

Weekend SPORTS

Covering Charlotte County Sporting Activities

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New golf course caters to beginners and duffers alike

BY VERN FAULKNER
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BAYSIDE - Hackers, duffers and young golfers rejoice: an enterprising retiree has opened the doors on an introductory, nine-hole labour of love. After four years – and a fair outlay from his wallet – Phillip Bartlett’s par-28 Bayside Golf Course is open for business.

The former heavy construction worker explained that the golf course is, in essence, part of his retirement plan.

“I’m in the construction business and getting too old to do that. I had to find something a little easier.”

A life-long love of golf, combined with a field he deemed “reasonably well suited” for a small course proved the perfect ingredients for his creation.

Bartlett estimated he has invested about 15 to 20 hours per week of labour through the last four years, depending on the time of year and the weather.

He hasn’t forged ahead without help, however, and he credits a number of golf addicts – including local pros, some affiliated with other courses – for guidance.

“I’ve had lots of advice from other people involved in the golfing business,” he said. “All the local pros are interested in another golf course, and they’ve given me advice on design and the technical side of it – the kind of grass to grow, and so forth.”

“We’ve had a lot assistance,” he said. He noted that Fairmile Farm has “pretty much donated a great deal of fill.”

In fact, the farm is but one of a lengthy list of people Bartlett said he must give credit to. Among others were Cecil Follis, Kingsbrae Garden, Leavitt’s Lawncare, Ken Howard, Cody Weeks, Mary Bartlett, St. Croix Printing (scorecards), John Rigby, Jim Gibson, Tim Foulkes, Michael Henderson and Blair Van Tassell.

In other words, this has been more than one man’s labour of love.

Bartlett’s experience and machinery gained working in the earth-moving business also proved valuable in constructing the course. With that done, however, Bartlett went hunting for specialized mowers, none of which came cheaply.

“I had to settle for used equipment,” he said. “I was fortunate to pick up a fairway mower for \$2,000 and a rough mower for about the same.”

He noted he’s currently borrowing a greens mower, but hopes to obtain a used machine for that purpose at some time in the future.

“The high-priced golf courses are always replacing their equipment, so the used stuff is available if you know where to look.”

Ghost Road Auto has helped keep the second-hand equipment running, some of which is of uncertain vintage, such as the fairway mower.

“My greenskeeper calls it a dinosaur,” he said.

Bartlett had to ponder when asked how much outlay he had made in the last four years.

“It’s hard to say. I suspect that \$60,000 – something like that.”

He notes he could have invested that sum or sold buildings on the property for a quicker return, but “it wouldn’t have been much fun.”

The greenskeeper is pretty much a volunteer, Bartlett noted, and offers his time in addition to a full-time job at another local course.

The course features eight par-three holes with a longer par-four thrown in for good measure.

“Young fellahs like to hit a driver now and then, so it allows them to take their driver,” he said.

Bartlett said he expects most visitors to be casual golfers or people who want to improve their short game. The course is also a cost-effective way for beginners to get a grasp of the game’s fundamentals – and that includes young kids.

“I think there’s an opening for kids to learn to play golf for a reasonable price,” he added. “It’s somewhat ideal for a parent bringing two or three kids and letting them play. From the gazebo, they can watch them all the way around.”

The cost for a round is \$10 for adults, \$5 for kids.

While Bartlett admits to having a few spare clubs lying around, there are no formal club rentals, golf carts or bag carts on hand. Hence, Bartlett pointed out, it’s best for potential visitors to bring everything they think they need.

“This is going to be a work in progress for some time,” he said.

Next on the drawing board is a clubhouse.



John Gardner/Courier

Phillip Bartlett prepares to test his short-range putting at his new golf course in Bayside.

“A golf course isn’t much of an establishment unless there’s a clubhouse. It will be modest, but at some point, we plan to put a clubhouse in.”

For the moment, golfers can leave the sand wedge at home, as there are no bunkers as of yet, nor any hazards save for a modest creek that trickles through two holes and offers what Bartlett typified as little challenge.

That, too, is on the long-term list of things to add. Bartlett said he aims to improve the greens (an irrigation system is on the to-do list for the summer) and replace existing flags. Upgrading the tee locations is also an item Bartlett intends to tackle before the season winds down.

The hours of operation are dawn to dusk, seven days a week, “As long as the weather is good,” he said.

At the moment, there is no reservation system, in part because the client pressure has been light, with only a dozen people “give or take a few” on the weekends.

“First-come, first served is likely suitable for the time being,” he said.

Bartlett certainly doesn’t see himself competing with nearby courses, but augmenting golf in the area.

“I’m certainly below the level of the St. George or St. Stephen club,” he said, noting, “The director of golf in St. Andrews is coming up to play, he said, and a few pros will come and play for the fun of it and give me a critique, for sure.”

The Bayside Golf Course is located at 3501 Route 127 in Bayside.