 74.2/138
2017 rank: 54

56. ALAMANCE COUNTRY CLUB

BURLINGTON
71 | 6,900 | 72.8/128
2017 rank: 55

57. PRESTONWOOD COUNTRY CLUB (MEADOWS)

CARY
72 | 7,108 | 74.6/138
2017 rank: 58

58. CARMEL COUNTRY CLUB (SOUTH)

CHARLOTTE
72 | 7,503 | 76.5/142
2017 rank: 56

59. COUNTRY CLUB OF ASHEVILLE

ASHEVILLE
71 | 6,672 | 72.3/134
2017 rank: 62

60. PINEHURST NO. 7

PINEHURST
72 | 7,216 | 75.5/149
2017 rank: 60

61. LONNIE POOLE GOLF COURSE

RALEIGH
71 | 7,358 | 74.7/142
2017 rank: 65

62. GRANDOVER (EAST)

GREENSBORO
72 | 6,800 | 72.5/136
2017 rank: 61

**63. BRYAN PARK GOLF AND CONFERENCE CENTER (CHAMPIONS)**

BROWNS SUMMIT
72 | 7,255 | 75.4/140
2017 rank: 63

64. THE CURRITUCK CLUB

DUCK
72 | 6,888 | 73.9/136
2017 rank: 66

65. THISTLE GOLF CLUB

SUNSET BEACH
71 | 6,898 | 74.1/135
2017 rank: 67

66. PINWOOD COUNTRY CLUB

ASHEBORO
72 | 6,830 | 73.5/134
2017 rank: 69

67. ST. JAMES PLANTATION (RESERVE)

SOUTHPORT
72 | 7,212 | 75.4/146
2017 rank: 64

68. LAKE TOXAWAY COUNTRY CLUB

LAKE TOXAWAY
71 | 6,500 | 70.9/134
2017 rank: 68

**69. JEFFERSON LANDING**

JEFFERSON
72 | 7,111 | 73.1/134
2017 rank: —

70. PORTERS NECK COUNTRY CLUB

WILMINGTON
72 | 7,112 | 74.8/138
2017 rank: 70

71. CROASDAILE COUNTRY CLUB

DURHAM
72 | 7,068 | 73.4/140
2017 rank: 75

72. LINVILLE RIDGE

LINVILLE
72 | 6,775 | 72.8/136
2017 rank: 71

**73. CAPE FEAR NATIONAL GOLF CLUB**

LELAND
72 | 7,217 | 74.5/143
2017 rank: 74

TOP 100 GOLF COURSES IN N.C.

74. TOURNAMENT PLAYERS CLUB AT WAKEFIELD PLANTATION

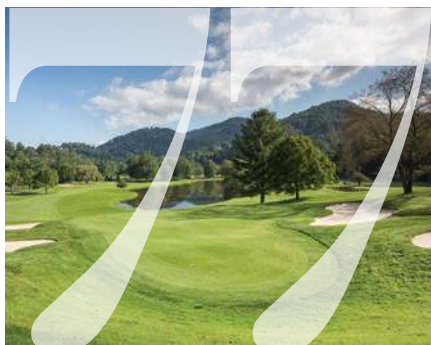
RALEIGH
72 | 7,257 | 75.2/137
2017 rank: 73

