

Club grows up with the city

By JOHN C. CAMPBELL

Georgetown Country Club was once the heart of Georgetown's social life. Generations of area residents have played golf and visited with their neighbors over drinks and good food at Georgetown Country Club. Their children have grown up at the club learning the fundamentals of golf, fishing on the banks of the San Gabriel River and swimming in the pool. "Children and families are the lifeblood of our club," said Patrick Buhrmann, the club's new general manager. "We have members whose fathers were here and even their fathers' fathers."

He said it's more of a blue-collar club and members are sociable, very kid-friendly and welcoming. Georgetown Country Club began and still is a nonprofit cooperative. When members join, they own a piece of the club.

Dues are used for new amenities. Richard Lowder, the previous general manager who recently retired after helping run the club for almost three decades, said it has always been a club in service to the city. "Georgetown Country Club sold 15 acres adjacent to the club to the city of Georgetown in a deal that allowed them to complete the hike and bike trail. "Part of the agreement included routing reclaimed water to the course for irrigation."

A historic course, built during the "golden age" of golf course architecture, Georgetown Country Club opened as a nine-hole course in 1927 and is one of the oldest courses west of the Mississippi River. It was completely redesigned as an 18-hole course in the mid-seventies by Carl Doering, who later designed the Berry Creek golf course. The San Gabriel River comes into play 11 times



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New management is revitalizing Georgetown Country Club, the oldest golf club in the city.

during a round of golf. Combined with fairly steep terrain that often rises above, then dips back down into the canyon, it is a short course overall, but very scenic and rather demanding to play. The winding, wooded layout boasts a charm seldom seen in modern-day courses. Although Georgetown

Country Club's golf course has flourished for more than 90 years, everything else about the club has changed. The shuffleboard, pool tables and refrigerators that once held cold beer, sodas and a small can for payment have been replaced by multiple lounge rooms with large LCD TVs and a full-service bar.

The original swimming hole, which was built into the San Gabriel River, has been replaced by three swimming pools overlooking the golf course. The wood floors of the pro shop are the last remaining memory of the club's once popular racquetball courts. Even the fireworks the club annually financed —

one of the year's most anticipated events in a city that once boasted fewer than 10,000 residents — long ago moved to San Gabriel Park. "Our goal is to be the best value, but more importantly the friendliest club in town," Mr. Buhrmann said. "Our staff knows members by name and always tries to make them feel welcome."

New pro brings national attention to Georgetown

By JOHN C. CAMPBELL

In August, Ben Kern stood in the winner's circle at the Professional Golf Association Championship to accept the trophy for winning Low Club Professional at that golf major's 100th tournament. Mr. Kern's incredible win was the culmination of a memorable summer that brought him to the Georgetown Country Club as head golf professional.

The 90-year-old country club, hidden in the heart of the city, welcomed Mr. Kern and his family in July after Mr. Kern accepted an offer to become the club's new head golf pro from general manager and fellow PGA professional Patrick Buhrmann.

Ben is responsible for the pro shop, the golf cart fleet and all golf-related operations. He manages the other pros, is responsible for developing and managing an innovative tournament system, administers the rules that are a big part of golf etiquette, and as time permits plays golf with members. He also is directly responsible for promoting the game of golf in Georgetown.

After he joined the staff, Mr. Kern and Mr. Buhrmann headed over to Horsehoe Bay, where they won the Texas Team Championship with an impressive



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Ben Kern won the golf pro trophy at the PGA Championship 100th tournament.

partnership that included 22 birdies and an eagle. Following that performance, Mr. Kern travelled to the Cascades Club in Tyler where he became only the second club pro to win the Texas State Open.

Mr. Kern finally made the trip to Bellerive Country Club in St. Louis to play in the PGA Championship, his first PGA Tour event. Mr. Kern hit 45 of 56 fairways during that tournament, ranking second among the entire field. By day three of the tournament, Mr. Kern was in the thick of it, hitting consistently closer to the pin than anyone else.

That accuracy, combined with a 284 yards averaged off the tee, allowed Mr. Kern to notch the best finish by a club pro at the PGA

Championship in 13 years. Mr. Kern's win was marked by cool, consistent play and a steady swing. "That's been my strength for a long time," he said. "It was a blast. I surprised myself how relaxed I was."

His winning mindset has a lot to do with his play. "When I submit my entry form," he said, "I am submitting it to win the tournament."

