

Makeover

Royal

Princess Anne's eye appeal enhanced by focusing on the traditional, while adding a touch of the dramatic

by Jim Ducibella

Tim Liddy probably never even hears the best compliments. It's an observation made in passing by a Princess Anne Country Club member who has played Liddy's remade golf course regularly month after month that he still finds something new and exciting each time.

It is members who had gone away now returned because they've heard there's something special happening at this club just a boogie board ride from the Atlantic.

It's the guy who sits at the bar of his buddy's club and proclaims that his course makes yours look like a vegetable garden, quickly followed by swearing, "And that ain't the gin talkin', either."

It's ... well, you get the idea.

"It's hard for me to believe that he took the same piece of ground and made a completely different golf course out of it," says member Les Watson.

Watson had a hand in Liddy coming to Virginia Beach. Friends with Pete and Alice Dye through their work on Tournament Players Club of Virginia Beach – now Virginia Beach National Golf Club –

Watson asked the Dyes to recommend a bright talent who would give them a first-class piece of work at a price that fit their budget.

Their answer was Liddy, a 1981 graduate of Ball State University in Indiana, who has degrees in landscape architecture and environmental design. For the last 15 years, he has run his own company out of the very Virginia-sounding hamlet of Yorktown, Ind.

FREQUENT, ENGAGED VISITOR

Liddy met with the club's course redesign committee more times than one can count. When they suggested that he stand in front of the entire membership and run through his plans and take questions and suggestions, he said fine.

"He did it all," Princess Anne president Joe Taylor says. "You couldn't ask everyone to do some of the things we asked Tim to do. He always wanted to know what it was that we wanted."

It took a year, but Liddy fashioned something at Princess Anne that defies labeling.

Was it a restoration? To some extent.



One of architect Tim Liddy's most striking changes came at the seventh hole.

CHRIS CRUMLEY

“It doesn’t sound like much, but moving one thing up six inches and something else down six inches is a big deal. It takes time and patience, but the results are worth it.”

— Tim Liddy

Was it a renovation? To a greater extent.

Was it a revelation? It was to its members.

“We told him that we wanted a whole new golf course, a whole new experience, as well as the elements we loved in our old golf course,” Taylor says. “He exceeded our expectations.”

Liddy is quick to deflect the credit back to the Princess Anne membership, which he says provided him with something course designers find increasingly rare these days.

“The golf course was first and foremost on their list of things to do,” he says. Princess Anne member and VSGA board member Gary Beck represented the membership and was instrumental in doing work in conjunction with the redo. “Not houses. Not a resort. It was all about the golf course. I knew I had the opportunity to create something special.”

DISCERNING TOUCH

Members say he did it not by beating more length out of the course. It measured 6,000 yards when he started; it measured 6,062 yards from the tips when it reopened in May. Rather, he did it with subtle flavoring and a dash of old-fashioned.

Once flat fairways now feature gentle rolls and pleasing contours. There are bunkers that not only come into play but add tricky bits of intrigue to the hole, especially for the uninitiated.



CHRIS CRIMLEY

The par-3 11th hole offers a view of Linkhorn Bay.

“You try to introduce deception,” Liddy says. “There’s a bunker on No. 1 on the left that’s made to look like it’s right on the green; actually, it’s quite far away. There’s a bunker on No. 10 that makes the hole look a lot longer than it actually is.”

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Sometimes, he just put things back the way they were. Take the seventh hole. Before a 1987 renovation, the hole was played toward water, with a tee shot over one of several roads that cut through the course. Perhaps with insurance in mind, the ’87 renovation led to the hole being reversed.

The daredevil in Liddy thought playing tee shots over roads was one of the course’s endearing features. He put the hole back to its original configuration, but elevated the tee so that it was almost impossible not to fly the road.

Originally, No. 10 was a challenging par 4, while No. 11 was a short par 4 that was, at best, ordinary. Liddy transformed the duo into a 562-yard par 5 and a 192-yard par 3 to open the inward half.

“He was here probably 30 or 40 times,” Watson says. “That’s an uncommon number of visits by a course architect. But he wanted it right, and he spent so much time making sure that the course was visually appealing.”

SCENIC STROLL

It helps, Liddy says, that he’s adopted Dye’s aversion to spreading himself too thin.

“I’m truly hands-on; I only focus on one or two golf courses a year,” he explains. “When it’s done, it’s my interpretation of what needed to be done, no one else’s. That’s what made this kind of project so special.”

What about Liddy’s greens? They’re exacting and challenging, without being discouraging; fast and curvy without teetering into funhouse.

“All of the members told me they wanted ‘interesting’ greens,” Liddy says, chuckling. “With a short golf course like Princess Anne,



Players face a challenging shot to a sloping surface at the par-3 15th hole.

CHRIS CRUMLEY

you've really got to focus on greens and make them interesting or else you don't have much of a golf course."

Liddy, a protégé of Dye's for 18 years, reached into yesteryear to

make some of it happen.

The 11th green is classic redan, wider than it is deep, and angled diagonally away from the teeing ground.



MATT BOUCE

Bunkering at the par-4 third hole plays to the layout's strategic element.

Meanwhile, the 12th green is formed in traditional punchbowl style, sitting below the level of the fairway, with the sides shaped to throw slightly errant shots back onto the putting surface.

"The golf course has a few iconic images now that I don't think it had before we started," Liddy says. The layout is scheduled to host the 2009 VSGA Senior Amateur Championship. "There's some distinct, dramatic landscape, something that builds as you go through your round."

In addition to the golf course, Liddy even threw in a freebie: A catchy phrase members use to describe their new experience.

"He told us that he wanted to make it a round here like a 'walk in the park,'" Taylor says. "And that's exactly the phrase a lot of us use when we're asked what's it's like to play Princess Anne these days."

Author Jim Ducibella recently retired after 26 years at The Virginian-Pilot in Norfolk. He is the author of the book, Par Excellence: A Celebration of Virginia Golf, and is presently working on another golf-related book.