

## PROponent MEMBER SUCCESSFULLY LAUNCHES LEARNING CENTER

# BILL McINERNEY TEES UP A DREAM COACHING COMPLEX

By David Gould, *Staff Editor*

The game of golf is in the doldrums. Business is slack. And yet this industry keeps producing new concepts and astounding new facilities. In the Boston suburb of Natick, Mass., the first full season of operation for KOHR Golf is halfway along and all indications are positive. Meanwhile the 17-acre academy complex is continuing to draw raves for its physical beauty and brilliantly versatile layout.

The creative force behind this little green kingdom of skill-development is Proponent Group member Bill McInerney, Jr. Several years ago he was talking to investors about a coaching app and an e-commerce coaching website when the property became available. Living just up the road from it, he was aware of its condition—a neglected dustbowl range with half-disintegrated mats. McInerney mentioned it to one of his committed investors, who suggested that the range and the app be merged into one business proposition with the learning center bumped up to first priority.



Bill McInerney, Jr. and team member Oliver Segal at KOHR Golf

Soon, daily life became a series of sketches, pro forma spreadsheets, town meetings, interviews with contractors, permit applications and the like. The all-in cost would come to roughly \$3.5 million, not far off the original budget. The



Kohr Golf is designed for the serious golfer with annual practice memberships running \$3,500 and a waiting list for the junior academy.

## MEMBER FACILITIES

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likes of Reebok founder Paul Fireman comprise McInerney's finance group—indeed it was Fireman who had taken Bill aside for a brief conversation that would prove life-changing.

"Paul volunteered a large sum to back me—more money than I was comfortable taking," recalls McInerney. "He then reminded me of the goals I'd laid out, which were all about helping the largest number of people I could help. He told me if I didn't come by in the morning to pick up that check I was turning my back on my own vision."

A central ridgeline defines KOHR Golf, with the range's landing field sloping moderately but continuously down. That landing area looks like someone stole a half-dozen greensites from classic golf courses and arranged them logically on one parcel. There is so much definition and charm to this acreage that the 300-yard poles with their 125-foot-high netting appear to be half that distance away. Kyle Franz, a lead associate on the Gil Hanse architectural team that built the Olympic golf course in Brazil, did the design work.

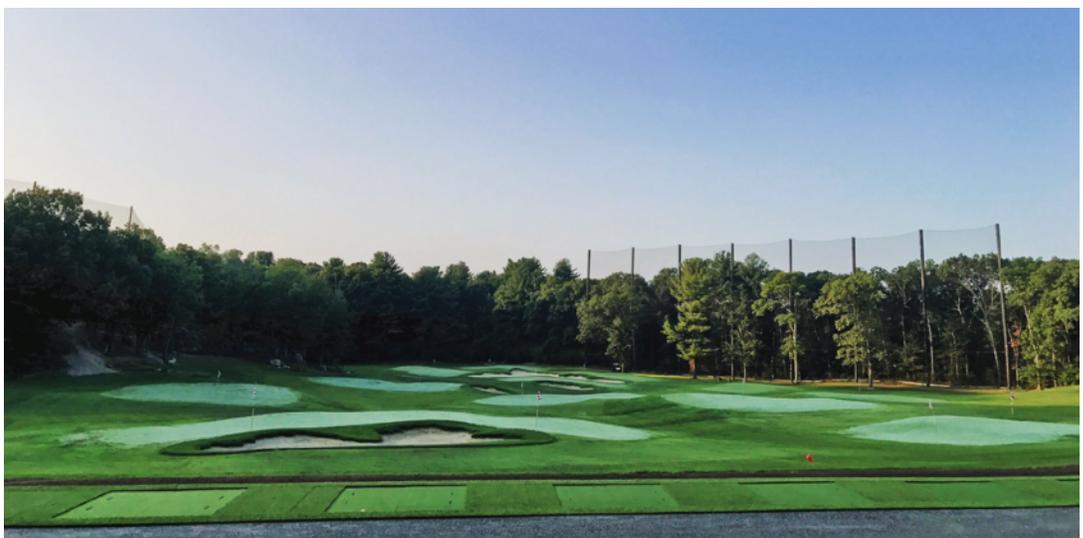
Farther along the ridge you come to a separate tee area that merges with two fairway-style bunkers, plus a variety of uneven grass lies, again with plenty of target green complexes to play to. Walk backward from this section of tee line and you come upon a 2,000-square-foot natural grass tee, stretching out in front of the facility's indoor-to-outdoor hitting space. It's a high-ceilinged, two-bay, climate-controlled teaching building with a Cool Clubs fitting studio on one side and a general-use bay beside it.

