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Encore by the Shore

The PGA Championship is set to tee off on South Carolina's Kiawah Island

To the Nines

Columbia Country Club's 27 uniquely numbered holes are home to state championships and a group of highly competitive players **BY MICHAEL J. SOLENDER**



The clubhouse at Columbia Country Club is the hub for 27 holes of outstanding golf, as well as authentic Lowcountry cuisine.

While it's not unusual for a socially minded golf and country club to have a 19th hole, it's quite a rarity for the hole to be featured on the club's official scorecard – and followed by additional holes numbered 20 through 27. Yet hole 19 isn't the place for cold beverages at Columbia Country Club in Blythewood, S.C. Instead, it's precisely where members and occasionally befuddled guests find themselves when starting their round or making the turn at the 27-hole club situated 30 minutes north of Columbia, the capitol of the Palmetto State.

Three distinctive nines differentiate the course from its peers: Ridgewood (holes

1–9), Tall Pines (holes 10–18) and Lakeside (holes 19–27). “The holes are numbered 1 through 27 on the course and the scorecard,” says Chris Sparrow, PGA General Manager and Head Golf Professional. “It's been that way ever since the course was established. People find it unusual. When we hold outings, it always takes some extra explanation for groups unfamiliar with our layout.”

Originally called the Ridgewood Golf and Country Club at its founding in 1904, the club was established when the Columbia Railway System bought the land and worked with developer Frederick Hyatt to create an amenity to entice home buyers to the small village of Eau Claire, just outside Columbia's city limits. After building a nine-hole course, 250 charter members paid annual club dues of \$5 per year when the club opened. Five years later after a meeting in Charleston, S.C. in 1909, Ridgewood Golf and Country Club became one of the five founding member clubs of the Carolinas Golf Association.

Rechristened the Columbia Country Club in 1945, the new name better repre-

Columbia Country Club

135 Columbia Club Dr. W,
Blythewood, SC 29016

Opened: 1904, with a move to the club's current location in 1962

Course Architect: Ellis Maples

General Manager/Head Golf Professional: Chris Sparrow, PGA

Superintendent: Sam Friar

Fast Fact: Beyond golf, CCC is known for its culinary flair. Executive Chef Brandon Wallace brings his love for South Carolina seafood and Lowcountry specialties to the table on a daily basis. The menu includes favorites such as shrimp and “dirty” grits, whole fried flounder and grouper, Brunswick Stew, Chicken Bog, gumbo and Frogmore Stew

Inside CCC: The club was the longtime home course for South Carolina Golf Hall of Famer David DuPre, who passed away in 2011; DuPre was a star collegiate golfer at the University of South Carolina, played in the 1982 U.S. Open and won four state amateur titles to go with eight club championships at CCC

sented the locale of its most prominent members. In the late 50s, after the town of Eau Claire was annexed by the city of Columbia, the club relocated to its current location in Blythewood as part of a land swap. Flush with more than 240 acres of undeveloped property, club leadership looked to Ellis Maples, a protégé of Donald Ross, to carve 27 holes into the ambling, heavily treed countryside.

Nothing hidden on Columbia's Nines

“As a traditional course, it plays with a lot of character,” says Sparrow. “It is right out in front of you with nothing hidden and



INSET: RICHLAND LIBRARY

plenty of room to drive the golf ball. Ours is more of a second shot or approach shot golf course, with the main challenge found on the greens, which are undulating, sloping, and quick. To score well here, golfers must place their approach shot on the correct section of the green or they're going to struggle."

Columbia Country Club is well known and widely respected throughout the state. In 2020 the club hosted both SCGA Men's and Women's Amateur Championships. More tourneys are set for 2021, including the Carolinas Golf Association Mid-Amateur Championship in April and the SCGA Women's Amateur Championship, for the second year in a row, in June.

"It's a course that can be set up to fit every level," says Sparrow. "We can challenge the elite golfer, but it is also friendly and fun for high handicappers." For championships, tournament officials typically use the Ridgewood/Tall Pines nines, as they can be stretched to nearly 7,300 yards. "Lakeside should not be overlooked, especially for shotmakers. Its shorter length doesn't require a driver off every tee and allows more options for attacking the hole, and some great risk-reward opportunities."

Sparrow characterizes the club member-

ship as one that takes their golf seriously. "We have some of the best amateur players in the state," he says, noting several former collegiate players from universities such as Furman, College of Charleston, and Wofford play out of the club. "At last year's club championship, I had 14 players with 'plus' handicaps. It's a competitive bunch."

Several years back, the weekday dogfight group was put to the test by a then 14-

year-old Dustin Johnson. The Columbia native and defending Masters Champion joined "the fight," proceeded to shoot 65, and left all who witnessed his round dumbfounded.

"Of course, he'd be welcome back any time he's in the neighborhood," adds Sparrow. ■

Michael J. Solender is a golf and travel writer based in Charlotte, N.C.



Architect Ellis Maples created a layout with plenty of challenge and character in the heavily treed South Carolina countryside.

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