

# Home on the Range

## Increasing course accessibility for juniors.

BY PAT O'BRIEN

The game of golf has never been more popular for junior golfers. Unfortunately, they face many barriers in trying to play the game, including expensive green fees and equipment, and long, intimidating layouts. Although junior players may have access to teaching professionals to learn the fundamentals and etiquette of the game, most golf courses do not have the space to add new junior golf facilities with shorter holes.

The Rivercut Golf Course, a public course operated by the Springfield Greene County Park Board in Springfield, Missouri, addressed the accessibility issue for juniors by using their driving range as a part-time course. The driving range is three acres in size with five target greens that are easily converted into short, simple golf holes. Best of all, there is no cost for juniors.

This idea was so popular that the Heart of the Ozarks Junior Golf Foundation, a non-profit entity, was created to take this idea a step farther and build a four-hole junior golf facility adjacent to the driving range at the Rivercut Golf Club. Contributions to fund the project were secured from groups such as the USGA, the Missouri Golf Association, and tax-deductible donations from individuals.

Construction began in the summer of 2001 to build the new four-hole Betty Allison Junior Golf Course at Rivercut. All holes will range between 50 and 75 yards long. Unique course features will include low-maintenance Meyer zoysiagrass putting greens and tees, a 2,500-square-foot bentgrass practice putting green, practice sand

bunker, landscaping and water display, starter building, and a special four-foot asphalt circular path for walkers, spectators, and wheelchair participants. A fence around the perimeter to secure the area and special parking for both cars and buses are also parts of the plan, so organizations can bring groups out to play. Restrooms and a mini-pro shop will be available, and a scoreboard will be erected. Lights may be added at a later date for night golf. The estimated cost of the project is \$300,000. However, most courses could do this at a lower cost by simply using existing driving ranges and target greens, and designing a simple layout for part-time use by junior players.

Ed Halasey, CGCS, plans to maintain the facility with existing labor and equipment already at Rivercut. The junior course will be maintained every Tuesday morning from 7 to 9 AM and will require 15 to 20 man-hours. The native soil zoysiagrass putting greens and tees will be mowed with the regular approach mower at 1/2". The average putting green size is 2,000 square feet. The tall fescue on the driving range will be mowed at the normal rough height of cut of 1 1/2". Course amenities, such as ball washer and water coolers will be scaled down and available for the players. An extra \$40,000 will be spent annually on maintenance costs, and the Springfield Greene County Parks will pick up this tab.

Junior golfers in Missouri will have something special once the course opens this summer. Not only will there be free golf, but golf balls, tees, and junior-size clubs will be provided. Plus, area PGA professionals, including Rick



Creating a junior-friendly golf environment can help launch a lifelong enjoyment of the game.

Grayson, a noted golf teacher and Executive Director of the Ozarks Junior Golf Foundation, will provide free instruction during certain times. To play the course or to get a lesson, kids need only make an appointment and bring an adult supervisor. No impact on the range revenue is expected from the part-time use of the facility as a junior golf course, as the special events will occur mainly at off-peak hours. Predicted initial play levels are 20,000 annual rounds.

This model junior golf facility is an affordable beginner-friendly layout and won't take long to play. Hopefully, it will motivate your course to use existing land, such as the driving range, and convert it into a beginner links.

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