

Grand Forks Country Club life takes another round

By [Andrew Haffner](#) on Dec 27, 2016 at 6:42 p.m. Source: Grand Forks Herald



After more than a half-century and countless rounds of golf, the Grand Forks Country Club continues to hold its own as it tees off into a new year.

Doug Iverson, the club's general manager, said the private golf and leisure facility is in a period of upswing at a time when the clout of clubs elsewhere is on the decline.

"It's coming back to life, getting busier and busier every year," said Iverson, estimating as many as 600 people are current members, nearly a third of whom were added over the past few years. Though that many people have access to the club, the actual number of memberships is about 200 and includes multiperson family memberships.

Iverson said the 1980s and early 1990s were the "heyday" for the American country club scene. That national popularity found its way to the local club, which maintained anywhere between 270 and 350 memberships throughout that time. The modern statistics aren't quite at that level, but Iverson said the current membership rates are pretty good for a private club in this day and age.

Iverson referred the Herald to the club website for specific questions on its rates but said the organization likes to stay competitive with other area clubs, specifically the clubs in Fargo.

Brian Kraft, a 23-year-member and current president of the Country Club, said he's happy with how the club is positioned as it makes its way into the new year. Kraft said the club's staffing and leadership is well-attuned to the needs of the organization. In terms of member life, he said the facilities are frequented by a strong core group of members while new faces are coming through the door.

"The club is only going to be as successful as its membership," Kraft said. "Adding members is always a goal, and it's always important for us to retain members. We're happy with how that's going."

Family focus

Over his two-plus decades of membership, Kraft said he's seen the club undergo a kind of "changeover" to a younger, family-oriented membership base. Some of that switch came after late-season flooding ruined the club swimming pool a few years ago. The time without a pool pulled the number of memberships to a low point of 150. Since then, the pool area has been redone and members once again are making a splash.

Beyond the farthest reaches of the pool deck, the club has made improvements on the golf course and in other parts of the grounds. Kraft said the course has received a makeover of sorts from a "nongrass standpoint" that centered primarily on course infrastructure such as benches, cart paths and tee boxes.

The pool and restaurant—the latter of which is open to the general public for dining from January through March—do their fair share of entertaining, but the golf course remains the big draw. Iverson said the course was designed by golf course architect Robert B. Harris — who also planned the UND-owned Ray Richards Golf Course — and was built in 1964 when the club was moved across the river from East Grand Forks to its current location.

Nowadays, more than 50 years after its foundation, the course sees as many as 13,000 rounds of golf played in an average season.

Iverson said the announced closure of Ray Richards hasn't yet affected the Country Club in any noticeable way. He didn't consider the university-owned course to be a competitor and said the declared intent of UND to shutter the course is "really unfortunate."

"We'd rather see them survive, as they're good for the golfing community in Grand Forks," Iverson said.

Kraft echoed that sentiment, saying Ray Richards "filled a void" for local golfers seeking an accessible course experience. Still, for those with the interest and means, he said the Country Club offers access to the game like none other.

Never gets old

Longtime Country Club member Matt Norby spoke to the readiness and continued playability of the course as its most attractive features. Norby, who said his father is an avid golfer, was first brought to the club under a family membership.

He said his parents "joked it was our day care," and it wasn't uncommon for him to hit the course on his own with friends around the age of 7. While the season is on, Norby usually plays at least twice a week. Though he's been playing the course for about 30 years now and also frequents King's Walk—the Grand Forks golf course designed by professional golfer Arnold Palmer—Norby said the Country Club course keeps calling him back.

"I just love it out there," he said. "There's a lot of courses you get sick of playing, if you play day after day, two, three times a week. For whatever reason, with the character of that course, I don't get tired of playing. It's always fun out there."