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Golf's New Short Story

Small-scale courses are proving to be long on appeal for golfers who are pressed for time or space, those who are new to (or still a bit scared of) the game, and families looking for fun ways to “get a round.”

By Betsy Gilliland, Contributing Editor



The Hickory Course at Hamilton Farm Golf Club, with a full 18 holes, is the only USGA-rated par-3 course in the United States and is designed to challenge every golfer's favorite shot.

Time constraints imposed by increased work and family obligations have made squeezing in a regular round of golf more difficult for even the most avid players. To give devoted golfers a chance to play quicker rounds with greater frequency, a growing number of properties are creating and promoting smaller-scale “short” courses. The courses can either be of normal length but limited to 12, 9 or fewer holes, or still be 18-hole layouts, with reduced yardage that emphasizes short-game shotmaking throughout the track.

These courses are also proving to be a good way to get beginning or less-skilled golfers over the “intimidation hump” that can keep them from first wanting to learn the game and then from enjoying it more often. At the same time, properties are finding that short courses can be a great way to include the fun of golf in special events like “date nights” or other programs that fit well with clubs' growing emphasis on family-oriented fun...

...In Gladstone, N.J., **Hamilton Farm Golf Club** (Old World Charm Meets New-World Needs,” C&RB, June 2008) not only has its 18-hole championship Highlands Course, it also boasts the only USGA-rated par-3 short course in the world—the 18-hole, 3,100-yard Hickory Course.

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“It's not your typical par-three course,” says General Manager Tim Bakels. “It's extremely challenging and is laid out magnificently. It

truly is a reflection of our big course. For people who are working on their irons and their short games, there's no better way to practice.”

Many couples play the par-3 course together, Bakels adds, as well as golfers who like to get in a round before or after work. “Once they play it, they're hooked,” he says. “The key is to get them out there.”

Matt Freitag, the club's Director of Golf, says Hamilton Farm sees about 12,000 combined rounds of golf annually. In 2008, the Hickory Course saw about 1,300 rounds. Freitag's goal was to bring at least 1,500 rounds to the short course in 2009. But another reason why golfers enjoy the par-3 course, where rounds can be finished in less than three hours, is because it is less crowded than the Highlands Course, Freitag says. “They play it for scores, and they play it for competition. It's not for lessons and it's not a pitch-and-putt or an executive course. It's a full-scale golf course.” **C&RB**