In the 12 tournaments he played in 2017, he won three, placed second five times and finished only one in double digits.

The one piece of advice he said he always gives his students is all about posture. "Everyone is different but it always comes down to PGA. Posture, grip, alignment," he said. "Those are good basics for anyone."

When Mr. Kern accepted the position, he said it was as much the club members as the course that brought him to Georgetown Country Club.

"They don't just come to play golf, the members are also here to eat dinner, have a drink and socialize. They like being here and I really like that."

Georgetown is taking to Ben as well. The city council dedicated September 25 as Ben Kern Day thanks to his PGA win.

General manager reviving city's country club legacy

By JOHN C. CAMPBELL

Georgetown Country Club, a 90-year-old landmark in the community, has experienced many changes since it opened in 1927, which includes declining membership over the last decade while the city of Georgetown's population continues to grow.

The executive committee launched a search early last year for a general manager who could take the club into the future and attract new members.

That search led to Patrick Buhrmann, a 38-year-old PGA professional and native Texan who visited the club and liked both the potential and the challenges of revitalizing membership.

"What I saw was a club that had a great history, had a great location, had a beautiful piece of property, but had not really done anything to try to transition to becoming viable in today's economic environment," Mr. Buhrmann said.

"I am committed to cultivating and continuing the traditions that our members already love, but it's not enough to open the gates and say 'come in.' If that's all you do, you are not going to have enough members to survive," he said.

"We are improving, mod-



PATRICK BUHRMANN
General manager

ernizing, and updating the infrastructure. We also are enhancing the golf course and the pool complex, adding a fitness facility, even a kid headquarters that is going to be a place for youngsters and teens to gather and play while their parents golf. There are a lot of amenities we want to have systematically fall into place over the next several years."

Mr. Buhrmann has made changes during his first year on the job that he credits with bringing in new members.

"We've welcomed 74 new families to the club since the beginning of the year. That's a sign of things to come. There should be a multiplier effect as improvements are completed.

"The club is poised to be in the right place at the right time," he said. "De-

velopment is booming in Georgetown. Just around our golf course we're going to have 600 high-income single-family homes literally on our doorstep over the next three to five years. It's not often that clubs have the luxury of being in the same place for 90 years, then all this new business comes to them and that's where we are."

Perhaps Mr. Buhrmann's largest visible move this year has been to bring in Ben Kern as the club's new head golf professional. Mr. Buhrmann was not just looking for a good pro, he said the facility needed someone who would be a draw for the club.

"I was looking for someone who would be recognized locally and regionally as a great player and a great teacher and Ben Kern's name came to the top of the list."

Mr. Buhrmann's decision was validated when Mr. Kern won the Low Club Professional honor at a major professional golf championship in August, gaining national fame just a month after he was hired.

"I felt Ben was someone who could become that kind of professional for us, but it's obviously blossomed faster than I expected," the club's newest general manager said.

Scoops ice cream shop expands reach with new trailer

By RACHEL MADISON

Scoops, the ice cream counter inside All Things Kids on the Square, is now serving its ice cream all over Georgetown thanks to its brand-new ice cream trailer.

All Things Kids opened on Main Street in April 2011 as a toy store. The owners had the idea of a battery-free toy store. The store still only sells toys that don't require batteries to operate.

"We wanted to make sure [children] had access to educational toys that devel-

oped the brain, mind, curiosity and problem-solving skills," said Karen Soeffker, founder of All Things Kids and Scoops.

Soeffker added ice cream to her toy store concept in April 2017.

"It really transformed our business into a destination," she said. "Calling it All Things Kids in the beginning was a blessing, because now we're no longer just a toy store. We have games, books, toys, ice cream and candy."

Because the ice cream has been such a hit, Soeffker said shoppers have

asked her if she could take ice cream to them.

"We hadn't really considered catering, but we had a wedding planner ask us to bring ice cream to a wedding, so we ended up getting two dipping cabinets, which is what the ice cream is served out of in the store," she said. "We could fit in at least eight different flavors into one cabinet. The groom picked eight of his favorite flavors and the bride picked out eight of her favorite flavors and they each had their own favorites."

Soeffker added that



Photo Credit

Carl Soeffker is ready to serve up some ice cream from the Scoops trailer. Carl, son of All Things Kids founder Karen Soeffker, is considered Scoops' chief scooper and vice president. The toy store, candy shop, ice cream counter and new trailer are part of the family-run business.