75. BALLANTYNE COUNTRY CLUB

CHARLOTTE
72 | 7,034 | 74.1/136
2017 rank: 84

76. CEDARWOOD COUNTRY CLUB

CHARLOTTE
71 | 6,940 | 73.4/132
2017 rank: 76



77. HOUND EARS CLUB

BLOWING ROCK
72 | 6,327 | 69.9/129
2017 rank: 79

78. STARMOUNT FOREST COUNTRY CLUB

GREENSBORO
71 | 6,518 | 72.0/136
2017 rank: 85

79. WILSON COUNTRY CLUB

WILSON
72 | 6,851 | 73.1/136
2017 rank: 80

80. GRANDOVER (WEST)

GREENSBORO
72 | 7,100 | 74.3/140
2017 rank: 72

81. KILMARLIC GOLF CLUB

POWELLS POINT
72 | 6,560 | 72.2/144
2017 rank: 81

82. COUNTRY CLUB OF SALISBURY

SALISBURY
71 | 6,665 | 72.0/128
2017 rank: 77

83. BRIER CREEK COUNTRY CLUB

RALEIGH
72 | 6,885 | 73.6/139
2017 rank: 82

84. THE CLUB AT LONGVIEW

WEDDINGTON
72 | 7,068 | 74.5/140
2017 rank: 78

85. ROCKY RIVER GOLF CLUB

CONCORD
72 | 6,970 | 73.5/137
2017 rank: 83

86. NORTH RIDGE COUNTRY CLUB (LAKES)

RALEIGH
72 | 6,880 | 73.8/136
2017 rank: 86

87. BERMUDA RUN COUNTRY CLUB (EAST)

BERMUDA RUN
72 | 7,045 | 74.3/139
2017 rank: —

88. CROW CREEK GOLF CLUB

CALABASH
72 | 7,101 | 73.9/130
2017 rank: 88

89. MILL CREEK GOLF CLUB

MEBANE
72 | 7,004 | 73.5/144
2017 rank: 91



90. CAROLINA GOLF CLUB

CHARLOTTE
71 | 7,011 | 73.2/138
2017 rank: 92

91. TANGLEWOOD PARK (CHAMPIONSHIP)

CLEMMONS
70 | 7,018 | 75.4/142
2017 rank: 90

92. NEW COURSE AT TALAMORE

SOUTHERN PINES
71 | 6,840 | 73.2/140
2017 rank: 100

93. SOUTHERN PINES GOLF CLUB

SOUTHERN PINES
71 | 6,268 | 70.3/130
2017 rank: 95

94. BLOWING ROCK COUNTRY CLUB

BLOWING ROCK
72 | 6,162 | 69.9/130
2017 rank: 94



95. SAPONA RIDGE COUNTRY CLUB

LEXINGTON
71 | 6,620 | 72.2/137
2017 rank: —

96. HERITAGE CLUB

WAKE FOREST
72 | 7,016 | 73.1/133
2017 rank: 96

97. PRESTONWOOD COUNTRY CLUB (FAIRWAYS)

CARY
70 | 6,475 | 71.2/134
2017 rank: 98

98. STONEY CREEK GOLF CLUB

WHITSETT
71 | 7,016 | 73.8/139
2017 rank: 99

99. LONGLEAF GOLF & FAMILY CLUB

SOUTHERN PINES
72 | 6,709 | 72.4/132
2017 rank: —



100. NAGS HEAD GOLF LINKS

NAGS HEAD
71 | 6,126 | 70.2/138
2017 rank: —

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FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE COAST

- | | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 Raleigh Country Club | 5 The Reserve Golf Club | 9 Brook Valley Country Club |
| 2 Treyburn Country Club | 6 Sedgefield Country Club | 10 Country Club of Asheville |
| 3 Musgrove Mill Golf Club | 7 TPC Wakefield Plantation | 11 Holston Hills Country Club |
| 4 Old North State Club | 8 Grande Dunes* | 12 Providence Country Club |

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OLD NORTH STATE CLUB





COURSE DOCTOR

Kris Spence's specialty is restoring the state's classic tracks.

BY LEE PACE
PHOTOS BY PETER TAYLOR

Donald Ross, perhaps golf's most beloved designer, created some three dozen courses across North Carolina during the first half of the 20th century, from Highlands Country Club in a far western nook of the state to Cape Fear Country Club in Wilmington. Ross died in 1948, but today, Greensboro-based architect and restoration specialist Kris Spence is reviving his designs for a new generation of golfers.

Spence has developed a niche over nearly two decades by linking the old masters to the modern game, whether adding yardage to accommodate today's long ball, rebuilding greens with popular hybrid Bermuda grasses or returning Ross' original bunkers and greens to their former state.

"Kris is an artist," says Joe Dillon, a former club champion at Forsyth Country Club in Winston-Salem, which Spence restored in 2006. "I watched him sketch out holes on a piece of paper or even a napkin. Then you see it rise out of the ground and it's amazing."

Growing up in Missouri, Spence, 55, took an early interest in course architecture — as a kid, he roughed out a putting green in his family's backyard — but most of his early play was on modern courses on relatively flat pieces of land. A golf scholarship took him to Arkansas State University, but he transferred to Lake City Community College, now Florida Gateway College, to study golf course operations. After graduating in 1985, he took a job as the green superintendent at Forest Oaks Country Club in Greensboro. He had heard a lot about Pinehurst No. 2, the course Ross carved out from the sandy loam of the Sandhills that is considered one of the top dozen in the U.S.

So he made a point to drive to Pinehurst and see it himself.

"The greens were the old 328 Bermuda (grass) — they were as firm as any I'd ever seen," says Spence, who was a scratch player, capable of shooting par or better whenever he played. "They impacted the way I played the game. You couldn't fly the ball at the flag — that caught my attention. And it became clear as you played the course that there was one angle of approach that gave you an advantage. That one round of golf set me off in a totally new direction."



Kris Spence's current projects include a course renovation at Providence Country Club in south Charlotte. Raleigh-based McConnell Golf has invested \$5 million in the club since it bought it in 2016.

Spence read books on classic designers and studied plans from Ross and other architects such as Seth Raynor, A.W. Tillinghast and William Flynn. He visited Ross courses in North Carolina, including Sedgefield Country Club in Greensboro and Alamance Country Club in Burlington. In 1990, he landed a job as green superintendent at Greensboro Country Club, where the original Irving Park course was designed by Ross, starting in 1924. The club began talking in the mid-1990s about updating its playing surfaces and restoring the original bunkers, green shapes and playing strategy that had been lost over the years. Spence volunteered to handle the project in-house.

"At that time, 'restoration' was not a big buzzword, so the club was a little apprehensive, and I'm ready to go full bore," Spence recalls. "The course had been remodeled in the '60s, and it had mounds and a very modernistic approach. I found the original plans and some old aerial (photographs). It was one of the best-bunkered golf courses, but all of that was gone."

Spence completed the work in 1997, and that led to a \$2.5 million project at The Omni Grove Park Inn in Asheville, another vintage course that Ross had remodeled in 1926. Spence researched the history of the course and drew up a master plan for a restoration, again seeking to re-create as much Ross



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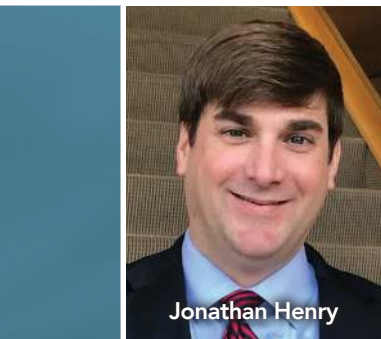
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Wallace Williams



Chris Sutherland



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Westray Veasey



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KRIS SPENCE GOLF COURSE RESTORATIONS/ RENOVATIONS IN NORTH CAROLINA

COURSE	CITY	TOP 100 RANKING	COURSE	CITY	TOP 100 RANKING
Bentwinds Country Club	Fuquay-Varina	NR	Greensboro Country Club	Greensboro	NR
Benvenue Country Club*	Rocky Mount	NR	Omni Grove Park Inn	Asheville	NR
Blowing Rock Country Club	Blowing Rock	94	Hope Valley Country Club*	Durham	50
Brook Valley Country Club	Greenville	NR	Jefferson Landing Club*	Jefferson	69
Cape Fear Country Club	Wilmington	13	Lake Toxaway Country Club	Lake Toxaway	68
Carolina Golf Club	Charlotte	90	Mimosa Hills Golf Club	Morganton	NR
Cedarwood Country Club	Charlotte	76	Mooresville Golf Club	Mooresville	NR
Country Club of North Carolina	Pinehurst	4	Providence Country Club*	Charlotte	NR
Cowan's Ford Golf Club	Stanley	NR	Roaring Gap Club	Roaring Gap	NR
Forsyth Country Club	Winston-Salem	38	Sedgefield Country Club	Greensboro	12

Other projects:

Camden Country Club
Camden, S.C.

