

ONE PROPONENT MEMBER'S STORY OF LEARNING CENTER DEVELOPMENT

COLLETON RIVER MAKES MAJOR UPGRADE TO ITS INSTRUCTION PROGRAM



For Proponent member David La Pour and his students, a new teaching facility opens the door to better swings and better golf.

By David Gould, *Staff Editor*

Having traveled far and wide for eight years as a lead instructor for the Dave Pelz Golf Schools, David La Pour had seen plenty of golf teaching and practice venues. The brand-new teaching facility at Colleton River Club in Bluffton, S.C., represents the best of the best, in his view.

“We’ve got a 2,200-square-foot multi-bay building with an office, a sitting area and all the technology you could want,” says La Pour, “plus a five-acre short-game practice area, a double-ended driving range that measures 300 yards and a 6-hole short course right outside the door.”

Then there’s the view—panoramic frontage along golden-hued, salt-water marshland. “The club’s original halfway house happens to be at one end of the range, which is a nice convenience, and there are cottages adjacent to our Learning Center that members can use

as guest quarters for family and friends,” says the longtime Proponent Group member.

“This was already a world-class golf club—with an excellent Nicklaus Signature course and a Pete Dye course that is one of Pete’s absolute greatest,” explains La Pour. “The new coaching complex adds “a really significant feather in the cap,” of this luxury residential community in the Lowcountry. While actual construction of the center took just six months, its opening came nearly a decade after the idea was first hatched.

“When I arrived here nine years ago,” La Pour recalls, “one of the first questions they asked me was whether a learning center would be an amenity that increased the value of the club. I told them I thought it definitely would be.” Before long the club had embarked on the project’s planning stage, but the Great Recession hit and the idea was shelved. Several years went by and the idea resurfaced. By 2013 it was under serious study once again, with board members asking basic questions about



what to build, what would it cost and how the complex would be funded.

“At that point,” says La Pour, “a group of members came forward with the idea to start a sponsorship program. They felt that by passing the hat, so to speak, they could add a wonderful new amenity to what was already such a great facility.” Fairly quickly the members’ sponsorship plan (which included various incentives) had managed to generate over one-half of the projected cost budget.



Fellow members who are planning similar projects are advised by La Pour to interpret the contractor’s estimate of cost per square foot as covering the building shell only, not technology, furnishings or permit fees.

This was in 2015, and a final green light was given. The fact that over 24 months would elapse before the center's grand opening is attributable in large part to Hurricane Matthew, which triggered Beaufort County officials to suspend active building projects until they were able to resolve their hurricane-related issues.

As La Pour is quick to note, the Proponent Group resources he was able to call upon proved invaluable. "As we began our planning, the website's Teaching Building Survey and Guide, along with the Photo Gallery devoted to academy buildings, helped tremendously," says La Pour. Sifting through all that data to find material, metrics and specifications that were most relevant to his project, La Pour was able to expeditiously create for Colleton members a "blueprint"-style document.

"I put together a 20-page report that showed our members what the top facilities in the Southeast looked like, what amenities they had and how they functioned," he says, adding that any Proponent member wanting a copy of the report he wrote need only contact him and request it.

In addition, the Colleton team contracted with Proponent-endorsed designer and installer Tim Cutshall, whose industry-leading knowledge and skill virtually guarantee all interior equipment and infrastructure will fit like a glove and function flawlessly.



A comfortable sitting area for students (top photo) is directly adjacent to La Pour's open-plan office space (bottom), which he opted for in order to maximize his visibility and his opportunity to engage with golfers.

Fellow Proponent member Kenny Nairn was on speed-dial for La Pour, continually offering opinions and helping the

Colleton team avoid missteps along the way.

The entire cost of the project was over \$500,000, to create a teaching and learning space that, in La Pour's words, "is state-of-the-art, shows very well and might even help sell a few houses here." It should be noted that the club's 6-hole course had been in use long before the Learning Center was designed. In fact, that Bruce Borland-designed practice loop had started out as nine holes (each 130 yards or shorter) before three were repurposed to build the new short-game practice acreage.

As for that \$500,000-plus price tag, most of it went toward construction of the building, which the contractor quoted at the round figure of \$100 per square foot.

"One thing I learned—and I would pass this along to Proponent members who might do something similar in the future, is you can probably double the per-foot cost that a building contractor gives you," advises La Pour. "It's likely to be accurate for what he's talking about, but then you've got to add your impact fee, licensing fees, permit fees, the sewer connection, electrical connections, plus all the teaching-tech costs. None of those were part of our contractor's estimate."

Even in the first weeks after the ribbon-cutting, La Pour has "given a lot of tours" and received excellent reviews on the Learning Center. Among the membership are golfers who are greatly familiar with modern, high-tech teaching facilities but many others who have never laid eyes on one.

"One way I describe our new center is to tell people, 'It is home base for your golf game.' In other words," explains La Pour, "we have your Trackman numbers, we have your Bodi-Trak profile, we have video of you, all of it quick-access and all combinable into a presentation that changes how you're going to feel about the possibility of really improving."

Enduring the long delay between original discussions and the project's final completion was sometimes arduous for La Pour, but he took note that the cost of top-shelf teaching technology did come down over that



All the fixings: Protection from the elements, inside-to-outside hitting bays with first-class teaching technology, pristine turfgrass and a space for putting diagnostics and teaching.

time span, creating some notable cost savings in the end. "Our TrackMan unit dropped \$5,000 in cost, as one example," he says. "Even the TVs—they were \$500 each when a couple years earlier they would have been \$1,500 each."

Revenue projections—even real-time revenues—are on the upswing at the Colleton River Club, just one month into the new era. "Our lessons are going in a positive direction, same with clubfitting," reports La Pour, who cites, "automatically increased credibility for the instruction program," owing to the quality of the new amenity.

As he looks out from his teaching tee on that beautiful marshland view, David La Pour can count on sculpting many more beautiful swings than he otherwise might have. **PG**