

Mark Burnett

A passionate lifelong golfer, Mark Burnett leveraged his degree in business administration and management to cultivate a 30-plus-year career in the sport he loves. Formerly the president and COO of ClubCorp (now known as Invited), Burnett oversaw the investment of more than \$750 million into a network of golf facilities that grew by more than 70 properties under his leadership. Today, the 59-year-old businessman is continuing his journey as the president and CEO of Heritage Golf Group, one of the country's leading private golf ownership firms.



Heritage recently acquired Lakewood Ranch Golf and Country Club outside of Tampa, Florida. What attracted you to the club? It was definitely one that we had tracked for a while. It's an unbelievable property and one of our flagships now, in part for its breadth and size. When we acquired it, the club had 54 holes of golf with three courses, two clubhouses, two ranges, two pools, 20 tennis courts, and 20 pickleball courts. And the community of Lakewood Ranch is incredible—not just within the gates around the golf courses but the entire Lakewood Ranch Township.

How do you plan to improve the club now that it's Heritage-owned? There was a public course called the Legacy at Lakewood Ranch that we acquired the week after we bought Lakewood Ranch Golf and Country Club. The course was an Arnold Palmer signature design, and from what I hear, it was one of Palmer's favorite creations. We're converting the Legacy into a private course and incorporating it into Lakewood Ranch, which will complement the club's other courses nicely since two of them are also Palmer designs. There aren't any other 72-hole country clubs in North Florida or even on the west coast of Florida that have the full-scale amenity package that Lakewood Ranch does, so it's exciting to have the opportunity to be so unique.

You've made golf clubs and courses your business, but do you see business being conducted on golf courses as it was in the past? No doubt, there's lots of great fun, discussions, and business dealings that still occur out on the course, but I think the big change with private golf is that there are fewer corporate memberships. The core driver at a country club—especially the clubs with other amenities besides golf—is families. Those clubs are now about kids being able to learn how to swim at an early age or learn how to play golf or tennis, and it's about making new friends in that environment.

What do you hope Heritage's legacy will be? Besides having a collection of great golf clubs, I want the Heritage legacy to be rooted in member and guest satisfaction. I strive for all of our members and their guests to be thrilled with how we're investing in their clubs. But I also want our company to be known for our efforts to make a difference in the various grow-the-game golf initiatives. Anything that can get a golf club in someone's hands and get them attached to the game, taking it less seriously and having fun and wanting to get better—I love it all. —SHAUN TOLSON ®



Florida's Lakewood Ranch Golf and Country Club (above and top right); Heritage Golf Group CEO Mark Burnett (bottom right).

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indoor simulators, especially at all of our northern and mid-Atlantic clubs. We're spending significant amounts of capital on indoor simulators and creating winter golf leagues, so even when the weather isn't good, members are still able to be active and participate with other members in league play. And at many of our clubs, we've invested in the technology to help you improve your game on the range with launch monitors and other devices where you have the ability to get your numbers and see shot shapes—if you're into that kind of thing. That leads into club fittings and more instruction. It's a balance of how we can help people get better at the game, and then how can we make the game fun and create an entertainment aspect.

You've greatly expanded Heritage's portfolio of clubs since you acquired the company. What potential do you see for private golf in this country? Private golf is thriving right now. With disposable income, you can certainly purchase things, but experiences really matter. Going on a nice vacation with your family or spending time experiencing your club, that's the draw today. So it's a big responsibility on us as owners and operators of private clubs to give our members great satisfaction and delight in the investment that they're making. We want to make sure that they see the value when they go to their club every week.

Was it always your goal to work in the golf industry? I had a passion for golf, and I played a lot growing up, but it wasn't my intention when I graduated college to work in the golf business. I was planning to go into finance and management, but I had an opportunity to work one summer at Lochmere Golf Club in Raleigh, North Carolina, and that evolved into me being able to run that club in a short period of time, which was great. It allowed me to take some of my business practices and do something oriented toward sports and athletics. I was fortunate to be fairly successful early on, and my career took off from there.

What do you love most about the game? I love the competitive aspect of the game and being able to personally improve. I'm a golf swing tinkerer. I enjoy the continual quest for improvement—the tweaks to make your swing look better and to improve the shots that you hit. I also love playing with people that I like to be around. With golf, you're making a time investment, and so if I'm going to do that, I want to be around people that I really enjoy and to be able to solidify and improve social relationships, whether that's with family or friends or business partners.

Have those personal interests in golf impacted the business decisions that you've made with Heritage Golf Group? Yes, we've invested a lot in golf technology for