Country Club of Spartanburg
Spartanburg, S.C.

Memphis Country Club
Memphis, Tenn.

Sara Bay Country Club*
Sarasota, Fla.

Chatmoss Country Club
Martinsville, Va.

Jefferson Lakeside Country Club, Richmond, Va.

Rock Hill Country Club
Rock Hill, S.C.

Saugahatchee Country Club
Opelika, Ala.

**in progress; NR-not ranked*



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detail as possible while making adjustments for the distance of the modern golf ball and increased green speeds. *Golfweek* named the project its “Best Restoration” in 2002. After completing that job, Spence left the club and hung his own shingle in the golf architecture and construction business.

“People are telling me I’m good at it, I think I’m good at it, and I think I could be successful,” he says. “I’m not the first person to do it. Donald Ross and Ellis Maples and Flynn and Tillinghast and a lot of guys entered the business the exact same way, by taking that path, through being a green keeper and a construction guy.”

Over the last decade and a half, Spence has developed a specialty for restoring and renovating many of the courses designed by Ross and other classic architects in the Carolinas and beyond.

Rob Fowler, who directed the committee that hired Spence to lead Forsyth Country Club’s 2006 restoration, said the club respected the designer’s experience as a superintendent.

“He understood we have to live with the golf course after he leaves,” says Fowler, whose family owns the Modern Automotive dealership chain. “I also think Kris understands better than most what makes a Ross course so playable for all levels of golfers. One of our goals was to make this course more fun for the average player.”

A decade later, the Country Club of North Carolina embarked on a \$4.5 million renovation of its Dogwood Course, a 1963 Ellis Maples/Willard Byrd design consistently ranked in the top five in the state. Spence supervised the reconstruction of every green, tee, bunker and fairway during the 2015-16 renovation.

“From the beginning, Kris brought a style that spoke to integrity and straightforwardness,” said Robert “Ziggy” Zalzneek, club president. “Some architects we talked to tried to tell us what we wanted. Kris listened first. He tried to talk us out of some things, but he listened. . . . And he knew Ellis Maples’ work and style and had a track record with it. He was the right man for this job.”

Spence, whose firm has 20 employees, uses many tools in his design process. He looks at original plans when available. He uses Google Earth to find aerial imagery of courses at various time periods. For the



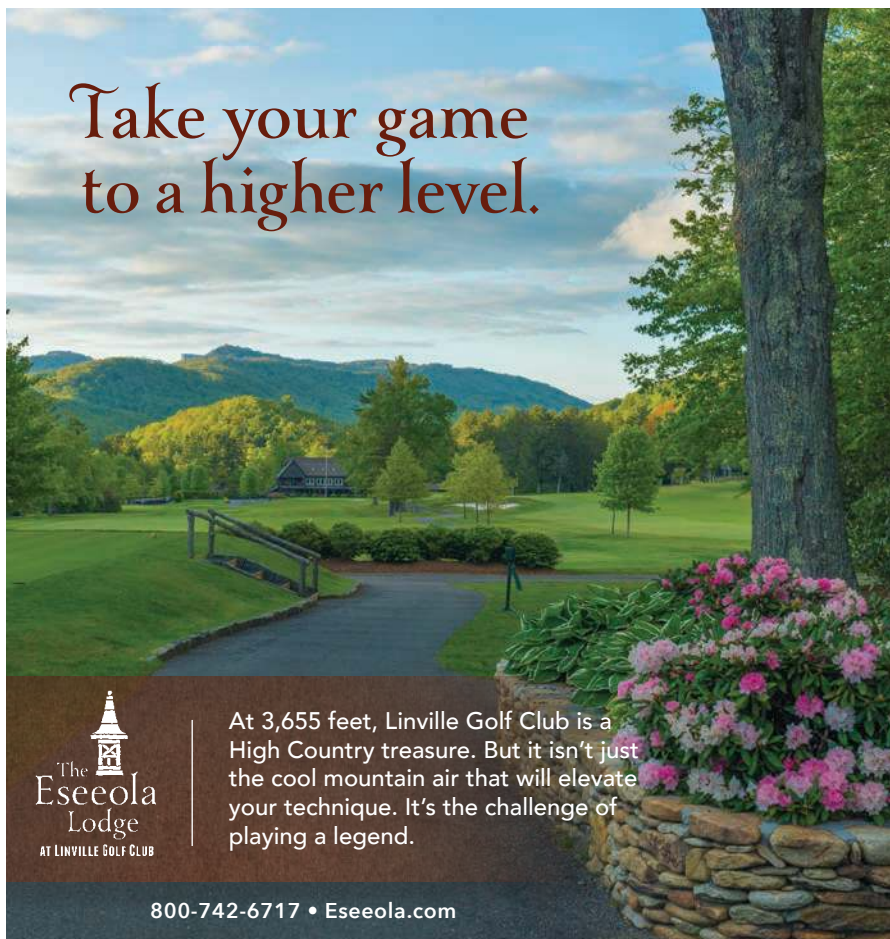
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“Some architects we talked to tried to tell us what we wanted. Kris listened first. He tried to talk us out of some things, but he listened. ... And he knew Ellis Maples’ work and style and had a track record with it. He was the right man for this job.”

