

High Cliff Owners Bringing It All Together

By Judy Dixon Hebbe
For the Times-Villager

What makes two men, who are passionate about golf and own a golf course that has been named best in the Fox Valley for five years in a row, purchase a restaurant whose previous owner went bankrupt?

"We thought if it was run differently, it would do well," said Dan Ripple, who not only owns High Cliff Golf Course with Jeff Luniak, but, with his partner, is now remodeling and changing the original High Cliff Supper Club.

The pair purchased the golf course in March 2013 and now host leagues on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of each week. They also run a youth program on Tuesdays and Thursdays for different age groups. At a recent youth tournament they sponsored, they invited youth players from Butte des Morts, North Shore and Ridgeway golf clubs to compete. The High Club foursomes beat the competition.

With the purchase of the restaurant in February, the partners have upgraded and renovated the kitchen, remodeled the building into two ballrooms, a pro-shop and The Pub, which has its own kitchen that serves a sandwich, wraps, hamburger and pizza menu for golfers and visitors. Fish fries are also offered on Friday.

"Golf is not just the game. The camaraderie of the group and the opportunity to interact and have fun recounting the game with friends after finishing the course is all part of the game," said Ripple. "The Pub offers a casual, relaxed post-game atmosphere.

Ripple is quick to point out that "This is not just for golfers. We'd like to have neighbors or visitors to High Cliff Park, who would like a sandwich or a fish fry, to also come in."

To retain and enhance the banquet and business, they gutted the upper level, replacing the dark wooden entry doors with glass and metal doors and removing the various levels that separated bar and dining areas, the fireplace and separating walls, leaving one large room that can seat up to 300 at round tables and more at straight tables. The room has windows on three sides and offers a panoramic view of the golf course, the Niagara escarpment and, to the south, High Cliff Park.

"You won't find an event venue around here that has a better view than this," Ripple said.

The bar from the upstairs dining room was moved into the downstairs ballroom, which seats 250 at round tables. It also has access to The Pub. The renovated kitchen can serve dinners in both the upstairs and downstairs ballroom at the same time. Both ballrooms have dance floors.

Ripple and Luniak have rented their kitchen to Cliff View Catering, owned and operated by Kristin Vanden Wymelenberg, who not only provides service to their events but also runs her catering business from that kitchen. The threesome came together with the same sense of community, focusing on using local farmers and processors for produce and meats. Vanden Wymelenberg has a staff of about 30, including chefs, a specialized pastry chef and servers.

The partners want to make High Cliff the “go to” place for events. The Lodge, the former pro-shop, has been remodeled and can accommodate up to 40 people for meetings, reunions and receptions.

Dubbed “The Bridal Suite” by the owners because it is where the bookings for bridal showers take place and where the bride and her attendants gather for breakfast, mimosas and preparations for the major event on the patio or one of the ballrooms.

“Whether it is a birthday party, reunion, wedding or a corporate meeting, employee recognition dinner or a nonprofit fundraiser, we have a comfortable space for all size events,” Luniak said.

He envisions corporations bringing their sales personnel or managers in for a meeting and then taking the latter part of the day for a round of golf. To accommodate such groups, they have installed a six acre, nine-hole foot golf course that is played with a soccer ball.

“For the person who only plays golf once a year, this is a fun alternative,” said Ripple. “Anyone can kick a ball.”

This winter the lower ballroom will be outfitted with a miniature putting course and two golf simulators, which will offer players the opportunity to hone their skills. A putting league will be held on Thursdays. The Pub will remain open Thursdays through Sundays. This winter they are planning to have taco Thursdays, fish Fridays, home cooked meals on Saturdays and made-to-order breakfasts on Saturday and Sundays.

Next year the patio off The Pub and the lower ballroom will be reconstructed to provide a garden atmosphere for outdoor weddings.



Submitted photo

Dan Ripple (left) and Jeff Luniak (right) who own High Cliff Golf Course, are now remodeling and changing the original High Cliff Supper Club.