



The 'Clubhouse' is coming

By JAN MOORE



Hackers is planning a multi-million dollar expansion.

Plans are finalized for
42,000-square-foot complex

With three years of market research under their belts and all of the other necessary pieces in place, the owners of Hackers Golf Park in Statesboro have made it official - construction of a new 42,000 square foot family entertainment center adjacent to the existing park will begin this fall with completion slated for the summer of 2010.

"When we opened the original golf practice range facility in 1998, it was always our intent to continue adding to the park," said Darin Van Tassell, Hackers' owner. "We are now poised to initiate our most aggressive addition to date. Our latest effort constitutes what is likely to be one of the single largest private entertainment additions in the history of southeast Georgia. After several years of strategic planning and design work, we are ready to build the Clubhouse."

The plans for the new multi-million dollar facility are nothing short of extraordinary. The Clubhouse will have 24 state-of-the-art bowling lanes, an additional private bowling area with four lanes, a 3,000 square foot laser tag area, a full service restaurant, snack bar, an arcade gaming area with ticket redemption, a video gaming area, as well as a few "mini" bowling lanes. Van Tassell said the Clubhouse will have a Disneyland feel in a way.

"When you walk into the front door, there will definitely be a wow factor," he said. "There will be huge digital screens behind the bowling lanes. We can put any video and audio that we want on them, from football games to concerts. It will almost feel like a laser light show inside. And the furnishings will be very, very nice and contemporary."

According to Van Tassell, Jerry Merola and Frank Seninsky of Amusement Entertainment Management (AEM) were hired to perform a market feasibility study in June 2007. They were asked to evaluate the Statesboro-Bulloch County market to determine if a family entertainment center would be a viable business and to determine what attractions would be the most profitable and popular for such a center in this market.

"AEM carefully analyzed the demographic composition of the Statesboro-Bulloch county region, and compared the results to regional markets throughout the country," Van Tassell said. "Their findings have been based upon actual performance data gathered from hundreds of entertainment based centers, adjusted for market factors prevalent within the region. AEM rated this project as having appropriate return to warrant development."

Seninsky said he has made a few trips to Statesboro since being retained by the ownership group in 2007. "Our feasibility study said this would work," he said. "This is going to be a really special bowling anchored facility that doesn't serve alcohol resulting in a little different model. We think it will be very successful." Seninsky gave some very interesting statistics that many may not be aware of. "One of the greatest growth segments in entertainment is bowling," he said. "It is estimated that 70 million Americans bowl at least one game a year. In challenging times people are very discerning about spending money. This will be an excellent value."

Jaime Riggs, executive director of the Statesboro Convention and Visitors Bureau said the addition of the Clubhouse will give her organization another avenue to solicit sports based events to the Bulloch County area. "We have a number of baseball and softball tournaments that are held here each year out at Mill Creek," she said. "Now we can go after the bowling segment for their tournaments. Also, the Georgia Special Olympics has a bowling facet that we have not been able to host. Now we can bid for that as well. It will open up a myriad of opportunities for us. It just adds to the whole package of Statesboro and Bulloch County that we present to potential visitors and convention planners."



Darin Van Tassell, co-owner of Hackers Golf Park, stands atop a mountain at Hackers.

Peggy Chapman, executive director of the Development Authority of Bulloch County and president of the Statesboro-Bulloch County Chamber of Commerce, said the 60 full-time equivalent jobs created by the Clubhouse will have a similar impact to a very large retail operation opening here.

"The resulting job creation will be great for this area," she said. "In times like these, the addition of new jobs for our residents is a great thing. Also, I think it is going to be like Splash in the Boro in that it will provide another source of entertainment for families and businesses. It will be another reason to come to Bulloch County, and that is a benefit to all of us. This is going to be spectacular."

With the addition of the Clubhouse, Hackers will have four separate entertainment areas covering 30 acres - the golf practice range, Twin Falls miniature golf course, the ATEC batting cage facility, and the Clubhouse. Hackers has been named in the "Top 100 Golf Ranges in America" by Golf Range Magazine for the past 9 years.

Van Tassell, an associate professor in the Center for International Studies and the Department of Political Science at Georgia Southern, is known as one of the leading figures in the international baseball community recently serving as the competition director for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. The former Georgia Southern baseball player was inducted into the Georgia Southern Hall of Fame in 2006.

"The Clubhouse is going to have the feel of an old minor league baseball park with a lot of brick and wrought iron," he said. "I want people to feel like they are being entertained, and to really enjoy their surroundings. And of course, I love baseball, so that is why we tried to incorporate some of that feel."

Van Tassell said the next phase of the park that is currently on the drawing board is a par three golf course. "Who is to say when that will happen, but it is our plan to do that one day." Van Tassell said he hopes to have renderings of the exterior and interior of the Clubhouse available on the Hackers website in the next few days. The website address is www.hackersgolfpark.net

Van Tassell is married to Netra Van Tassell, and they have two sons, Whitt and Payne.

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