KOHR Golf gets a percentage of gear sales that the Cool Clubs business generates, based on a variety of considerations, including deep discounts for Bill's academy kids plus the fact that Glen Sutton, the fitter and business owner, paid for

construction of the building. At the mid-season mark, Sutton's highly touted fitting skills were generating revenue on track to produce a seven-figure year-end total.

Oh, and to the rear of the building is another acre or so of practice greens and practice bunkers with elevation changes and immaculate, fast-running turfgrass. On a recent weekday Don DeRico, the facility's full-time superintendent, was inspecting this short-game complex and selectively watering the still-young turf. "The roots are coming out the bottom of the cup cutter," he says with a degree of pride. McInerney is as quick to praise his team members and stakeholders as any top manager you'll meet in the golf industry, but he's particularly effusive in describing DeRico's bentgrass-nurturing magic.

KOHR Golf has a 75-member youth academy with a waiting list, plus members who pay \$3,500 for basically unlimited use, and then public walk-up business. Fifteen



**KOHR Golf sits on a former rundown range and was designed by up-and-coming architect Kyle Franz.**

miles away is the McGolf roadside golf center built and managed by McInerney's father, Bill Sr.—it was the site of Bill Jr.'s teaching practice for decades. McGolf is a perfectly located, carefully managed golf property that sells practice buckets and mini-golf tickets—plus burgers, shakes and fries—all day and night from April to October, piling up profits every year. Knowing intimately the contours of an enterprise like that, McInerney, Jr. nonetheless created a far different and in many ways less commercial variation on it.

"I'm motivated to succeed, and there's every reason to believe that this business will do well," says McInerney. "I'm not motivated by money, and never have been." He was a standout youth hockey player who got fairly close to having a pro career, and golf came along later for him. He made one try at PGA Tour qualifying, then got busy teaching. The early years of his instruction career left him still unsure where his true passion lay.

That all changed when a letter arrived from a teenage boy whom McInerney had worked with but had not seen in some time. It started out "Dear Coach Bill," and proceeded to express thanks for the caring and guidance that had been part of the boy's golf lessons. "He told me he had been messing up and getting into drugs before he came to me,"

recalls the coach. "Now his life was different, he was on a good path, and I had made a difference for him. That letter was it for me. I never looked back."

The name "KOHR," by the way, is simply a homonym for "core," given a new spelling for brand purposes and to add some subtlety. "The core of anything is the important part, whether it's your physical fitness or your golf swing or the values you stand for," says McInerney.

Several months after the complex opened he was going through old records and found a sheet of paper with "dream range" scrawled at the top in his handwriting. On it was a detailed diagram of what an ideal practice and learning center would look like.

"This was a sketch I made one night when I woke up at about 2 in the morning and wanted to record what had come to me in my sleep," Bill says. "I must have tucked that piece of paper in the nightstand drawer and forgotten all about it." If you're wondering, the answer is yes: What the sketch showed is almost exactly what the new complex looks like.

Many of us have similar aspirations sketched out and tucked away someplace. McInerney's story is about not turning your back on the vision of what you might achieve—and all the people you may help along the way. **PG**



KOHR Golf is designed to handle the worst of New England's weather... for its hardest of patrons.