ROBERT “ZIGGY” ZALZNECK



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Dogwood project, he showed club officials how trees bordering putting surfaces had crept onto greens perimeters over the years, hindering healthy grass growth. He's made three trips to the British Isles to study the styles of the Old World links courses, where the ground game is more prevalent than the American staple of playing golf through the air.

Most of all, he walks the property, looking with his eyes and feeling with his feet.

"I get in tune with the piece of property," he says. "I look at the folds of the land, I look at where the water's going, I look at the high spots. Most of the time, the routing is still intact. I've always found when I do restorations — whether it's Tillinghast or Raynor or Ross or Maples — I stay in tune with that land."

Despite a steady flow of jobs asking him to knock the rust off the classic architects' work, what's eluded him is landing an assignment to build a new course from scratch. Since 2009, more courses have closed than new ones have opened, according to the National Golf Foundation.

Spence had signed contracts in the early 2000s to design two courses in North Carolina and one in Virginia, but the financing never came through. He later met with a developer in Florida to discuss plans for a new course but thought the land too mediocre and eventually passed. He's also completed extensive remodeling projects at Lake Toxaway Country Club and Mooresville Golf Club, which was a \$5 million improvement.

"Those jobs were certainly the equivalent of a from-scratch design in the realm of construction and design," he says, but the industry doesn't view them as original design.

Until that opportunity presents itself, Spence is content to focus on remodeling and restoration. He's currently working on Providence Country Club in Charlotte, a Dan Maples-designed course from the mid-1980s, and restoring Sara Bay Country Club in Sarasota, Fla., a Ross course that opened in 1926.

Spence estimates he's touched about 60 courses to one degree or another.

"There is always something new to learn in this business. Donald Ross in particular, he was always evolving and adapting to each piece of ground, and it just teaches you something every time." ■

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HISTORY REVISITED

Two revered Sandhills resorts take a different swing at a new generation.

BY MIKE PURKEY

Tucked among the towering longleaf pines along Midland Road just north of downtown Southern Pines sits a golf resort steeped in the game's centuries-old tradition, complete with a wood-paneled lodge where generations of visitors have swapped stories about missed putts and sensational shots. To stay relevant in the age of millisecond attention spans and information overload, however, Kelly Miller knows that his sport and business need to keep a keen eye toward the future. While there is a place for golf history, yesterday won't allow you to grow into tomorrow, the president of Pine Needles Lodge & Golf Club says.

"It's a challenge," says Miller, 59. "There are things that younger people want that older people might not be interested

in. Music is a big thing on the golf course now, and for the longest time, it was taboo. My son, Blair, is a millennial and he's actually got me kind of hooked. Now, I've got an [Ultimate Ears Boom speaker] in my golf bag." A growing number of golfers now carry similar Bluetooth equipment to accompany their rounds, signaling a shift in golf culture led by younger players but increasingly accepted by older golfers.

"We're still pretty much old-school at our facility," Miller says. "But I can say we're really looking for new ways to do things." Thinking ahead helped prompt the family-owned business to take on a wealthy investor last year to help finance improvements.

For the last 60 years, the resort has been synonymous with its owner, Peggy Kirk Bell, who died in 2016 at age 95. In 1953, she married Warren "Bullet" Bell, a former professional basketball player with the Fort Wayne Pistons. Later that year, they purchased Pine Needles, which consisted of the golf course and one lodge, for the princely sum of \$50,000. It felt like all the money in the world at that time, she often said.

Peggy Kirk Bell was a charter member of the Ladies Professional Golf Association. In the early days of the LPGA, Bell flew her own single-engine airplane to and from tournaments and on barnstorming trips around the country conducting clinics and playing exhibition matches to promote Wilson Sporting Goods.

One day in the early 1950s, Bell was flying in the Midwest when an electrical storm came up. Looking for a place to land, she flew over a cornfield and said a foxhole prayer: "God, if you get this plane on the ground, I'll never fly again." She landed successfully and trekked to a nearby farmhouse, where she offered the owner an airplane for a bargain price. She ended up using the proceeds from the airplane sale to build a swimming pool at Pine Needles. "She said every time she walked past that pool,



Kelly Miller



Warren “Bullet” Bell and his wife, golfer Peggy Kirk Bell, purchased Pine Needles, top, in 1953. Bullet died in 1984, and 10 years later, Peggy and a group of Triad investors bought Mid Pines, bottom.

she thought of the plane,” Miller says. In the ensuing decades, Bell was recognized as one of the sport’s leading instructors and created popular golf retreats for women at Pine Needles called “Golfaris.”

Bullet died in 1984 and Miller, who had married one of Bell’s daughters, Peggy Ann, took over as general manager at age 24. He had played college golf and graduated from the University of Alabama in 1981. With additions over the years, the resort now has 74 rooms.

In 1994, Bell had the opportunity to buy Mid Pines Inn & Golf Club, almost directly across Midland Road. Like Pine Needles, Mid Pines was created by famed designer Donald Ross. Adjacent to the golf course is a hotel that was built in 1921 and cottages along the 10th fairway that serve as rentals for golf guests. It was a perfect fit. Bell, along with investors Sonny Ridenhour and Jim Marsh of High Point and Jack Campbell of Winston-Salem, bought the property.

“The two Donald Ross originals and their warm, unaffected lodgings and gracious staffs have become as authentic a center of the best things in golf as there is in America,” Jaime Diaz wrote in *Golf Digest* about Pine Needles and Mid Pines shortly after Peggy Kirk Bell died.

Pine Needles has hosted three U.S. Women’s Opens — 1996, 2001 and 2007 — the most prestigious championship in women’s golf. The resort will host the championship again in 2022.

