

New England Golf Monthly – June 2009

GOLF COURSE REVIEWS

Affinity Management follows through on plan to revitalize Ferncroft Country Club

Greater Boston Private Course Spotlight

By Gary Trask



The new management at Ferncroft Country Club has spent more than \$2.5 million in improvements during the past three years. *Photo by Tim Owen*

When Affinity Management purchased Ferncroft Country Club in Danvers back in 2006, it vowed to bring back the tradition and prestige the club once commanded in its hey-days of the 1980s, back when it regularly hosted a LPGA event and was considered one of the elite courses in Greater Boston.

"We knew it was going to take a lot of effort, but we also knew that the potential was there," remembers Affinity's Managing Director Damon DeVito.

What DeVito and his company didn't know at the time was that a staggering recession was on its way. But despite a severe downturn in the economic climate, the Virginia-based Affinity has not hedged on its promise to revitalize the club and its Robert Trent Jones, Sr. design. In fact, in the three years that have passed since Affinity took over it has spent a total of more than \$2.5 million on capital improvements.

Off the golf course, the 19th Hole Restaurant area was completely renovated, a new fitness room was built, the swimming pool area was resurfaced and the tennis courts had new lights put installed. On the course, the cart paths were paved last year and all of the bunkers have been re-edged. In addition, a new 40,000 square-foot practice area was created adjacent to the executive course, complete with a grass-tee driving range with target greens, a short-game practice area and chipping and putting green. Affinity also awarded its maintenance crew with \$150,000 in new equipment.

"The best part about it is that the money we've spent has been spread around pretty well," points out DeVito, who has also seen the club start a Junior Golf Scholarship Program and become home to the Boston Lobsters professional tennis team and the annual Jason Varitek Celebrity Putt-Putt Fundraiser.

"It's not like that at a lot of clubs, but we wanted to make the kind of changes that benefited the entire club and that every member would notice. It's a very satisfying feeling because when you look around, the changes and improvements that we have completed have really made a huge difference."

This past offseason the club - which sits less than 20 minutes north of Boston - continued its improvements. In addition to giving the men and women's locker rooms a facelift, the club more than doubled its dining capacity by creating the new Jones Room.

"In this climate you want to spend wisely and this was something that we really felt needed to happen because our membership had outgrown our dining area," DeVito says.

"The Jones Room is the kind of place where the entire family can eat and feel comfortable while the 19th Hole is the place where you can go and have a beer and a sandwich after golf in a more casual atmosphere. We now have two different environments that meet the needs of everyone."

One of the unique touches to the new up-scale dining area is the span of built-in bookshelves along the wall. In order to fill the oak shelves Ferncroft members are being encouraged to donate their favorite book and to sign the inside cover.

"It's an idea that I saw at a club once when I was in India," explains DeVito. "We didn't want the room to have a sterile look. We wanted it to be alive. And I think having our members fill the bookshelves makes them feel like they each own a piece of the room. It makes for great dinner conversation. So far, we've received a great response."

When Affinity took over at Ferncroft in 2006 it began with zero members. Last year, despite a tough market the club grew 26% and now has more than 300 golf members and an overall membership of 450 strong, including a popular social membership category that Affinity added to the mix three years ago.

"The members have always been and will always be the heart and soul of the club," says DeVito, whose company has worked with clubs all over the U.S. in more than 20 different states in the last 10 years. "That's why it's important to us to continue to make these improvements."