

Members Club at Grande Dunes Eliminates Public Play

Under the management of McConnell Golf, the Myrtle Beach, S.C., club will eliminate a policy established in early 2011 that allowed outside play from resort guests and select hotel and golf package providers. The company looks to “restore the facility to the original intent” by returning to its private roots “in a market that is oversaturated with public courses.”

McConnell Golf has started to implement its policies at the Members Club at Grande Dunes in Myrtle Beach, S.C., and one of its first actions is to eliminate all public play at the club, *Myrtle Beach Online* reported.

Since early 2011, the club has accepted outside play from resort guests and select hotels and golf package providers. The infusion of revenue has helped a membership that lags behind those of other private clubs in the area financially support the club, *Online* reported.

The Members Club, a 7,029-yard par-71 Nick Price and Craig Schreiner co-design, had been entirely private from its opening in June 2005 to early 2011 but struggled to attract members, particularly after the housing slump and recession began around 2007, *Online* reported.

“The immediate plan is to restore the facility to the original intent,” said McConnell Golf chief operating officer Christian Anastasiadis. “When we looked at the property they lost the vision and the identity. The first thing you want to do is reestablish the vision Burroughs & Chapin had when they built the course. I think it is good to stay private in a market that is oversaturated with public courses.”

McConnell Golf was hired by LStar Management to operate the Members Club, Ocean Club at Grande Dunes, and Anchor Café on the Intracoastal Waterway and Grande Dunes Marina, as *C&RB* reported in December (“[McConnell Golf to Oversee Grande Dunes](#)”).

The Members Club is the first of the 10 courses McConnell Golf operates that it doesn’t own, and Anastasiadis said the two-year management contract is automatically renewable. McConnell has been approached several times in the past about management contracts, *Online* reported.

“We won’t be taking on a lot of clubs,” Anastasiadis said. “We want quality and they want quality, so it’s a good fit. I think there is value in it.”

Outside play at Grande Dunes was priced among the top tier courses in the market and was limited to certain times of the day and days of the week. Members Club head pro Brian Vest said member,

guest and public play combined to total nearly 18,000 rounds in 2013. The course has had to cancel package rounds that were already booked for this upcoming spring, *Online* reported.

According to Vest, the Members Club has 185 golf members plus an additional 180 social members. It had less than 125 members in early 2011 when it began allowing outside play, and has bolstered its numbers by dropping an individual initiation fee that was originally \$45,000 to as low as \$2,500. It has been \$7,500 recently and Anastasiadis said it will remain a non-refundable \$7,500, with dues remaining approximately \$430 plus tax per month, *Online* reported.

"I think it will have a lot of takers in the near future," Anastasiadis said. "It's a great facility and it is in a great spot. The area of the Grande Dunes is perfect for being a private facility. There's still a lot of growth there. With LStar's development, we expect a good amount of new members to join."

Anastasiadis said the few new homebuyers in the past three weeks have all wanted to look at the club. "The momentum is there," Anastasiadis said.

The Members Club's early initiation fees were 70 percent refundable after resignation, with one refund for every three new memberships, and that policy remains intact. "It's good stewardship to honor the old contracts," Anastasiadis said.

Cups are being painted, greens are being walk-mowed and members are being picked up at their cars in the parking lot. Car windshields will be washed by staff on specific days. "I believe strongly that our team can implement the McConnell Golf quality," Anastasiadis said. "You will see those little touches."

Anastasiadis said all Members Club employees have been retained. Former Old North State General Manager Teresa Bellote has been named GM, and former TPC Wakefield first assistant superintendent Ryan Gamble is the new super and has retained much of a crew that was outsourced from National Golf Management, *Online* reported.