

Taking Home the Trophy

This 3-hole course provides a unique space for members and an avenue for community outreach & growth of the game

BY TONY L. STARKS

In many ways, The Reserve Club stands out against the backdrop of private facilities that dot Google Maps when you search “private golf courses in the Coachella Valley.”

The property maintains the authentic beauty of the desert and is landscaped with native vegetation that pops during the desert bloom. It’s not meant to feel like Maui or Naples, but instead embraces the surrounding topography and artfully navigates the space between four mountain ranges.

The Living Desert Zoo and Botanical Gardens sit adjacent to the course, which means you may spot a giraffe left of the fairway on the par-5 sixth hole.

Only 239 home sites sit on the 700-acre parcel. And while that number may seem large, but it’s quaint when compared to some Palm Desert developments that house more than 1,000 homes.



The Trophy Holes (top) and a newly renovated clubhouse (inset) are marquee fixtures at The Reserve Club.

The facility also boasts a recently renovated clubhouse that came with a price tag of over \$10 million. Designed with touches of Tuscan architecture, it serves as an eye-catching centerpiece.

With all those unique elements, it's a three-hole practice course that's perhaps the most distinctive part of the property. Dubbed "The Trophy Holes," the series was originally designed and built by course architects Tom Weiskopf and Jay Morrish

to be part of the full-length championship layout. However, a routing change spurred the creative usage.

"After we altered the routing to what we have right now, we had this remaining plot of land with three very nicely designed golf holes. We thought, 'Hey, what should we do with this?' We decided to make it into something special, something that you don't see anywhere else," recalls Tom Cullinan, Managing Broker of Reserve Realty. "You see nine-hole par-3 courses everywhere, but we wanted these three holes to be a place for people to practice and truly experience the game however they'd like."

Consisting of a par 3, par 4 and par 5, the resulting Trophy Holes are every bit as manicured and pure as any other hole on property. They are a golfer's playground, and so much more.

"The Trophy Holes provide us with an amazing amount of flexibility, especially when you look at how we were trying to grow the game," says Mike Kelly, The Reserve Club's CEO and General Manager. "Firstly, it provides families an unencumbered way to have the kids or grandkids learn how to play golf. They don't have to worry about being pushed or pace of play; they can just go out and have fun learning the game while hitting the same shots they'd find on the golf course."

"It provides a similar opportunity for the beginners, as well," Kelly continues. "They can go to The Trophy Holes and have a real on-course experience without the intimidation of being on THE golf course."

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The Trophy Holes have also proven the perfect place for on-course playing lessons, as instructors don't have to worry about interrupting normal play. Furthermore, each hole has two pin locations to give members more options for practice. For older members with physical limitations who still love the game but may not be able to enjoy a full nine- or 18-hole round, The Trophy Holes have been an ideal alternative.

Beyond The Gates: A link for community impact

Going back to the origins of the property, "The Reserve" was chosen as a name because it's meant to be an oasis for its members and residents – providing a sense of escape and relaxation while reserving the areas native beauty. However, that feeling of seclusion, luxury and exclusivity is contrary to the mindset of the club's staff and membership.

"We feel we have an obligation to grow the game and introduce it to people in a way that they don't feel intimidated or uncomfortable," says Kelly. "The Trophy Holes are the perfect opportunity to for us to invite groups into The Reserve to

accomplish just that."

Denise Adams, the club's Membership Director, helped foster a relationship with The First Tee of Coachella Valley and now junior golfers from the community are regularly provided free clinics and playing opportunities on The Trophy Holes. Furthermore, Kelly is starting to forge mentoring relationships between club members and First Tee juniors.

"I grew up very blue collar. My father was a police officer and worked for everything we had. Even I sometimes look around and think, 'How did I get here?' But I remember being invited to play golf at a private club for the first time, because I worked at a course washing carts. To be able to see what was possible, and know that it didn't matter where you come from but that by working hard you could get an opportunity," says Kelly. "Our staff and members embrace the responsibility of sharing that message with young people and our community, and we want to help create those opportunities through the game of golf."

And The Trophy Holes are providing the club with an opportunity to do just that. ■