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— Bill Ciccotti, PGA Director of Golf

CROSSOVER CULTURE

BY TONY L. STARKS

At a club where outdoor activities are king, the staff has made the range an added destination

Golf is just one of the many options members have at Yellowstone Club in Big Sky, Montana. There's skiing, mountain biking, rock climbing, fly fishing, hiking, whitewater rafting and pretty much everything outdoors. It is one of the most unique private club experiences in all the 50 States.

Expert guides are offered for each of the onsite activities, or experienced members can rent equipment and create their own adventures. Whether it's the rushing Gallatin River or the snowcapped Lone Peak, outdoor destinations define the experience at Yellowstone. The golf operations team has come to define the practice range as one of those destinations.

Facing directly towards Long Peak, which is the premier ski run on property, the range is beautifully framed by Mother Nature's paintbrush. The scenery and attention to detail make it far more than a place to hit balls. It's been embraced as a location for members to hang out. It's a spot to spend time with family and friends.





The remodeled clubhouse was completed in 2016 and built to fit the contemporary mountain culture.

“Our driving range is a destination,” says Bill Ciccotti, the PGA Director of Golf. “When members approach there’s music playing, lounge chairs, a variety of targets and chipping barrels to hit into.”

“Looking beyond that, there’s something for everyone. We have candy for the kids, fruit for the health-conscious, a menu of snacks and drinks to grab. There are even a variety of games, including corn hole that people can play whenever they’d like.”

The backside of the range is reserved for the more serious golfer wishing to diligently work on their game. A dedicated chipping green and practice bunker are ready to serve the focused golfer. Fitting carts are staffed with knowledgeable employees who can answer any questions about fitting, equipment or golf-centric technology. But to truly understand the role of the range, you have to look at the origin of the club.

“We understand the culture of this property and our membership. It started as a skiing destination, but golf has grown pretty rapidly,” says Ciccotti. “We do our best to combine skiing and golf at every opportunity we get. It starts with how the range was designed. It points directly at Lone Peak, which is the main skiing mountain

in Big Sky. So you’re hitting at the mountain and seeing snowcaps that are still visible in the summer time. Then our range dividers are skis that read ‘Yellowstone Club.’ The ball pyramids are shaped like Lone Peak. We embrace our crossover culture and the mountain lifestyle.”

The rustic outdoorsman would never be bored at Yellowstone, but they still offer the finer things you’d expect from a high-end private club. Massage tables are set up on the range during special events and outings, as nearby chefs prepare gourmet grilled options. Also during tournaments, caddies wear bids outfitted with their players’ names and hustle to ensure the golfer’s needs are met.

“Our entire staff is focused on customer service in every aspect of the operation,” says Ciccotti. “We do our best to ensure every detail is thought through.”

The “crossover culture” is also apparent within some of the club’s most popular outings. In one of their nine-hole scrambles with a Winter Olympics theme, a downhill hole is converted into a slalom race that golfers must navigate on GolfBoards. The winner earns a stroke off their team’s score. During the Fall Roundup – where members participate in



activities across the club including mountain biking, fishing, a high-rope obstacle course and more – the putting green was converted into a miniature golf course using skis and wooden ski poles while the range hosted a Skills Challenge with ski-centric targets.

With so many options, Ciccotti recognizes that golf may not be the priority for many of the 630 families who have memberships at Yellowstone. But by making the range a summer destination to relax, lounge with family or play a game of corn hole, he’s created a golf-centric space to introduce people to the game in a non-threatening way.

“We want it to be an exclusive place for our members to relax, come hang out and enjoy themselves,” he says. “At the same time, it gets them more comfortable being in golf setting alongside their family. That approach has led members, who I’ve never seen play golf before, to pick up a club.”

Another way in which Yellowstone Club is unique, during the winter months there are nearly twice as many members on property as there are in the summer. With the golf course closed, and likely under snow, the operations team needed a way to reach the winter members. In 2016 a new clubhouse featuring a mountain contemporary design was completed, and a golf simulator room was added.

“Now in the winter, we offer the opportunity to continue playing and

practicing golf,” Ciccotti says.

The club does a great job of emphasizing the social aspect of it. After ordering dinner, members encouraged to enjoy some appetizers or cocktails while using the simulator as their meal is prepared.

“Throughout the winter, it’s usually booked from 2 p.m. when we open it until it closes after dinner services. It’s helped the golf season go from 90-100 days, to something that last all year for our members,” he says. “Around Christmas and New Years, it gets extremely busy here. That’s an important time for us, because we’re trying to capture as many of those members as we can and get them back playing golf here in the summer time.”

“Without the simulator, I don’t think we would have been as busy as we were

throughout the year, nor would we have had as much traction towards golf in the summer. I saw close to 50 groups that had never played our golf course in the summer, playing on the simulator in the winter. Then I saw them back here on the course the following summer teeing it up.

Adds Marketing Director, Krista Traxler: “It’s also been a great tool for attracting new members. If we’re showing guests around the clubhouse in the winter, we can take them into the simulator room and pull up our golf course to show them what it looks like through a virtual flyover. It’s been a special tool for us and allowed the golf operation to extend year round. We’re ecstatic to have it, and the conversation has started to switch to ‘Do we need to add more?’” ■

