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Southern Golf makes its mark on Riverhill

By Richard Oliver - Express-News

Web Posted: 06/23/2010 12:00 CDT



John Junker (left) and Bryan Gathright of Southern Golf Properties have taken over management of Riverhill Country Club in Kerrville. From this elevated spot on the No. 7 tee box, you can see almost the entire course. BOB OWEN/rowen@express-news.net

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KERRVILLE — When Bryan Gathright and John Junker, operators of Southern Golf Properties, took a tour of Riverhill Country Club shortly after purchasing the property last year, they came across a telling discovery in the men's lounge.

Tacked on a bulletin board was a photo of former President Reagan.

"And it had been up there from the time of Ronald Reagan's presidency," Gathright said, laughing.

Clearly, there were updates needed at the celebrated facility, which includes the historic Gus F. Schreiner home, adjacent clubhouse and pro shop and gorgeous golf course designed by legendary figures Byron Nelson and Joe Finger.

Roughly nine months into its ownership, Southern Golf Properties has worked to incorporate the new while still celebrating the old, renovating locker rooms, eating areas and the golf centers with modern touches. From the Schreiner mansion, built in 1901, to the pro shop, established seven decades later, the company has worked to return a common

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design theme throughout, including columns and vaulted ceilings.

"The idea is to have a lot of growth, a lot of energy, breathed into the place," Junker said.

That mandate has been extended to the golf course, as well. The par-72 layout, currently 6,958 yards at its longest, will soon be stretched by another 350 yards by deeper tee boxes to be constructed on five holes.

Sand traps throughout the course are being made over, with a scattering of added bunkers planned for key elbows of fairways. More than \$30,000 has been invested to trim overgrown trees on the property, and fairways and greens are being reshaped in select spots.

"This course was designed by Nelson and Finger so that in your round of golf, you literally hit every shot and use every club in your bag," said Gathright, also director of instruction at Oak Hills Country Club in San Antonio.

The changes — many set to be completed by August — are part of Southern Golf's initiative to introduce the Hill Country facility as its showcase. Gathright and Junker, along with partner Matt Fawkes, have set up operations on site for an ownership and management company that now oversees courses in Castroville, Laredo, Utopia, Kerrville and San Antonio.

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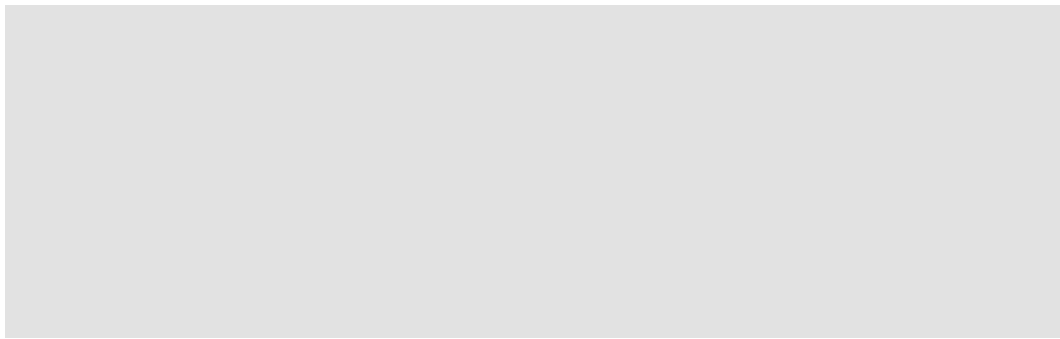
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Riverhill, built in 1974 on what was once the land of famed Texas rancher and businessman Charles A. Schreiner, includes more than 700 homes in neighborhoods in and around the golf course. In addition to the current 523 members, Southern Golf is soliciting further expansion from in and outside of Kerr County.

The golf course remains the major draw. The acreage, with the various looks and challenges familiar to Nelson designs, including his favored bent-grass greens, was once a major focus for some of the state's headline amateur events. Southern Golf would like Riverhill to be showcased again.









The site will host a U.S. Amateur Championship qualifier on July 26-27, as well as the Texas Golf Association Stableford Handicap Championship from July 30-Aug. 1. Southern Texas PGA tour stops are also planned at the site.

"We feel like it's a historical gem, and we don't want to change that," Gathright said. "We really just want to bring it to its full potential."

With that in mind, mounding for new tee boxes is already in place and blueprints for additional bunkering and trees drawn up.

And Reagan's photo has been taken down.

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