



TEEING UP FOR ANOTHER GREAT SEASON ON THE GREEN

An interview with Golf Manager Vaughn Robinson

PCMC Community News: The Park City Golf Course celebrated its 50th anniversary last year, and you yourself have been involved with the golf course for over 18 years. What is it about the place that gives it such staying power?

Vaughn Robinson: I think it stems from the family atmosphere among both the staff and the patrons. We are able to build really strong relationships that endure. The staff really consider the course their second home. The average pro has been with us for 12 years, and our shortest-tenured starter has been with us for three. My position is also a great example: I'm only the fifth manager in 50 years. My four predecessors were Ralph Emery, Doug Vilven, Greg Cunningham, and Craig Sanchez. I think this continuity really helps enhance the patron experience: it's always nice to see a familiar face behind the desk and be greeted by name as you walk through the door.

Likewise, the friendships with patrons are just as strong. I've literally watched some of them grow up. I started teaching one of our regulars—David Wintzer—when he was 14 years old. He went on to play for his college team at Westminster, and now he works part-time for the course as manager on duty. He also started his own business, WEDO Gluten-free Flour, based here in Park City. I think this is a great example of how the golf course is a true nexus of our community.

PCMC: Some people perceive golf as a game for the elites, but one of the city's missions is to make play accessible to everyone. How does this translate to the links?

VR: Accessibility is one of the things that sets us apart: we're the only public golf course within a 20-mile radius. There are six private clubs within a 30-mile radius of us, but only one or two public ones. And we are a public course providing a resort-level experience. People refer to us as the "locals country club." We have a nice golf shop and great course maintenance.

PCMC: You were promoted to golf manager last year. What are you focusing on as you grow into your role?

VR: Well, I should say I have a great foundation to work with. Craig Sanchez—my immediate predecessor—transitioned to another role within the city that capitalizes on the great relationships he built at the course. So working from this position of strength, I'm looking at ways of increasing our revenue and continuing to enhance the golfer's experience and growing our league play.

In terms of revenue, a lot of people might not know that the golf course is an enterprise fund. This means that the course's operations and capital expenditures are sustained by user fees rather than tax dollars.

PCMC: That is impressive. So what strategies are you pursuing?

VR: Right now we are adjusting the tee times to accommodate both league play and public play. This year we will have a shotgun tournament on the first Tuesday of each month for Ladies League and the remaining Tuesdays will be tee times.

Another personal goal of mine is developing a stronger relationship with the Ladies Leagues (9- and 18-hole). Before I became manager, I was in charge of the men's league and worked closely with them. But the ladies league kind of runs itself. I would love to have them utilize both mine and the staff's knowledge to help improve their experience.

PCMC: You've mentioned that the staff is a key component of your success. How are you structured organizationally to ensure the best experience for your patrons?

VR: Another thing that sets us apart is our collaboration between the pro shop and the maintenance staff. At many courses, these two entities are adversaries, constantly fighting a turf war. At PCGC, we all know we're part of the same team—we're all just there for the customer. I know the maintenance crew are experts in their realm, so I defer to them. During staff meetings, we all work together to solve problems that arise.

PCMC: As we all know, the West is in the midst of a pretty serious drought. Golf courses require a lot of water. What strategies do you have in place to minimize water use?

VR: This is something we take very seriously. The Golf Maintenance staff and I work diligently to manage watering at a micro-level. Two years ago we updated our sprinkler heads. The new heads are more efficient and allow us to change the watering intervals, as well as target the watering direction and areas more precisely. We have the ability to turn on or shut off just one head at a time, rather than the entire system.

At the same time, we also updated our entire irrigation system. Our new system has precision sensors that measure the level of precipitation and subsequently shut down the system after a certain point. And the system is smartphone-enabled, which allows us to be even more responsive. Discussions have also begun for potential water management plans.

PCMC: There is something about being on the links that makes one philosophical. Do you derive larger life lessons from golf?

VR: Absolutely. Part of why I love teaching at the course is seeing how it instills integrity, respect, and other important qualities—especially in younger players. It helps make them productive members of society. And seeing the smile on someone's face after they have sunk a putt is usually the best part of my day. The Park City High School Boys Team won five consecutive state championships from 2008 to 2012 and won again in 2014. The Girls team is currently vying for a region crown this year and a potential state tournament run themselves. Coach George Murphy has done a tremendous job with both the boys and girls teams during this time.

The Park City Municipal Golf Course opened April 3rd. Ladies' Leagues will take place every Tuesday starting May 5, and Men's Leagues will be held every Wednesday starting on April 26. Junior Leagues will begin Monday, June 8, and continue throughout the summer. In addition, the course will be holding three youth camps in June: 8-11, 15-18 & 22-25. Instructors are also available for private lessons or clinics. Signups and more information are available at www.parkcitygolfclub.org.