Throughout its history, Pine Needles has been a family business. In addition to Miller and his wife, Peggy Ann, Bell’s

daughter, Bonnie, and her husband, Pat McGowan, have worked for the company. So has Bell's son, Kirk. McGowan is a former PGA Tour member who is director of instruction at the resort.

Miller has been looking toward the future for some time. But that path sparked an awakening. "We were in the process a couple of years ago working with a group out west on doing some neat things at Pine Needles and Mid Pines," Miller says. "I wanted to show them our plan that was a really cool plan. The consultant came down to breakfast the next morning and I said, 'What do you think?'"

"He said, 'You'd better be careful building an iconic resort.' Somehow, I thought that didn't sound like a compliment. He

said, 'Look at these places now like The Homestead [in Hot Springs, Va.], which is as traditional a resort as there is. 'They put in a water park.' All of a sudden it hit me that he was right. We were trying to build what's been in the past."

Miller connected with business-school students at UNC Chapel Hill to analyze possible changes. The research pointed in a specific direction.

"We need to look for what the millennials want," Miller says. "They don't care about the size of the room. They care about the public facilities; they want to bring their pets in, stuff I wouldn't have thought of. We're really in the throes of what we need to do to be relevant over the next 20 years."

"We think tradition is very important, but the question is: Does the next generation think it's important? I happen to believe they do. The balancing act we have to have is how can we keep tradition and make it relevant for today's travelers and those in the future?"

To help facilitate the change, Mid Pines in December took on New Jersey-based investor Hareesh Tharani as a partner. Tharani purchased the shares of the Triad investors. Terms of the sale were not disclosed. Tharani is chairman of a private holding company based in New York that comprises real estate, private equity and clothing companies, including Dunning Golf and the Greg Norman Collection.

One of the priorities is to refurbish the aging hotel at Mid Pines and to upgrade the bar area, both indoors and outdoors. No start dates have been announced. The golf course at Mid Pines was renovated in 2012 by Southern Pines architect Kyle Franz, who has worked with famous designers such as Tom Doak and Gil Hanse. Franz also assisted Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw in 2010 with their redesign of Pinehurst No. 2.

The Mid Pines project received rave reviews, with *Golf Magazine* rating it as the best resort renovation of 2013. Miller hired Franz last year to rebuild greens and reconfigure bunkers at Pine Needles. Now, the golf aspect of the resort is firmly in place. It's what's off the course that presents the challenge.

"We are proud of our courses," Miller says. "Now, what we really want to do is enhance the hospitality experience — rooms, food, beverage, amenities and programming, as well." ■



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SCHOOLED IN GOLF

The Triangle's three major universities sport more than just great basketball.

BY JIM POMERANZ

Standing on the 11th tee at Lonnie Poole Golf Course at N.C. State University, the striking view of the Raleigh skyline makes this 665-yard, par-5 the layout's signature hole. In Chapel Hill, at UNC's Finley Golf Course, the 490-yard, par-4, dogleg left 15th hole has that moniker. "It's intimidating from your tee shot all the way to the green, with water along the left side," says director of golf Mike Wilkinson.

And Duke University Golf Club's 181-yard, par-3, 12th hole — played completely over water from tee to green — is most memorable. "This is a photographic gem," says PGA director of golf Ed Ibarguen. "The water has an uncanny ability to collect shots hit with hope rather than confidence."

These three courses in the Triangle are on-campus, open-to-the-public layouts and among the state's best. Finley is ranked No. 39 among the North Carolina Golf Panel's top 100 courses; Duke is No. 41; and Lonnie Poole is No. 61.

Each course operates at or above break-even without financial supplements by its university, officials say. Duke has a \$2.3 million budget, Lonnie Poole is at \$2 million and UNC Finley's is \$1.8 million. Course maintenance accounts for about half of the budget. Duke and Finley are part of their schools' athletics departments, while Lonnie Poole is owned by a limited-liability corporation that develops N.C. State's Centennial Campus.

Much of the income at these courses is generated from faculty, students, staff and alumni. Eighty-five percent of the Duke course's players are university-related, compared with 52% at Finley and Lonnie Poole. Students and staff get discounts at each course.

Duke is the oldest of the three layouts, though Finley's original design by George Cobb opened in 1949. (The adjacent Washington Duke Inn & Golf Club, also owned by the university, opened in 1988.) UNC hired Tom Fazio to create a new Finley course in nearly the same spot at a cost of \$8.2 million, fully funded by donations. Duke's course was built for \$500,000 in the 1950s; the 1994 renovation cost \$2.5 million, paid for by donations and operating income. Robert Trent Jones Sr. donated his design fee.

Donations totaling \$17 million paid for Lonnie Poole, including the course, clubhouse and maintenance facility. Waste Industries Inc. founder Lonnie Poole and his wife, Carol, contributed \$6 million.



Lonnie Poole Golf Course, named for a Raleigh sanitation-company entrepreneur, abuts Interstate 40 and N.C. State University's Centennial Campus.

