

PRIVÉ SPOTLIGHT

SOUTH FLORIDA

ICON OF ELEGANCE

Renovations and New Programs Create Bright Future at Audubon Country Club



By Sally J. Sportsman

ASKED TO IDENTIFY the defining element of their club, several members of Audubon Country Club, in Naples, Fla., said it's the sunsets. Upstairs in the clubhouse, west-facing windows form a panorama to the glory of each evening's setting sun, something that has thankfully not changed since the private, member-owned facility opened in 1988.

Change has been in the air recently, though, and even longtime members are enthused. "As part of the club's desire to remain first class, we always want to have the best offerings we can," said Michael Rodriguez, general manager.

That desire has resulted in an extensive renovation of many facets of the facility over the past several years.

A CLUB WITH APPEAL

Audubon Country Club is resplendent with greenery, flowering plants, shade trees, birds, and wildlife. Its park-like setting is interspersed with 28 lakes, and more than half of the acreage is dedicated to preserve areas. The exclusive gated property is an oasis of calm and relaxation.

"Our strongest attribute is the camaraderie amongst our membership," said membership director Lauren Ruocco. "They are friendly and engaged, which makes for a special club. Members not only join, they *belong*."

Superlative member service enhances enjoyment of the club's extensive array of amenities. These

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include a truly distinctive clubhouse with both casual and fine dining, a comprehensive tennis program, the only full-size croquet courts in Naples, an Olympic-sized heated pool, a state-of-the-art fitness center with a variety of offerings, and two new, official regulation Har-Tru bocce courts, lit for night play and offering organized seasonal games and leagues.

“From its prime location bordering the pristine beaches of the Gulf of Mexico, to the array of member events and programming, Audubon truly has it all,” Ruocco said.

And then there’s golf. Challenging enough to keep the interest of the most accomplished players yet enjoyable for everyone, the golf course is set among lakes, preserves, and gracious custom homes. Encouraging play with its beauty and strategic challenge, the layout offers five tee options. A compatible



foursome is never hard to find, and instruction is available to beginners and experienced players alike.

Tournaments, outings, and a variety of events keep things interesting all the time. And the golf shop is fully stocked with first-rate equipment and apparel. What possibly could be improved at such an enchanting place?

RENOVATIONS FOR ENHANCED ENJOYMENT

The clubhouse has been reconfigured and updated over the last two years.

Its new character is a mixture of old Florida and an island feel. Bright colors, wicker, wall texturing, and new flooring have been installed. The golf shop was moved to a different location, and the fitness center, overlooking the 18th green and a fountain, was enlarged. The parking lot was redone completely, with new landscaping, curbing, and asphalt.

The golf course is receiving attention, too. The fairways on the back nine holes were regrassed with more tolerant, lush Bermuda grass, and the bunkers were redone. In 2016, the front nine and the driving range were also regrassed, and additional target areas installed for member practice sessions. The short game center has been planted with Celebration Bermuda grass, and the practice bunker has been revamped.

“The changes to the golf course improved playability, aesthetics, and maintenance,” said head professional Justin DeFont. “Bulkhead work, to help the shoreline around the ponds, created a defined look and provided protection to prevent erosion.”



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Fresh shrubbery was planted to cover the property’s boundary fence. Tee boxes were moved and expanded, and some were added.

“These course upgrades have accommodated play and show variety to different players,” DeFont says.

The expansive transformations have been warmly received by Audubon Country Club members. Families and friends share fond memories even as they look with anticipation to all the pleasures that lie ahead. A place of joy and refuge, the club truly is a sanctuary, now even more than ever. ■

RECENT RENOVATIONS TO THE CLUBHOUSE AND ONGOING IMPROVEMENTS TO THE GOLF COURSE HAVE BROUGHT NEW ENERGY TO AUDUBON COUNTRY CLUB.

AT-A-GLANCE

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