

In the decade since it was founded, RedStick has maintained the lowest profile of any local links.

THE FIRST ❁ THE ONLY

VeroBeach *Magazine*®

RedStick: Our "Secret" Golf Club



In the decade since it was founded, RedStick has maintained the lowest profile of any local links.

REDSTICK: VERO BEACH'S "SECRET" GOLF CLUB

BY MARY BETH VALLAR

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GARY W. KELLNER OF DIMPLED ROCK







View of the 5th hole. The 320-acre property was purchased in 1999 from Galen Weston, developer of Windsor, who had planned to use it as an equestrian center.

RedStick Golf Club maintains a quiet profile in Vero Beach and its 275 members like it that way. At its inconspicuous entrance on 58th Avenue there is not even a sign, nor anything else to suggest what lies beyond, which is 320 acres of elevated land accommodating a 7,200-yard course and a 15,000-square-foot clubhouse.

Yet after 10 years in existence, RedStick's reputation has spread. Golfers at many of the nation's most prestigious golf and country clubs know about it, as do aspiring young professionals who are eager to work there. In addition, nonprofit organizations in the nearby Wabasso community, who have directly benefited from the club and its members, are also aware of it. Yet, for many in Vero Beach – golfers and non-golfers alike – RedStick remains a mystery.

"We have resisted publicity for 10 years," explains Warren

Schwerin, past club president and one of its founders. "We have never invited in any of the golf magazines or trade journals. It's not that we wanted to be exclusive, we just didn't think it was necessary. And the members have never been interested in publicity for themselves."

However, 10 years in the Vero Beach shadows is long enough. "It's now clear that we're an established part of the community and our members are very proud of what we've done," says Schwerin. What they have done is establish a highly successful, strictly nonprofit enterprise where members can play the game in its purest form and share the camaraderie that goes with it.

The idea for a club like RedStick goes back to 1998. A handful of avid golfers and part-time residents at one of Vero Beach's gated communities had become frustrated with the difficulty in getting multiple early-Saturday morning tee times for their group, as well as with other



The clubhouse dining room where members dine informally at a common table.



The library, reminiscent of those in historic clubs, is filled with books discussing every aspect of golf.

“country club” rules. Wouldn’t it be nice, they mused, if they could play golf anytime without having to make a starting time – and to play on a course where they could walk with a caddie and just enjoy the pure experience of golf at a relaxed pace in the company of others who also loved the game?

Could such a concept be achieved? Well, yes. But to accommodate the relaxed play with no starting times would require that the membership be severely limited. At first they determined that number to be 250; and, therefore, membership could be offered to only one in a family.

They realized they would have to start from the ground

up, literally, to build such a club. It would mean plenty of hard work – as it turned out, even more than they had anticipated. And it would indeed be expensive. But again, yes, they believed they could do it and that it would be well worthwhile.

Besides Schwerin, the founders included Tony Woodruff, the current club president, and Dick Kreidler, Rich Gordon and Fritz Blaicher. Under their leadership a groundswell of support – albeit slowly at first – came alive.

Actually, the RedStick experience has turned out exceedingly well for everyone involved. Open from mid-October to mid-May, the club has remained true to its



Another view of the library. Several of the nation's foremost clubs were used as a model for RedStick, including the Nantucket Golf Club and Ocean Forest at Sea Island, Ga.



