

FOCUS ON

Golf & Business

April 2-8, 2010

BostonBusinessJournal.com

Boston Business Journal 27



COURTESY PHOTO

Despite a tough economy where some 1.7 million golfers left the game in 2008, Shining Rock in Northbridge is coming online this spring.

Bay State golf courses look for leverage as the game and economy contract

BY KEITH REGAN
SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Like many public and private golf clubs in the region, the **South Shore Country Club** had a difficult year in 2009. But 2010 has brought new optimism to the Hingham course, which is owned by the town. One reason for hope is the club's new young professional membership, which offers golfers under 30 the chance for a steeply discounted membership fee of \$850 per year compared to \$2,000 for traditional memberships.

"We have a huge junior membership, but we were noticing that when they turned 21, we lost nearly every one of them," said operations manager **Jay McGrail**. That membership category is now full with a waiting list and McGrail is hopeful the total membership goal of 300 will be reached

early this season. "Already, before the season starts we are where we were at the end of last season."

Golf courses across the country were hit hard by the weakening economy even as they were seeking to reverse longer-term trends in the sport. In 2008, for instance, some 1.7 million golfers dropped out of the sport, according to the **National Golf Association**, a 3 percent decline. Some clubs continue to draw new members and have years-long wait lists, however, and Massachusetts will actually see a new golf course open this year when **Shining Rock** in Northbridge begins play sometime in April.

Still, clubs everywhere are looking for ways to keep members happy, with an eye toward providing additional value wherever possible.

"All golf is local," said **Jim Manzi**, a partner at the Boston law firm of **Foley & Lardner**, where he is a member of the golf and resort group. "There are

PLEASE SEE **COURSES**, PAGE 28

RELATED LIST

Toughest
Golf
Courses.
Page 16

DEUTSCHE BANK TOURNAMENT:

Local businesses chip in for Mass. tournament. **29**



BE THE BALL:

Boston-area executives talk about their love for golf **30**





MURTHA MEANS MORE

More vision.
More insight.
More commitment.

99 High Street | Boston, MA 02110
617.457.4000 | www.murthalaw.com

Murtha Cullina LLP | Attorneys at Law

BOSTON HARTFORD MADISON NEW HAVEN STAMFORD WOBURN

The Book of Lists party is over.



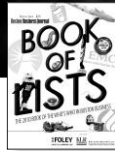
Now lets talk renewal.

As you already know the BBJ Book of Lists is the premier market analysis tool in Boston. Your investment as a sponsor or advertiser has assured you a presence for all of 2010.

It's now time to lock-in for 2011!

Boston Business Journal

Renewal period ends April 30th

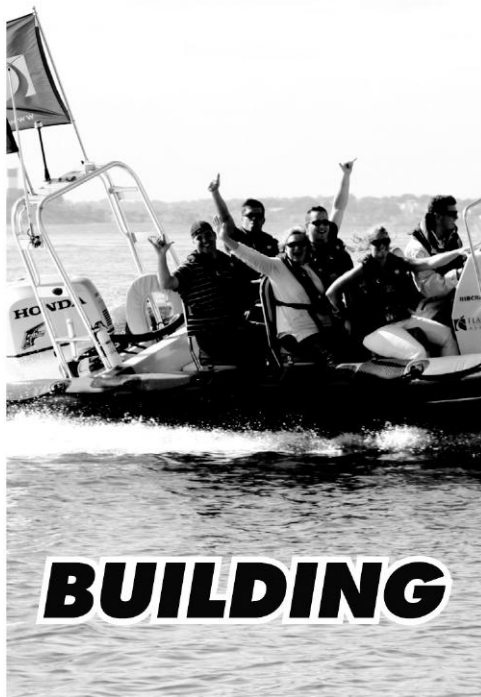


To secure your preferred position or sponsorship in the 2011 Book of Lists contact your account manager or Chris McIntosh at 617.316.3220 or chrismcintosh@bizjournals.com

FLAGSHIP ADVENTURES



team



BUILDING

Be Adventurous!

Scavenger Hunts on the Boston Harbor Islands

WWW.FLAGSHIPADVENTURES.COM

SEAPORT WORLD TRADE CENTER, BOSTON • 1.866.742.1010

COURSES: Economy makes for tough terrain as golfers exit

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

clubs that are doing well and those that are struggling. Right now, it's all about cash flow and finding ways to keep the money flowing so they can weather the storm."

Public courses may actually benefit from tougher economic times as some golfers choose to trade down from costly annual memberships to choosing pay-as-you-play options. "The real competition is among the private clubs," Manzi said. Though clubs are reluctant to drop prices for new members too far, initiation fees have been stable or even come down over the past two to three years amid weakening demand.

Nationwide, golf course owners are also emphasizing programs that promote inclusion and diversity within the game as they seek to make golf — a game with a long list of traditions, quirks and physical and mental challenges that can make it daunting for newcomers — as welcoming as possible.

Players and members are clearly looking for more value from their club memberships as well. At South Shore Country Club, a recent \$250,000 upgrade to the clubhouse, a new restaurant operator and a new irrigation system and new tee boxes have helped change perceptions of the course. "Between the course and the facilities, people have a situation here now where they can bring guests in and be proud of their club," said Manzi. South Shore also offered membership significant incentives for bringing in new members, with members able to earn 25 percent off their fees for each new member they brought in.

Golf enjoyed a growth spurt during the 1990s, but the number of courses in the country has leveled off or even dropped slightly since 2005 to around 16,000. Clubs are looking to counter demographic trends and also to meet the needs of a new generation of golfers who don't necessarily want to use golf as a getaway from their families.

Another national trend is the push to help golfers improve their game — a recognition of the sport's difficulty and its ability to frustrate players. "The idea is if they can get people involved and working on their games and help them break that glass ceiling of thinking the game's too hard, they will play more," Manzi said.

After a resurgence driven by the housing market boom, private golf course construction has been hit particularly hard by the housing downturn and the recession, Manzi added.

In Metrowest, members of the private **Hopkinton Country Club** will soon have an added benefit to their annual memberships as well — the ability to play for free at the state's newest course, Shining Rock in Northbridge.

Shining Rock is slated to open in mid-

April, once parking lot improvements and other amenities are in place. The par 71, 6,668-yard course itself has been ready for some time, noted golf operations manager **Lou Papadellis** — a reflection of the course's long journey after a developer defaulted on it and a related residential building project. "People who come to play will see a mature golf course," he added.

A SHINING EXAMPLE

Facts and figures on the Bay State's newest golf course.



Name: Shining Rock Golf Club

Location: Northbridge (38 miles from Boston)

Type: Semi-public

Par: 72

Length: 7,735 yards (championship tees)

Memberships: 125 full / 175 associate

Membership fees: \$2,750 / \$1,150

Daily greens fee: \$35-\$55

So far, about half of the 125 memberships have been sold. "It's going well considering people haven't really had a chance to see the course yet."

Tim Gordon, the owner of the firm managing both the Hopkinton and Northbridge courses, said the dual-course option is one that is gaining traction in the industry but is still rare in New England.

"We think it's an interesting business model that hasn't been tried out as much around here yet and gives us a significant competitive advantage," Gordon said, noting that the drive time between the courses is 15 minutes.

Hopkinton's private membership held up well despite the recession, which Gordon attributes to the club's long-term focus on the family and the demographics of its membership. "We were expecting the worst," he said. "We really battened down the hatches in the fall of 2008 and felt we were ready for anything. It got a little scary, but it turned out it didn't happen for us. Now, we're trying to be counterintuitive and look to grow and expand while times are still tough."