

Golf Digest

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SENIOR EDITOR, ARCHITECTURE

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Mayor Charlotte Craven
City of Camarillo
601 Carmen Dr.,
Camarillo, California 93010

Dear Mayor Craven,

I'm writing in support of the proposed transformation of the 18-hole Camarillo Springs Golf Course into the 12-hole Greens of Camarillo Springs, as proposed by architects Damian Pascuzzo and Steve Pate. Others have already pointed out the wisdom of such a transition in terms of accommodating the time and budget constraints of today's golfers and providing precious space for other social activities and needs.

So I won't repeat those arguments. Instead, I'll focus on why this proposal will succeed in the golf marketplace.

I've written about golf course design for over 40 years and during that tenure witnessed the evolution from rich exclusive country clubs to public-access country-clubs-for-a-day to plush residential-development courses to remote-destination golf resorts. Each has been a definite trend that served distinct purposes and received continuous support from different facets of the golfing public.

Today, the trend is away from long, time-consuming rounds of golf to shorter layouts that emphasize fun instead of difficulty and reward skill without punishing those who aren't proficient at the game. For the past half dozen years, I've referred to such new courses as Hybrid Courses because they fuse together aspects that all golfers desire – enjoyment, beauty, accessibility, conditioning – and cast away the undesirable elements – excessive hazards, impossible carries, elitist attitudes, five-hour rounds.

Architects have been suggesting such things for half a century. Architect Bill Langford proposed six-hole courses in the 1950s. Architect Bill Amick suggested 12-hole courses in the 1990s and Jack Nicklaus did likewise in the early 2000s. But shorter courses have now become the rage because the golfing public finally accepts them. Indeed, they now demand them. So in the past half dozen years, many remarkable Hybrid Courses have been created and have been successful financially, and that, of course, is the bottom line in any business. If it doesn't make money, why do it?

If you want to make money in golf in 2021 and beyond, you need a product that costs less in terms of fuel, water and labor and yet still is a popular product that generates avid repeat business. Hybrid Courses are doing that right now.

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Chief among the most impressive Hybrid Courses that I've played is one developed by the team of Pascuzzo and Pate. The Challenge Course at Monarch Dunes in Nipomo, Calif. is a 12-hole par-3 course that complements their dramatic main 18 built in sand dunes and eucalyptus forest. The Challenge is a short but a fun challenge, with large, undulating greens and five ponds sort-of in play, with two sets of flags on each green, one set in eight-inch cups, so it's also a hit among beginners and youngsters of all ages.

The team of Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw created a similar design at Bandon Preserve at the Bandon Dunes Resort in Oregon. It's the same concept - 13 one-shot holes - but in a far more rugged ocean dunes presentation. This one was conceived by owner Mike Keiser as an afternoon breather for players too tired to play a full-blown second 18 at any of the other magnificent but exhausting-to-walk courses at Bandon Dunes Resort. (Coore and Crenshaw also converted a regulation third nine at Farmington Country Club in Virginia into a 10-hole Hybrid Course.)

Four years ago, architect Tom Doak built The Mulligan, a 12-hole par-3 course at Ballyneal Golf Club in eastern Colorado. Three years ago, Gary Player did the 13-hole par-3 Mountaintop Course at Big Cedar Lodge outside Branson, Mo., while Tiger Woods did a 10-hole par-3 that's called The Playground at Bluejack National Golf Club north of Houston, the first design project of Tiger Woods Design.

Jack Nicklaus did a 12-hole par-3 course as part of his Red Ledges Golf Club complex in Heber City, Utah, and the century-old Wellesley Country Club in Boston added a 6-hole par-3 course for family fun two years ago, designed by architect Mark Mungeam.

The famed Desert Mountain Club in Carefree, Ariz., which contains six Nicklaus-designed courses spread over 10,000 acres, just added a seventh course, called Seven. Unlike the others, it was not designed by Nicklaus and is an 18-hole par 3. In the winter of 2020, when I played the course, it was the busiest course at the complex, which consists mainly of retirees and second homeowners. It was walkable, playable and, with several water features, very attractive, the perfect addition to a hugely successful residential development. It even has its own clubhouse, which was overflowing with customers on the weekday I visited.

American golf resorts have also joined the movement. Sand Valley in Wisconsin added a 17-hole (yes, 17) par-3 course designed by Coore & Crenshaw associates, Trappers Turn, also in Wisconsin, added a 12-hole par-3 course jointly designed by veteran Tour pro Andy North and Craig Haltom, and Forest Dunes in Michigan has a new 10-hole par-3 by designers Keith Rhebb and Riley Johns.

I have played or examined every one of the above short courses and can testify to their quality and viability. The number of holes doesn't matter; the total par doesn't matter. What matters is that these courses have been built to fill a demand made by their members or customers. They are enjoyable and fast to play, an unbeatable combination these days.

Of course, all of the above are amenities of large golf operations that include at least one regulation 18-hole golf course. Which begs the question: can a Hybrid Course succeed as a stand-alone proposition?