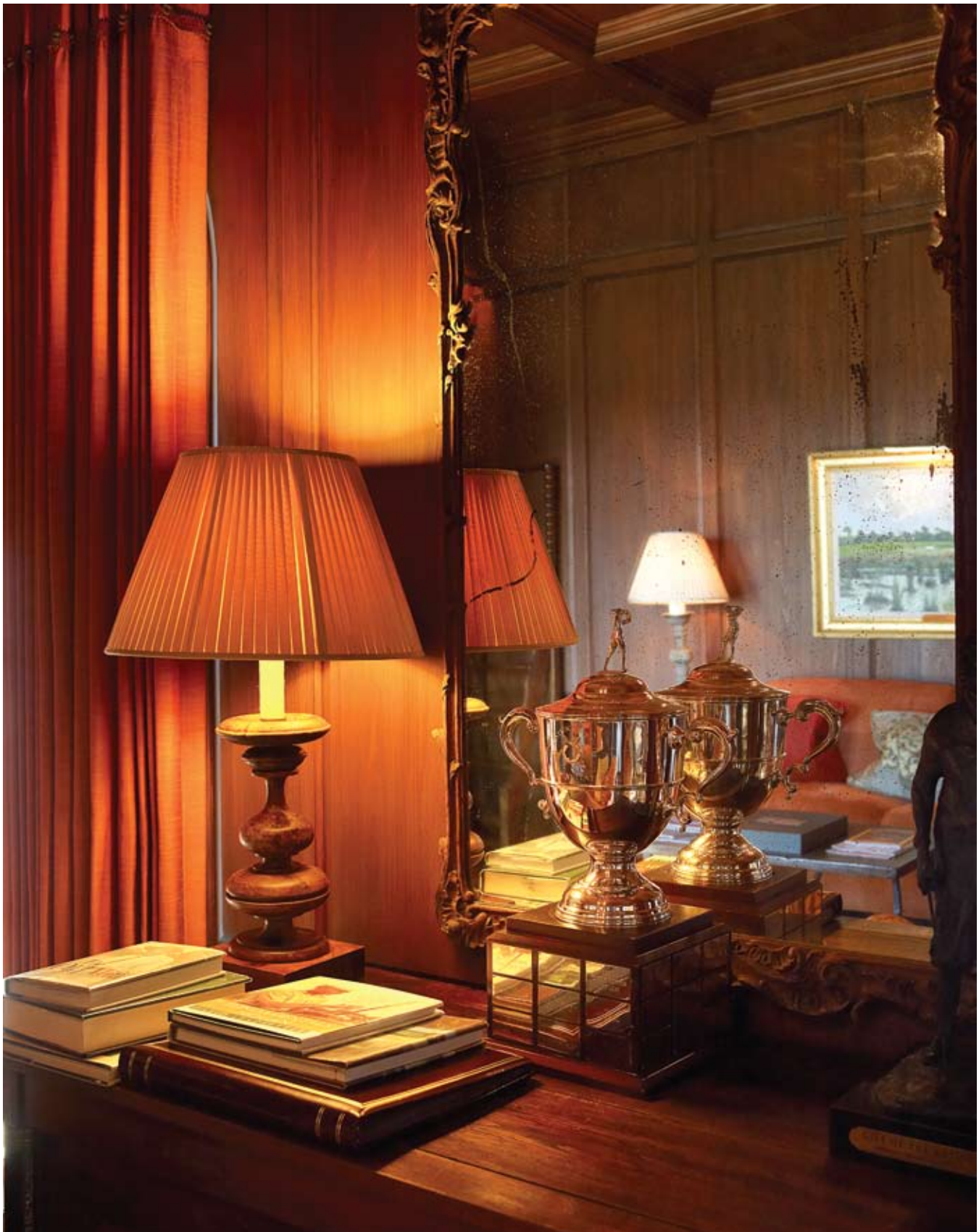
A lounging area in the clubhouse. "The basis for membership is very simple," says co-founder and former president Warren Schwerin. "You must love golf, and you must be courteous."

original mission of existing purely for the love of golf, and has been able to invite additional members beyond the original limit. "It is a golf club period; no pool, no tennis courts, no cottages, no dinners," Schwerin says. "And because of the frequency of play, it became apparent after the first year or two that the club could handle 275 members rather than 250."

The club hosts two golf events each week for all members: on Saturdays play begins at 9 a.m. and is followed by a cookout; on Wednesdays members have lunch first and then play. In addition, there is a game for senior members, and another for members with handicaps of 10 and under.