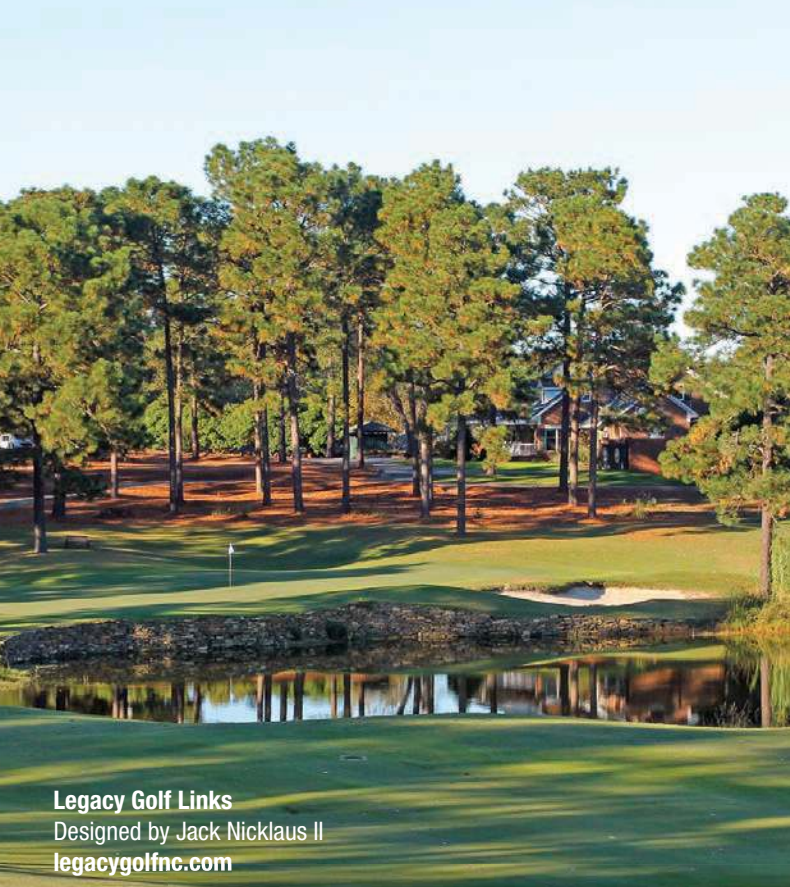
"We have a beautiful and challenging layout in the shadow of downtown Raleigh," says general manager Chip Watson. "And that includes the 11th because of that impressive Raleigh skyline." ■

College credits

COURSE	DESIGNER	YEAR BUILT	GREEN FEES
UNC Finley Golf Course	George Cobb	1949*	\$55-\$87 (with cart)
Duke University Golf Club	Robert Trent Jones Sr.	1957**	\$40-\$90 (not including cart)
Lonnie Poole Golf Course	Arnold Palmer	2009	\$59-\$85 (with cart)

*redesigned by Tom Fazio in 1999

**renovation by Rees Jones in 1994



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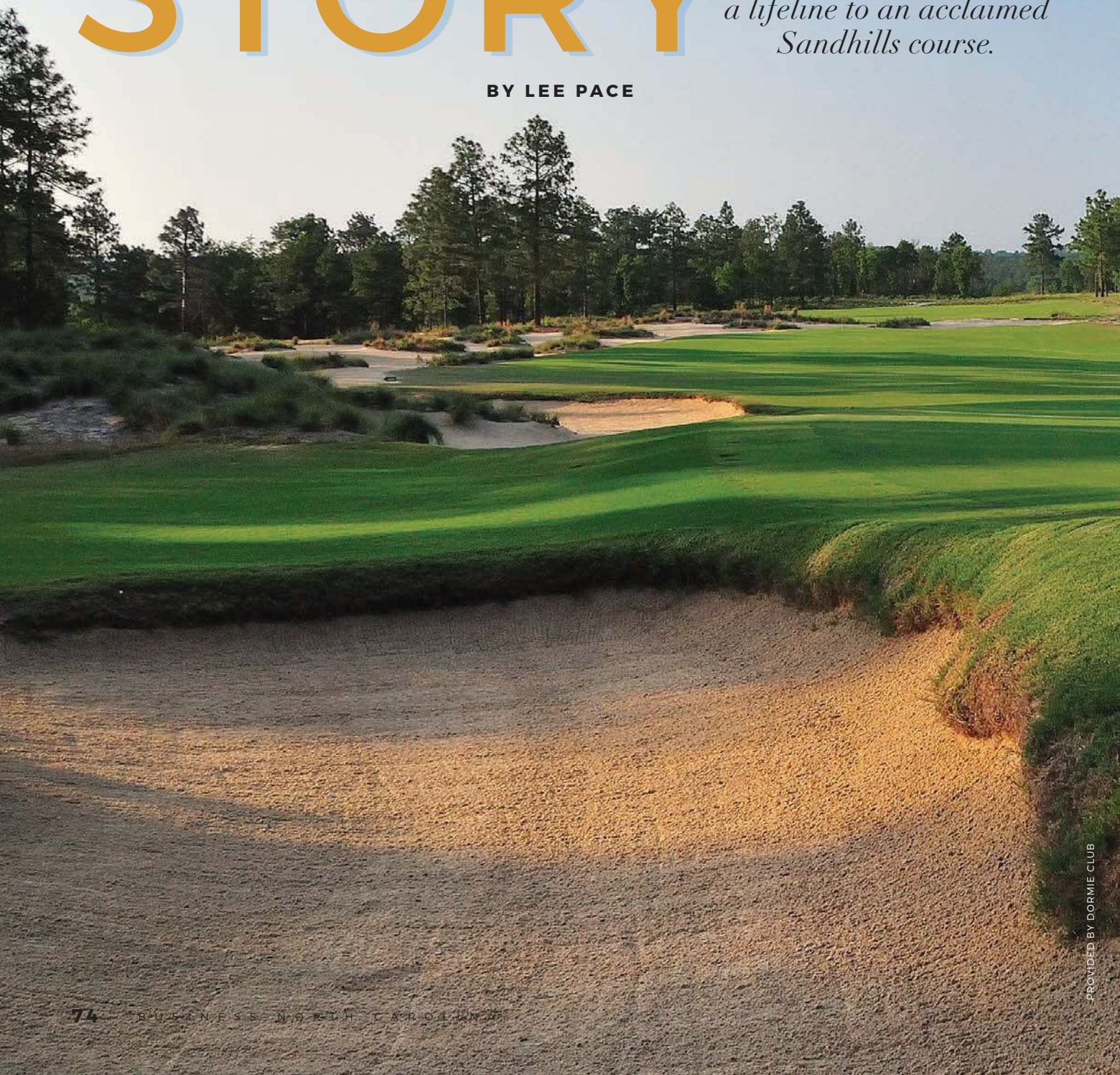


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DORMIE STORY

*A Nebraska
publishing family extends
a lifeline to an acclaimed
Sandhills course.*

BY LEE PACE





As a piece of art, the Dormie Club near Pinehurst was a purist's success from the moment it opened in 2010. The golf course was created 6 miles northwest of the village by the esteemed design team of Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw and laid quietly on rolling terrain, skirting three ponds and winding through pine forests and hardwoods.

