



Photos courtesy of Mirimichi Golf Club

New call boxes didn't ruin the aesthetics of the design of the greens at Mirimichi Golf Course.

G o o d

On-the-course wireless food ordering system at Mirimichi Golf Course speeds play and boosts sales

Eye on Design

The innovative food ordering system the Mirimichi Golf Course implemented as part of its major renovation of grounds and facilities has done far more than satisfy hungry golfers. It has also spurred food sales, accelerated the pace of play, and increased the capacity of players on busy days.

Allowing golfers the option to order mid-round snacks or post-play meals from the outdoor clubhouse café via wireless call boxes (strategically located where golfers typically start to think about some refreshment—either before tackling the back nine or after finishing the round) is a double eagle for management. The Mirimichi Golf Course is an 18-hole 300-plus-acre public course in Millington, TN, north of Memphis. Now in its second season since reopen-

ing, the course is owned by the entertainer Justin Timberlake, who grew up playing on it, and his parents (who still live nearby).

Ordering food via wireless call box before teeing off for the eighth or 17th hole not only boosts overall food sales, it also speeds up play and helps accommodate more players in prime playing hours, says Laura Bobbitt-Crocker, director of food and beverages at Mirimichi.

Golfers order their burger and beverage (or whatever else strikes their fancy) from the attendant at the base station radio at the café, which serves most patrons on a 10,000-square-foot patio that overlooks the championship course.

“For players ordering before the turn, we try to have everything ready and available quickly so when they come off No. 9 and arrive



Photo courtesy of Bitron, Inc.



Photo courtesy of Mirimichi Golf Course

Golfers don't have to stop the game to order lunch thanks to new call boxes at Mirimichi Golf Course in Memphis.

Call

By Steve Rice

at the patio we have the food prepared, ready to go. This speeds up the pace of play," Bobbitt-Crocker says. The staff will also bring out the order to players who prefer to eat on the move.

"We try to keep the turn time to six to eight minutes, 10 minutes at most," notes Bobbitt-Crocker, adding that this is considerably faster than the typical 10- to 15-minute turn most golf courses have.

Bobbitt-Crocker sees the call box system as a great business tool. "We love it. It augments customer service really nicely and makes our customers happy. And, because the on-course ordering speeds resumption of play after players stop to eat midway through the round, the pace of play increases a bit and we can have more players play during prime hours, which leads to more revenue and an even higher ROI," she says. The course now averages 100-150 golfers on good-weather days.

Three distinct factors contribute to increased overall sales from the well-placed call-ordering call boxes, according to Bobbitt-

Crocker. First, food and beverage sales increase immediately from spontaneous buying and the ensuing domino effect; when one player orders, others often join in so they can all eat together. Second, after players order and start anticipating that nice cold beverage and juicy burger waiting round the bend, course play just naturally speeds up a bit. Third, for course regulars and even occasional visitors, coming across those call boxes after ordering from them previously can spur appetites and kick-start the anticipation of a refreshing snack or meal after the next hole.

More than Just Fast Food

In addition to the two call boxes on the course just waiting for hungry golfers, the wireless management communication system features approximately 40 portable radios carried by course management and other staff and radio repeaters located strategically

around the course that ensure good reception from any perimeter of the 300-plus-acre course.

With the renovation, actor/singer/owner Timberlake aimed to recreate the look of the native habitat. It was important to him that much of the acreage be restored through reforestation of native trees, plantings of additional wildflower meadows and aquatic plants, and landscaping with native plants.

The eco-friendly renovation, which took about nine months, also incorporated water filtration and drainage enhancements to reduce consumption and enhanced the recirculating creek and waterfall system.

“We have a series of retention ponds and recirculating creeks that catch the water, which is filtered by the native plants that occur naturally around bodies of water in the mid-South. By the time the water is released into the surrounding creeks, there are no golf course chemicals in it and it is potable. Not only have we replaced non-native plantings with native plantings, but we also reduced the number of acres we mow from 200 acres of native Bermuda grass to 90 acres,” Bobbitt-Crocker says.

The plantings and improved methods of handling wastewater and runoff were so successful that Mirimichi became the first golf course in the United States to receive the official Audubon Classic Sanctuary certification by Audubon International. Mirimichi is the first golf course in the world recognized with both Audubon International Classic Sanctuary and Golf Environment Organization (GEO) certifications. (For more on GEO certifications, see the July/August 2011 issue of *Club Management*.)

The course is, in fact, an actual botanic garden. Though a public golf course, it has the ambience of a private course and offers many amenities that private courses could emulate. The word *Mirimichi* is a Native American name meaning “Place of Happy Retreat,” which is how Timberlake views the course whenever he uses it as a respite from his high-profile life, hanging out with family and old friends and enjoying a round of golf.

When it came to installing the call boxes in such a pristine environment, the Mirimichi design team chose a dark-colored sustainable (fast-growing) hardwood species from South America, Rhino (aka IPE). The call boxes, clad in this attractive wood, are unobtrusive and blend nicely into the background. (After using the call boxes once, hungry golfers tend to remember exactly where they are.) Because the radios are wireless and solar powered, no trenching was required during installation.

“We were very proactive when designing housing for the call boxes,” says Bobbitt-Crocker. “In keeping with our environmental sensitivity, we made sure the stanchions look just like the rest of our course accessories, such as benches and water basins, and do not stand out.” ³⁰

About the author:

Steve Rice is the president of Ritron, Inc., a privately held US company based in Carmel, IN, specializing in the design and manufacture of wireless voice and data communication equipment since 1977.



Mirimichi is a natural beauty: It was the first golf course recognized with both Audubon International Classic Sanctuary and Golf Environment Organization (GEO) certifications.



Mirimichi Golf Course is a botanic garden, with pristine surroundings for the enjoyment of its golfers.



Golfers know Mirimichi for its good design, incorporating both aesthetic beauty and technological advances.



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