The course has four tee placements: Black, 7,208 yards; Blue, 6,539 yards; White, 6,154 yards; and Red, 5,513 yards. Most members play from the Blue tees, but senior members have the option of playing from the White tees and reducing their handicap by two strokes. The fairways are Bermuda grass and the course is unique in that it is the only golf course remaining in the state of Florida with bent grass greens.

Membership is by invitation only. "The basis for membership is very simple," Schwerin explains. "You must love golf, and you must be courteous. There are no social or business criteria. Many of our people have had important



RedStick's Spring Invitational Trophy is on display in the library.



The club's "suggestion box" is located strategically on the 4th hole. The Florida chapter of U.S. Seniors holds the finals of its annual four-day tournament and its awards ceremony at RedStick.

careers, but no one is interested in hearing about them. That's not what is important here. What is important is that we have a wonderful golf experience."

Schwerin is, understandably, reluctant to discuss the club's members, but he will say that, "We have members with diverse backgrounds; that is, not all are investment bankers. And not all are from John's Island." In fact, less than half the members are J.I. residents. Many have homes in other affluent communities including Windsor and Orchid, and about 20 percent do not live in Vero



View of the 7th hole. "RedStick is a golf club, period; no pool, no tennis courts, no cottages, no dinners," says Warren Schwerin.

Beach at all. "These members are still working and they have yet to buy property here. And so they spend only a couple of weeks a year in Vero Beach."

However, one common denominator does exist: for a member, RedStick is his second or third club. Besides belonging to other golf clubs in Vero Beach, members also hail from some of the most prestigious clubs in other parts of the country.

Schwerin points proudly to the fact that RedStick has 52 members who belong to the USGA Senior Golf

Association and that the Florida chapter of the U.S. Seniors holds the final of its annual four-day tournament, along with the awards ceremony, at RedStick. Clubs hosting the other days of play in the tournament are Riomar, Bent Pine and John's Island.

The club was named for the RedStick tribe, whose warriors carried red sticks into battle. They were members of the Creek Nation and trading partners of the Seminoles.

The club lies on a sand ridge that runs through the

REPRINTED WITH
PERMISSION
©VERO BEACH
MAGAZINE



The clubhouse was designed by Mark P. Finlay Architects. Just under half the members live in John's Island; others have homes in Windsor and Orchid. About 20 percent do not live in Vero Beach at all.

county, and its property was originally the site of a sawmill that operated in the early 1900s. It was owned by two Indian River County pioneers, Walter F. Graves and his brother J. Edwin Graves, who came down from the panhandle of Florida to start a lumber business. Later they became prominent in the citrus industry.

In 1999, RedStick's founders bought the land from Windsor developer Galen Weston, who had initially intended to use it for the beachside development's equestrian center. Rees Jones, one of America's most renowned golf course architects, was tapped to design RedStick's links-style course. A links course usually refers to a seaside course that has no trees and, because of the proximity to water, plenty of wind. However, designing a links

golf experience was only one of RedStick's demands.

"We had many discussions with Jones about designing RedStick as a walking course that its members could continue to walk even as we aged," Schwerin recalls. "Our model was not to build a world-famous course, but to build a wonderful golf experience for our members to enjoy."

Today, members applaud Jones for creating exactly what they had in mind. They also give credit to Golf Course Superintendent Scott Bell, who was there from the earliest days of the course's construction, for his understanding of the site's terrain. Schwerin points to the stark beauty of the course with its sweeping fairways of Bermuda grass, rimmed with oaks, loblolly and slash pines that were planted by the thousands. "We have trees around the



Rees Jones, RedStick's designer, is an honorary member.

course but none on the golf experience," Schwerin comments, "and we excavated about 60 acres of land to use for fill on the course, which gave us six ponds. Because we're on the sand ridge, we are 38 feet above sea level and so we always get a wonderful breeze. That too is part of the links experience – the wind blowing off the water."