"By no means did we envision a copy of Pinehurst No. 2," says Coore, who with his partner authored a significant restoration of that famous course in 2010-11. A native of Davidson County, Coore lives in Scottsdale, Ariz. "But we wanted to take some of the principles we felt applied to No. 2 and other courses Donald Ross had done in the Sandhills and say, 'This is our interpretation of what golf in the Sandhills might look and feel like.'"

As a business, though, the club was doomed out of the gate.

Conceived in 2007 as an elite enclave of national scope with a total golf focus — no pools, tennis courts or wedding planners — the neophyte club was wracked by the financial crisis of 2007-09. It endured a construction stoppage and never generated any momentum toward its original vision in the recession's aftermath. Still, most golfers who have played the course applaud it: It is ranked No. 3 among the best courses open to the public in North Carolina by both *Golf Magazine* and *Golfweek* and the 12th best in North Carolina by *Golf Digest*. It is ranked 49th in *BUSINESS NORTH CAROLINA's* Top 100 courses, which includes private clubs (Page 54).

"The fact that the course never closed during some tough times says volumes about how good it is," says Mike Phillips, the club's membership director from 2009-13. "The site is hard to match in terms of peace and tranquility. But the operations and service certainly left much to be desired."

In January, the Peed family of Lincoln, Neb., acquired the course from MKH Ventures Inc. for \$7 million as part of a plan to assemble a network of elite courses. Tom and Rhonda Peed started a publishing business in 1978 with a single magazine in Webster City, Iowa. Sandhills Publishing Co. now produces more than a dozen trade journals and related websites for the heavy machinery and agricultural sectors. The Peeds' three sons work for their businesses, including Zach, who played collegiately at Nebraska Wesleyan University and now runs the family's golf business.

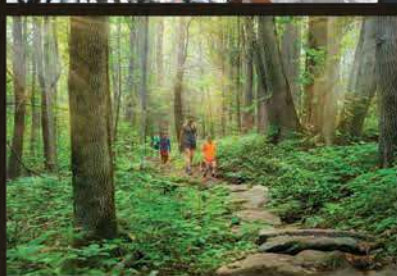
MKH Ventures created the club when it purchased a 1,028-acre parcel in late 2007 for \$15 million and spent approximately \$10 million on the golf course. The name stands for partners Rusty Mackey, Walter Krumm and Bob Hansen, the latter a Pinehurst resident who was most involved with the club's day-to-day opera-



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TOP 50 COURSES YOU CAN PLAY

Panelists rank the best public and semi-private golf courses in the state.

(PAR | YARDAGE | COURSE RATING/SLOPE RATING)

1. Pinehurst No. 2, Pinehurst	72	7,497	76.4/141
2. Pine Needles Lodge and Golf Club, Southern Pines	71	7,015	73.5/135
3. Pinehurst No. 8, Pinehurst	72	7,092	74.1/138
4. Pinehurst No. 4, Pinehurst	72	7,117	74.2/135
5. Mid Pines Inn and Golf Club, Southern Pines	72	6,528	71.3/127
6. Linville Golf Club, Linville	72	6,946	73.4/139
7. Pinehurst No. 9, Pinehurst	72	7,125	75.1/143
8. Finley Golf Course, Chapel Hill	72	7,119	75.2/141
9. Duke University Golf Club, Durham	72	7,105	73.9/141
10. Bald Head Island Club, Bald Head Island	72	6,855	73.7/143
11. Leopard's Chase, Sunset Beach	72	7,055	74.3/140
12. Scotch Hall Preserve, Merry Hill	72	7,257	76.3/139
13. Tiger's Eye, Sunset Beach	72	6,849	73.3/141
14. The King's Course at Mid South, Southern Pines	71	7,003	73.8/144
15. Pinehurst No. 7, Pinehurst	72	7,216	75.5/149
16. Lonnie Poole Golf Course, Raleigh	71	7,358	74.7/142
17. Grandover (East), Greensboro	72	6,800	72.5/136
18. Bryan Park Golf and Conference Center (Champions), Browns Summit	72	7,255	75.4/140
19. The Currituck Club, Corolla	72	6,888	73.9/136
20. Thistle Golf Club, Sunset Beach	71	6,898	74.1/135
21. Cape Fear National Golf Club, Leland	72	7,217	74.5/143
22. Grandover (West), Greensboro	72	7,100	74.3/140
23. Kilmarlic Golf Club, Powells Point	72	6,560	72.2/144
24. Rocky River Golf Club, Concord	72	6,970	73.5/137
25. Crow Creek Golf Club, Calabash	72	7,101	73.9/130
26. Mill Creek Golf Club, Mebane	72	7,004	73.5/144
27. Tanglewood Park (Championship), Clemmons	70	7,018	75.4/142
28. New Course at Talamore, Southern Pines	71	6,840	73.2/140
29. Southern Pines Golf Club, Southern Pines	71	6,268	70.3/130
30. Heritage Club, Wake Forest	72	7,016	73.1/133
31. Nags Head Golf Links, Nags Head	71	6,126	70.2/138
32. Stoney Creek Golf Club, Whitsett	71	7,016	73.8/139
33. Cutter Creek Golf Club, Snow Hill	72	7,280	75.3/144
34. Longleaf Golf & Family Club, Southern Pines	72	6,709	72.4/132
35. Pinehurst No. 6, Pinehurst	71	6,990	74.4/139
36. Carolina Colours Golf Club, New Bern	72	7,008	72.9/132
37. Compass Pointe Golf Club, Leland	72	7,228	74.6/138
38. The Golf Club at Ballantyne Hotel & Lodge, Charlotte	71	6,710	71.5/133
39. Tobacco Road Golf Club, Sanford	71	6,554	73.2/150
40. Belmont Lake Golf Club, Rocky Mount	72	7,095	74.0/135
41. Legacy Golf Links, Aberdeen	72	7,004	73.9/133
42. Mount Mitchell Golf Club, Burnsville	72	6,495	70.0/121
43. Mimosa Hills Golf Club, Morganton	72	6,750	72.8/137
44. Forest Oaks Country Club, Greensboro	72	7,197	75.9/145
45. Seven Lakes Country Club, Seven Lakes	72	6,943	74.4/140
46. Wilmington Municipal Golf Club, Wilmington	71	6,564	71.2/128
47. Grove Park Inn, Asheville	70	6,162	70.0/126
48. Boone Golf Club, Boone	71	6,686	71.3/128
49. Bryan Park Golf and Conference Center (Players), Browns Summit	72	7,057	73.8/133
50. Panther's Run, Sunset Beach	72	7,089	74.8/140