My answer is yes, based upon those I have visited. Among the many successful Hybrid Course operations is Bunker Hill Golf Club in Pickering, Ontario, where Canadian architect Jason Miller created a 12-hole par-3 on a land reclamation site in a Toronto suburb. While the owner originally wanted a regulation 9-hole course, Miller convinced him to instead built the 12-hole short course to address "the new direction of leisure-time management."

There's also Hawk's Landing at Blue Skies in Yucca Valley, California. In its 1960s heyday, Blue Skies G&CC was a favorite of Hollywood cowboy stars like Roy Rogers. But then

Blue Skies had dark clouds and folded. After it went fallow, local publisher Bill Brehm bought the land at auction and hired golf architect Cary Bickler to revive it as a full-length 12-hole layout, with 6 holes on each side of the clubhouse so that Hawk's Landing can be played as a 6-hole, 12-hole or 18-hole round.

The Origins Course in WaterSound, Fla. is a 12-year-old hybrid. Davis Love III and his design team created a six-hole residential course that features two par 4s, three par 3s and one par 5, and by tucking in four extra, smaller greens along the par-4 and par-5 fairways and adding a few extra tee boxes, they also made the layout double as a 10-hole par 3 course. Or one can play it as three par 4s and six par 3s, making it a 9-hole executive course. Or eight par 3s and one par 4.

A similar design idea is Trilogy at Ocala Preserve in Ocala, Fla., designed by Tom Lehman and architect Tripp Davis. A 6-hole residential golf development, it has one par 5, one par 3 and four par 4s. With additional greens beside most fairways, each par 4 can also play as consecutive par 3s and the lone par 5 as three one-shot holes. Since it also has a separate loop of six par 3s, Trilogy is both a 6-hole par-24 course and an 18-hole par-54 course.

Lehman also designed the 10-hole Frederick Peak Golf Course in Valentine, Nebr., which townsfolk built with volunteer labor. Wandering through bluffs along the edge of the stunning Nebraska sandhills, this hybrid is a source of genuine pride to this small community.

In St. Louis, the 18-hole daily-fee Hawk Ridge Golf Course opened in 1994 as a component of a residential development. When the economy tanked in 2009, the course was closed. But a few years later, nine of its holes were redesigned into the 9-hole par-27 Heritage at Hawk Ridge Golf Club with the remainder of the land now containing multi-family housing units. When I played the course in 2018, I was impressed that they used the most dramatic land from the original for the new Hybrid Course.

The Short Course at Mountain Shadows in the Phoenix suburb of Paradise Valley, Ariz. was once the popular Mountain Shadows Resort, recently reconfigured into 18 one-shot holes by architect Forrest Richardson, who also added a unique par-2 as a bonus hole. It has become one of the busiest in the Phoenix market, which is a major winter golf destination.

In Cleveland, Texas, northeast of Houston, architect Mike Nuzzo has created a novel hybrid complex called Grand Oak Reserve, which includes a 9-hole layout called Nine Grand, a 9-hole par-3 course called Three Grand and an 18-hole putting course called Eighteen Grand. There is nothing like it anywhere in Texas.

While I could describe many more Hybrid Golf projects, I'll close with the last project done by my close friend, the late Bob Cupp. A longtime resident of Atlanta, he convinced the city to refashion the rundown Bobby Jones Golf Course, a tight, dangerous 18-hole municipal that flooded constantly, into a nine-hole reversible layout. The plans were accepted just before his death in 2016 and his son, Bobby Cupp, a veteran golf architect himself, supervised its construction. What I found interesting when I played the course is that each hole has several tee boxes and each green is oversized and contains two flags, so that patrons can still play 18 different holes during their round, playing from one set of tees to one set of flags the first time around, and another set of tees to the other flags for the second nine. On the following day, they can do the same, but in reverse order, as the design cleverly has every hole playable in both directions.

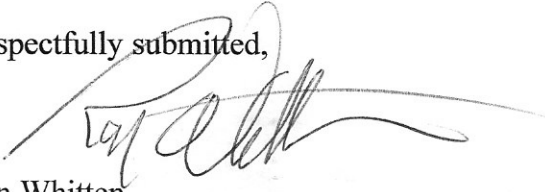
I hope my enthusiasm for the concept of a hybrid course has come through. The whole point of this lengthy recitation was to emphasize that short courses such as the one proposed for the Greens at Camarillo Springs are addressing an present and future demand of the golfing public. Many of our golfers are aging, some are extremely busy and some are just learning the game. Full-size golf courses can be exhausting to seniors, too time consuming to those with family and

business concerns and too intimidating to beginners. But hybrid courses are not. They are the alternative to giving up the game.

That portion of the golf market had not been addressed for decades, but it is clearly being addressed now, and that end of the golf market has responded with increased play that has increased revenue.

This is why I feel the Greens at Camarillo Springs should be approved. Its concept will be a success.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ron Whitten', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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