He adds that because of Rees' design and effective placement of berms, "at our opening game in October we had 104 members play and no team ever saw another foursome."

Although members did not intend for the course to be "world famous," it should be noted that RedStick is listed on Rees Jones' website among his "most notable original designs," along with such courses as Nantucket Golf Club.

Nantucket, in fact, was used as a model, not only for the course but for the club in general. In addition, many fine aspects that make RedStick outstanding were "borrowed" from some of the most exclusive clubs in the country. "Because we started with a clean sheet, we were able to look at some of the best clubs in America, decide what features we liked and incorporate them into the design of RedStick," says Schwerin. Besides Nantucket, these clubs included Seminole Golf Club in Juno; Ocean Forest at Sea Island, Ga., and Castle Pines in Castle Rock, Colo. And so, some of their best features are found today at RedStick – on its course, in the locker rooms, in the lounging area and in the dining room.

The 15,000-square-foot clubhouse was designed by Mark P. Finlay Architects. Completed in 2001, the design was inspired by Addison Mizner's Florida architecture, which combines both Mediterranean Revival and Spanish Colonial styles. The stone, tile and stucco building features wide archways and roomy porches overlooking the lakes and fairways.

The interior is elegant and warm with plenty of masculine touches. The mantelpieces above the club's two fireplaces, the lockers and the bar are oak, as are the wide plank flooring and the ceilings. Original paintings – many of famous fairways – decorate the walls and include one of RedStick's signature 17th hole, painted by golf landscape artist Linda Hartough. Historical photos are also



A rain shelter on the course. The club's six retention ponds are full of fledgling bass, and bobcats and Florida panthers still roam the land. So, unfortunately, do destructive wild pigs.

displayed throughout the clubhouse, including a series in the dining room of the Graves family sawmill and lumbering business. The dining room is informal, with a long oak table as its most prominent feature. Its ambience is designed to promote camaraderie and fellowship.

The club serves breakfast and lunch only, and both are extremely casual meals with an emphasis on simple fare and “comfort food.” Reservations are definitely not required. And while RedStick exists for golf, some members come just to enjoy lunch, or to play bridge or maybe fish in one of the ponds.

The club has proven to be a good steward of its natural environment. For every acre of wetland that was disturbed – by permission of the St. John’s Water Management District – the club placed five acres into perpetual conservation easement. Traditionally, only two acres go into such protection. Also, during development, native scrub jay and gopher turtle habitats were preserved.

RedStick is now taking steps, through mulching and other landscape techniques employed in the rough, to reduce water usage by 25 percent. “This is all part of

our program of water conservation undertaken with the blessing of the water management district,” says Schwerin. Today, the six retention ponds are full of fledgling bass, and several eagles are among the birds that fly over the course along with an array of other indigenous and migrating species. Bobcats and Florida panthers roam RedStick’s land, as do unwelcomed and often destructive wild pigs.

Schwerin was the first club president, serving for over nine years; Tony Woodruff assumed the office in 2007. Peter Miller serves as general manager and Peter McDonald is the head professional. A native of Ireland, McDonald also serves as head pro at Shoreacres Golf Club in Lake Bluff, Ill., during the summer. Likewise, Jason Jeffries, the club’s head teaching professional, goes to Maidstone Golf Club in East Hampton, N.Y., when RedStick closes for the season.

RedStick has six additional golf professionals on its staff. “The young pro’s traditionally move through the PGA system and RedStick is now part of the network of fine clubs attracting them,” Schwerin explains. “We would like to keep them here, but it’s our obligation not to stand



Inspired by Addison Mizner's Florida architecture, the stone, tile and stucco clubhouse features wide archways and roomy porches overlooking the lakes and fairways.

REPRINTED WITH
PERMISSION
©VERO BEACH
MAGAZINE

in their way. When they leave, they go to a better job and we're very proud of this." Fortunately, there is no problem filling vacancies. "We get hundreds of applications each year and it's easy to see why. This is Florida, and they can play every day. And," he adds, "We have a reputation at RedStick for a friendly, easygoing membership."