tions. When developing the course a decade ago, Hansen said it targeted “purist” golfers who would respect the rough-hewn, minimalist style of Coore and Crenshaw and prefer to walk instead of riding in a cart. He drew a parallel to the word “dormie,” a golf term from match play that means a golfer cannot lose.

“That’s the stage in life our members will have reached,” he said at the time. “They can relax. They can’t lose.”

Those members never showed up, however, as the Great Recession hit full force in the fall of 2008 and the golf industry retrenched with a vengeance. None of the planned real estate around the Dormie course was ever developed or sold, and the club opened for public play to help cash flow. In recent times, no golf professional has been in charge, just a clerk to run the cash register.

The new owners are honoring tee times and outings already scheduled, but eventually the club will be strictly private, per the original vision. Local, national and corporate memberships will be available, with access to each club in the Peeds’ Dormie One network, which as of February included Briggs Ranch in San Antonio, Ballyhack in Roanoke, Va., and Arbor Links in Nebraska City, Neb. More courses are likely to be added.

Plans for a clubhouse and 15 four-bedroom villas are in the works. Phillips, who has returned to Dormie as membership director and land sales broker, says the owners hope to break ground by summer, with plans for no more than 60 to 70 golfers a day. There is also an effort to develop up to 200 homesites by 2020.

Coore visited the club earlier this year and completed a punch-list of items for the club maintenance staff, things mostly a result of tree and underbrush growth over the eight years since the course opened.

“With Bill and Ben, it’s never a ‘fight’ to lay a golf course out,” Zach Peed says. “They take the land and find something that no one else could see. They spend time on a site, walk it and live it. They remove some trees and plant some grass, and you’re left with a golf course that isn’t forced — it wasn’t a struggle or a grind to design.” ■

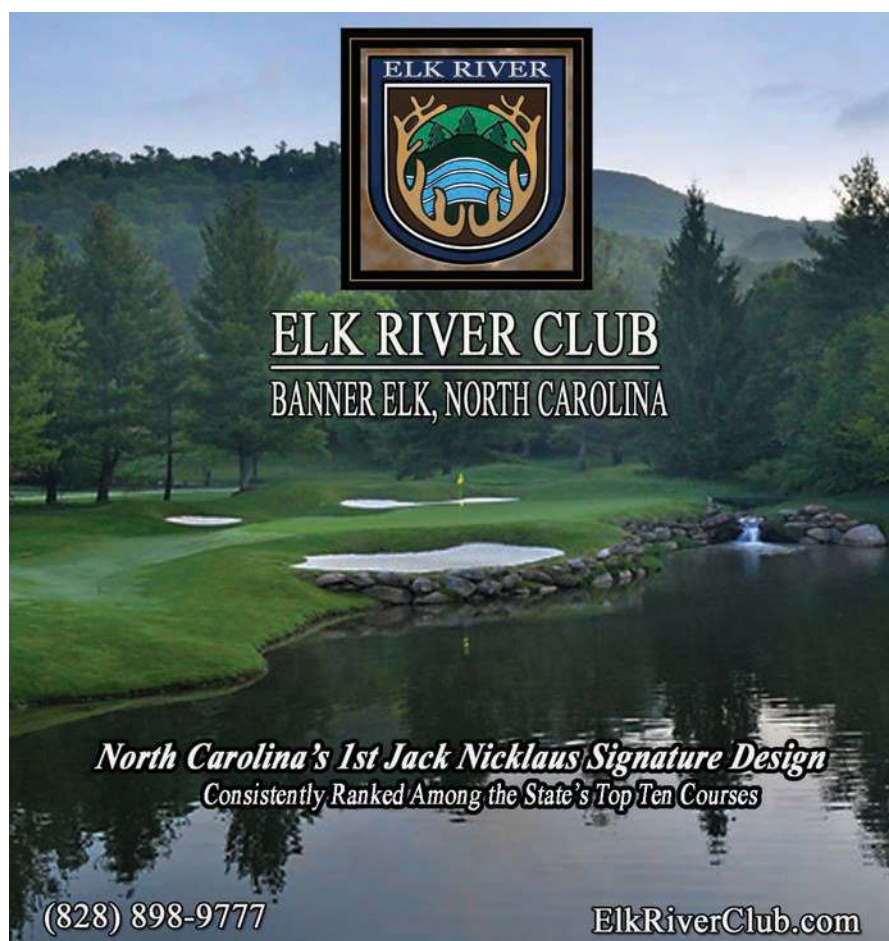


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