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Above and Beyond

From the course to the clubhouse, **Lookaway Golf Club** provides an engaging experience that honors tradition and embraces innovation.

by **BILL DONAHUE** photography by **JODY ROBINSON**



Known for its elegant design and pristine conditions, Lookaway has made the course even more enjoyable for golfers of every skill level.

In its two decades of operation, Lookaway Golf Club in Buckingham has earned its place as one of the finest golf courses in the region. In fact, Lookaway was the only Bucks County golf course to make *Golf Digest's* 2019-2020 rankings of the top 20 "Best Golf Courses in Pennsylvania."

From the tranquility of the course to the camaraderie in the clubhouse, Lookaway has engaged members and visitors alike since the club opened in 1999. Such success hasn't stopped Lookaway's leadership team from making bold moves to enhance the enjoyment of every individual who steps onto the property.

"We've always known that we can't stand still," says Bruce McKissock, Lookaway's founding partner, as well as a board member and chairman of the club's golf committee. "The initiatives we've undertaken over the past several years are now bearing fruit. We've had Rees Jones do a forward-looking plan for

things we want to accomplish on the course in the next 10 to 20 years. Trees grow and conditions change, and so does the membership, so we want to make sure we are changing along with it."

A recent in-depth survey of its 229-person equity membership showed a remarkably high level of satisfaction, according to McKissock. The survey also provided invaluable feedback regarding upgrades to the course and facilities to raise the satisfaction level even higher, many of which were already underway.

Universally known for its elegant design and pristine course conditions—thanks to Rees Jones, the famed course architect, and

Dave Renk, Lookaway's golf course superintendent—Lookaway has made the course even more enjoyable for all golfers, regardless of their skill level. For example, the club has removed trees to widen the approaches to some holes and "open up the vistas," according to McKissock. He suggests golfers may notice the most dramatic changes to the course's iconic finishing hole.

"Number 18 was known as one of the toughest finishing holes in the area," McKissock says. "It carries over two areas of marshland preserve, and on the second area there was a whole hillside of bunkers. For many middle handicappers, their second shot would often end up in a bunker and still have 60 or 70 yards to go. We've changed some of the bunkering, so now there's a larger landing area to remove some of the intimidation factor."

Lookaway also added junior tees to make the course more playable for families. For those playing from the junior tees, a par-4 hole measuring 385 yards might shorten the distance to approximately 200 yards. Other changes include updating golf carts to include electronic data for course conditions, pace of play, and real-time scoring for tournament play.

In addition to the upgraded golf cart fleet and tournament software programs, Lookaway has introduced an Indoor Golf Training Facility that offers some of the best technology in golf, utilizing Trackman and Foresight Golf Simulators. The equipment is used for lessons, club fittings, practice, and virtual play.

"The feedback the members receive from our Trackman Golf Simulator is invaluable," says Michael Little, PGA Golf Professional at Lookaway Golf Club. "They receive visual playback from video, club data from their swing, and a report with averages to help measure success. The Golf Training Facility has been the most popular

new amenity on property so far."

Enhancements have come off the course, too. A refurbished upper patio now includes a permanent hard roof to offer a temperature-controlled space where members and guests can enjoy post-game food and drinks while watching sporting events or other on-screen entertainment. The club also added a lower patio complete with a fire pit, plenty of seating, and an outdoor grill.

Likewise, members will notice some new flavors in the dining room, given last year's addition of Executive Chef Brian Devenny. He and his culinary team have committed to creating a special menu every Friday night, which

McKissock says has led to some unique dinner pairings. A special Valentine's Day menu included filet of elk paired with a lobster truffle bisque, for example.

Growing the Game

As part of its ongoing commitment to enhance members' use, Lookaway has expanded its onsite clinics and other instructional activities led by on-staff PGA Golf Professionals. This includes a new six-week junior program with three distinct semesters—spring, summer, and autumn—designed to teach young golfers everything from etiquette, playing the course, swing techniques, and short-game fundamentals.

"It is a golf school for junior golfers," Little says. "It helps grow the game of golf and grow the playing ability in our juniors at Lookaway. We will also be hosting more family golf events throughout the year. Thirty minutes before all Family Nights, we will be offering introductory golf clinics for our families to learn together."

Along with Laura Schiavo, a fellow PGA Golf Professional at Lookaway, Little is an active member of the PGA Foundation Committee, which is the charitable arm of the PGA. He has helped raise tens of thousands of dollars for PGA Reach Philadelphia through a 100 Hole Golf Marathon, which benefits military veterans, underprivileged youth, and junior golf programs in the Philadelphia area. He's also an active player, participating in as many as 25 tournaments per year. So far, he has more than 50 top-five finishes to his credit, as well as honors such as the Philadelphia PGA OMEGA Player of the Year.

Little's love for the game extends far beyond the challenge presented by a day on the course. He finds golf an opportunity to make lasting connections with other people. At Lookaway, he is as happy helping a new member improve his approach to the green as he is doing his part to host a high-profile tournament from the Philadelphia PGA or the Golf Association of Philadelphia.

"There's a unique culture here—a real family environment among members and staff," he says. "I often hear new members, say, 'I love it here, everyone treats me so well, and I feel like I have been here for years.' When we host tournaments and events, it is always nice to see familiar faces and show off our golf operation. It gives the players a chance to have the Lookaway experience, and to hear them say, 'Wow, this is an unbelievable place.'"

McKissock credits this communal feel to Lookaway's limited membership, which also helps

maintain a relaxed feel on the course.

"The small membership enables easy and open access," he says. "You can come out on the course at 10 on a Saturday morning or 2 on a Tuesday afternoon, and it's almost always that you can walk right out on the course and play. There are no established tee times, so whether you're playing 18 holes or just a few, we don't have restrictions on tee times as long as you're playing within the proper pace of play. ... If you want to come out with your eight-year-old son or daughter, who can play from the up tees, you can do that."

Making any changes to a course as revered as Lookaway can be a challenge, but McKissock says feedback from members suggests the club has maintained the delicate balance between honoring tradition and embracing modernity.

"We're as good a course as we ever envisioned it would be, but if there's any way to make it better, our thinking is let's do it," McKissock says. "We've brought in a core group of younger people, and we have a strong waiting list. At the same time, we want to assure our established members that the experiences they have enjoyed are not being pushed aside, and I think we've succeeded in doing that." ■



Lookaway recently introduced an Indoor Golf Training Facility featuring advanced technology designed to help golfers improve their game.

➔ **LOOKAWAY GOLF CLUB**
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Lookaway Golf Club continues to find new ways to enhance the enjoyment of every individual who steps onto the property.