Most members walk the course with a caddie. Carts are available, but members who choose to use them are also accompanied by a caddie. Some 60 to 65 caddies serve the club, and their hiring and training is outsourced to Caddie Master Enterprises Inc., the same company that provides caddies to Augusta National, Pinehurst and Pebble Beach. Over half of the caddies are hired locally, from Palm Bay to Ft. Pierce; the rest are either professional caddies whom Caddie Master assigns to other clubs when RedStick closes, or are assistant golf professionals who work at northern clubs in the summer.

"Something unique about RedStick is that our caddies can play after 2 p.m.," says Schwerin. "Many are scratch or low handicap players and they love having the opportunity to play every day." The club provides its caddies with their own building equipped with showers, television and other amenities. "These are just some of the reasons they tend to stay with us. Six were recently awarded 10-year pins." Another of RedStick's unique features is that it provides off-site housing for members of the clubhouse staff, most of whom come from Ireland, and for junior members of the golf staff.

"The club is in an enviable financial position with no debt and a substantial endowment to support future capital improvements. RedStick provides a full line of services supported by competitive dues," Schwerin explains.

Besides being a good steward of its money and environment, RedStick is also a good neighbor. Through a charitable foundation, the club contributes to such organizations as the Dasie Hope Center in Wabasso, which today serves 125 children in a free after-school program. Schwerin, who was instrumental in getting the center started in 2001, continues to serve on its board of directors.

However, it was during the hurricanes of 2004 that RedStick's outreach really excelled. "We realized that the people who lived in Wabasso were suffering terribly, so we brought water and ice in from Bridgeport, Connecticut, and ran an operation parallel to FEMA, distributing it to the people in the area." The Allen Chapel AMC Church, located about a mile from the club on 85th Street, was another beneficiary; RedStick donated funds to the church to replace its steeple, which was lost in one of the storms.

The club continues to offer its members the best in terms of facility upgrades. For example, in 2007 it added a state-of-the-art training facility to its practice range. It is equipped with such training aids as the J.C. Video Training System, which allows a member to tee up a ball, hit it and immediately view his swing from three different angles on a 42-inch split-screen monitor.

Members can also take advantage of technology used in the K-Vest System. This teaching aid uses 3-D sensors to analyze a golf swing, automatically identifying swing faults from set-up through impact. The training facility is further outfitted with FlightScope 3-D Doppler Tracking Radar, which tracks a golf ball for analysis of distance traveled, amount of slice or draw, and number of revolutions per second.

While the equipment can be used in conjunction with a lesson from one of RedStick's teaching pro's, it is not necessary. As Head Professional Peter McDonald puts it, "One of the greatest benefits to a member is that he can walk into the training facility and have at his fingertips the latest technologically sophisticated aids that are very easy to use."

The addition of new technology, the refinement of already high-quality conservation methods, and the inevitable turnover in the professional staff are aspects that are constant to the dynamic club. But as long as golf stays the *raison d'être* – as it most certainly will – RedStick will persist in upholding and fulfilling the dream of its founders.

Dick Kreidler, one of those founders, probably expressed it best in a poem he wrote in 2000, shortly after RedStick opened. It hangs prominently in the clubhouse for all – original members and newer members alike – to read and appreciate:

*Golf is about skill and good fortune at times...
And repeating mistakes and errant bounces at others.
Golf is about success, mediocrity, or failure with
each shot.
It is about our sense of adventure and willingness...
To smile at the challenge and laugh at adversity.
Golf is a reflection of our personality and reveals
character, our confidence and grit.
Golf is a wonderful tradition of honest competition
and camaraderie.
It is a walk in the park, a day in nature.
It is a special place in time with friends.
Enjoy the game for all that it is... the walk, old friends
and new friends.
That's why we're here at RedStick. ☘*