

Top Mississippi Public Golf Course Wraps Improvements To Enhance Player Enjoyment And Pace Of Play

The Refuge, Mississippi's "Best Purely Public Golf Course," recently completed course-wide improvements aimed at increasing playability and pace of play.

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Since opening for play in October of 1998, [The Refuge](#) (an [upscale daily fee golf course](#) in the [Jackson, MS suburb of Flowood](#)) has filled a niche for golfers seeking country club conditions without the heavy price tag or long-term membership commitment.

The course is known throughout the region for impeccable conditioning and the one thing any real

estate agent will tell you is more valuable than gold: location, location, location! Literally across the highway from the Jackson-Evers International Airport, The Refuge has seen a steady increase in first-time play from business travelers and Snow Birds alike. However, the one proverbial thorn in the side of the course has been that it has been perceived as "too tight" by the average

public golfer who "loses too many golf balls." Not anymore...

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We already have great course conditions and now we're making golf more fun. When the golfers are happy, everybody's happy!"

Nathan Crace

"All of that changes, effective today," says Nathan Crace, the operating Principal of Watermark Golf, the company with a long-term contract to manage the course. "And the reaction and feedback from golfers the past six weeks has been phenomenal! We can't wait for the spring and summer!"

Crace explains that the course was originally routed around pockets of wetlands and that the course's architect, Roy Case, tried to save as many trees as possible. However, in the 15+ years since the course opened, many of those trees have become a problem for both pace of play and enjoyment of the game.

"Let's just say we didn't get any surprises when [course superintendent] Bill Whatley and I toured



The par-5 finishing hole at The Refuge golf course in Flowood, Mississippi

the course last year with our USGA Green Section Agronomist," Crace laughs. "When we walked onto the second tee, he said 'You have too many trees that are way too close.' We knew that was just the tip of the iceberg."

Crace explains that USGA agronomist Chris Hartwiger was concerned about the impact of trees not only on turf quality along the outer edges of the course and a number of tees, but also how the maturing trees were crowding some tee shots and causing root encroachment along the slopes of tees and some green surrounds.

"We've long been known for quality playing conditions," Crace says. "Bill and his staff do a great job and I'll put our greens up against any Tifdwarf greens in the region. But Chris reinforced what we knew to be true: we had a systemic problem that we couldn't manage our way out of. We had an organic infrastructure issue."

So Crace sat down with Whatley and course golf professional Randy Tupper and they made a list of pros and cons. Crace says they knew they had the location, the conditioning, the staff, a nice clubhouse, a newly-improved practice facility, a new teaching academy, and the Wee Links (a three-hole course for juniors). The elephant in the room was how tight the course played and how many balls players said they lost. They then took their findings to the regular players and found their opinions to be the same.

"We took the results of our non-scientific study and said 'What now?'" Crace explains. "If the one thing that needs to be changed is making the course more playable and loosening it up, how can we do it without the expense and opportunity costs associated with shutting the course down for a full renovation? We didn't need a full renovation. We needed to carefully widen the playing corridors to address and correct the real problem."

The result was a plan that saw two machines undertaking a large-scale under brushing project over the period of three months that "widened the holes" by clearing out brush, briars, small trees, and understory that, as Crace explains, "Should've been done during the original construction of the course." A number of smaller invasive species of trees were also removed during the project.

"We have areas now where you can not only find your ball, but also play it," Crace says. "Before the project, it was a lost ball. Now it's fun and playable! Those areas of the course look like a golf course again."

But Crace is quick to point out that their goal was not to make the course "easier," the goal was to make it "more playable" and "more enjoyable."

"Big difference between easy and playable," Crace explains. "Playable is fun regardless of your handicap. In fact, we also identified areas during the project where we can add tees for the better players who may have shied away because hitting driver too often wasn't worth the risk."

Now they can hit driver more often; the difference is that if they miss a fairway, now they can have a shot to recover and scramble for par—not an automatic lost ball."

Crace says as the project was winding down for the winter, one golfer he spoke with on the course summed it up best when describing how he had just played the par-5 6th hole: He said "I pulled my drive left of the cart path, found it, hit it, pulled it left of the path again on my second shot, found it, hit out short of the green, and got up and down for a well-earned par. Two months ago, it would have been two lost balls and a triple bogey."

"That's all we need to know," Crace says as he smiles. "We already have great course conditions and now we're making golf more fun. When the golfers are happy, everybody's happy!"

More information about The Refuge and Watermark Golf can be found at www.refugegolf.com and www.watermarkgolf.com.

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