

HERITAGE GOLF GROUP LOOKS TO BE JOINING THAT

• ELITE • CIRCLE

BY TONY LEODORA



G

olf always has prided itself on being a gentleman's sport. But, let's face it, there are more than a few nasty words and phrases associated with the game.

And we're not just talking about the epithets emitted by the wayward golfers who are watching their ball head toward the out of bounds stakes.

We're talking about the negative words and phrases that are part of the language of the game:



“DOUBLE-BOGEY”

“THREE-PUTT”

“SHANK”

“CHILI-DIPPED WEDGE”

...AND

“MANAGEMENT COMPANY”





MARK BURNETT
PRESIDENT AND CEO



“FORTUNATELY, ALL OF OUR COURSES, AT THAT TIME, WERE IN SOUTH CAROLINA, FLORIDA AND VIRGINIA – STATES THAT NEVER CLOSED GOLF.”

To many golfers, especially those who are members of private clubs, the mere mention of certain management companies elicits an immediate frown.

Not all management companies. Some have sterling reputations and do their best to breathe life into clubs that need their help.

But there are others that have tarnished the industry by sucking the lifeblood out of a daily fee golf course or private club ... then take the profits and run. Too many of these stories have been told over the last few decades.

“I’ve been on both sides of the fence,” says Ron Garl, accomplished golf course architect and an industry veteran who has preached fiscal sustainability for years. “There is nothing better for a property that needs help than a good management company. And there is nothing worse than a bad one.”

Through the years, many management companies have come and gone. Two of the largest that continue to thrive and remain successful are Troon Golf and Club Corp.

Heritage Golf Group looks to be joining that elite circle.

Originally a small company with only six properties, it was purchased in January of 2020 by Mark Burnett and his group of investors. As president and CEO, the former Club Corp executive brought his expertise – and aggressive philosophy –

to the company.

Since then, he has engineered a mercurial rise that includes an impressive acquisition plan. Heritage Golf Group now has 20 golf clubs in its portfolio.

The purchase of the company took place a little more than one month before the Covid-19 pandemic closed much of the country. One can only imagine the shock that caused to the company’s plans.

“Our initial reaction was, ‘OK, this is interesting.’ But we didn’t panic,” said Burnett. “Fortunately, all of our courses, at that time, were in South Carolina, Florida and Virginia – states that never closed golf. The clubhouses were closed for a while but the golf stayed very busy.

“Of course, it wasn’t long before memberships and rounds started to increase, as people were seeing the positive nature of golf.”

That trend coincided with Heritage Golf Group’s rapid expansion.

In less than a year, three prime private clubs were acquired in New Jersey – Stanton Ridge CC, Shackamaxon CC and Basking Ridge CC. Add Knollwood CC in nearby Westchester County, New York and Heritage Golf Group was able to boast a collection of four courses within a half-hour drive.

“We were able to put together a regional network that gave members more options with their membership,”



explained Burnett. “Our national membership program is still in development. It will be launching later this year. Currently, we have been quite busy with acquisitions and capital improvements to our properties”

Therein lies the difference between the Heritage Golf Group model and other management companies. Heritage Golf group owns or leases their properties and takes a long term approach to the club business.

“Management companies that come in and manage for a fee have fallen short in performance over the years,” stressed Burnett. “We put in the capital and take the risks. It is the difference between a short-term strategy and our long-term strategy.”

Florida is another area where Heritage Golf Group has shown rapid expansion. Recent purchases of Venetian Golf Club in Venice and Pelican Preserve in Fort Myers have been added to a West Coast collection that includes TPC Prestancia in Sarasota and TPC Tampa Bay (scheduled for major renovation beginning in May). Plus there is The Club at Boca Pointe in Boca Raton on Florida’s East Coast.

In varying degrees, each purchase has been accompanied by an impressive improvement program.

“We like to come in and make improvements as soon as possible,”

explained Burnett. “Of course, the growing seasons come into play but we try to make immediate improvements wherever we can.”

The Venetian is a prime example. Settlement took place on February 6 of this year. On February 7, a small army of workers and equipment appeared on the property. The promise was to spend \$1 million in improvements within 12 weeks.

The major portion of the work focused on a complete bunker renovation, which included installation of the Better Billy Bunker System. Bunkers were dug out, new drainage installed, gravel added and sprayed with a polymer, new sand replaced and areas around the bunkers re-sodded. And all of this was accomplished within eight weeks. Attention also was focused on improving the tees and aesthetic areas around the course.

In addition to the Florida and New Jersey/New York properties, Heritage Golf Group has a number of other

properties. There are three resort-style courses on Hilton Head Island – Oyster Reef GC, Port Royal Golf and Racquet Club and Shipyard GC. In Virginia there is The Dominion Club and 1757 GC. Illinois has two clubs – Boulder Ridge CC and White Deer Run GC. North Carolina has two more – Brunswick Plantation and Cape Fear National. And one each in Missouri – Wingham CC – and Wisconsin – River Club of Mequon.

“We are sticking to our program of opportunistic controlled growth,” concluded Burnett. “We want to continue to be able to upgrade our overall product as we expand. We’d like to continue to grow and expand our portfolio, including west of the Mississippi.”

Having a vested interest in each property has been the key to the success of Heritage Golf Group. It carried the company through the pandemic and has its sights set on a positive future as the fastest growing country club lifestyle company in America.

**“WE WANT TO CONTINUE TO BE
ABLE TO UPGRADE OUR OVERALL
PRODUCT AS WE EXPAND.”**