



The redefining of the 21st Century country club continues...as the 'new community', a family-centered meeting place, where the 'experience' the intangibles, the green options and sustainability are what matters.

And with the redefinition of 'going green', clubs are being challenged to stand out as environmentally conscious leaders in their communities as they recruit and strive to retain club members, differentiating themselves from the competition.

That's precisely what happening at Bella Collina Towne and Golf Club in San Clemente, CA, where there's a team of people who really want to make a difference.

Bella Collina's 27 holes straddle the canyons, adjacent to Camp Pendleton, one of the U.S. Marines' major training bases in the western U.S., and a stone's throw from the Pacific Ocean.

"Country clubs have always had a stigma because of their selective memberships, and the oh, so many perceptions people have of a private club really is," explains co-owner John Fornaro. "We've been viewed as water wasters, people who dump chemicals and fertilizers into our ground water and streams, and of course, a bastion of exclusivity.

"Yes, clubs have had a bad reputation, and while some of that may have been true, it is changing," added Fornaro.

REDEFINING THE COUNTRY CLUB

Bella Collina Searches for Sustainability

COVER STORIES BY DAVE WHITE

“We’re either part of the problem or part of the solution and we’re offering solutions at Bella Collina.”

The ownership group – partners John Fornaro and Mark Zane – took over the club, on the brink of bankruptcy about a year ago, with a commitment to meet the demands of today’s private club members.

People historically joined private clubs because of their exclusiveness...the privacy. “That’s changed today,” Fornaro commented. “Members are seeking experiences and ‘going green’ is part of the experience.

“The focus has been to build up the club’s membership by offering what many younger families and members want in a private club today...meaning a family-centered club, and a variety of programs and events for family members.”

“Businesses, to be successful today, must be aware of these things and it’s also being a responsible business within the community,” Fornaro said, “We’ve noticed a lot of newer younger members who really appreciate our efforts in going green. It’s caused a lot of positive attention in our area. Our goal really is to be a ‘green’ leader for private clubs in North America.”

And Bella Collina now is experimenting that’s been developed by SolarDrive in cooperation with Club Car. “We’re expecting that we’ll conserve energy and ultimately using a solar option, we may need fewer carts,” Fornaro explained.

General manager Jim Shumate agrees: “The positive effect of going green has been substantial. We’ve received both local and national press because of it, which in turn has driven membership.

“We added 120 new golf members, which in our current economy is amazing. Many of our newer, younger members [with families] were especially drawn to the club for the green reason, and this demographic is the future of the club industry,” he explained. In other words, younger members have different expectations than some of the club’s older members.

Much has happened since the club embarked on its campaign in the last year. Everywhere you look, something good is happening, like for example on the golf course. And as might be expected, water has been a driving impetus for change.

The ‘green effect’ has come into play in many areas,” says Jay Pesicka, Bella Collina’s course superintendent. “We’ve removed approximately 20 acres of turf surrounding the tee complexes and other out-of-play areas. It’s been replaced with wood chips, some of which we’ve purchased and some generated on-site by chipping regular tree trimmings and bushes that have been removed.

SEE COVER STORY - PAGE 96

BELLA COLLINA MARKET FARM ATTRACTS AND EDUCATES MEMBERS

What do you do with a south-facing hillside in sunny southern California?

If it’s at San Clemente’s Bella Collina Towne and Golf Club, reclaim it for VR Green Farm’s market garden, a sustainable farm concept that is growing over 30 Italian heirloom vegetables and herbs on Bella Collina land.

It’s all part of the push to make the private country club an environmentally responsible member of the San Clemente community. Development of the market garden dovetails neatly with other programs happening at the Bella Collina.

For VR Green Farms, it all began innocently enough about a year ago, says owner Nic Romano of nearby Dana Point, CA.

Romano, a marketing person and photographer for



SEE BELLA COLLINA - PAGE 98



Solar Carts Becoming of Age For the Private Club Industry

“Make hay while the sun shines,” an old adage, for sure. And that’s beginning to happen for both private clubs and solar solution companies.

Take, for instance, Sebonack Golf Club in Southampton, NY...the first course in the U.S. to go solar with its golf carts. It wasn’t all that difficult a decision for Sebonack’s owner Michael Pascucci, one of the country most successful businessmen.

“One of our guys figured it out and said we were going to get our money back pretty easily,” says Pascucci, who sold a car-leasing business for \$700 million in 1997 and owns a television station serving the tri-state area.

“But even if the numbers weren’t as strong as they are, I still would have done it. The bottom line is this. It was the right thing to do.”

Bella Collina Towne and Golf Club in San Clemente, CA is also experimenting with the idea.

“We’ve adapted one of our Club Car carts, with the SolarDrive technology, to study just how well it operates in our environment. There certainly seems to be some benefits, not only with lower electricity costs, but it may show us that we can get along with fewer carts,” said partner John Fornaro. If this experiment pays off, Bella Collina will move to all solar carts.

Pascucci first experienced the system while playing golf with Ernie Els at the Bear’s Club in Jupiter, Fla., where Pascucci is also a member. “I played quite a few times with Ernie, and he always had his solar car with him. It was amazing to me that even on hazy days the car’s (energy capacity) stayed full” he says.

That helps explain Pascucci’s decision to power Sebonack’s entire Club Car fleet using the new SolarDrive system.

The solar-cell roof panels, designed and engineered by Danish firm, SolarDrive, significantly boost battery life and make it possible for the electric vehicles to capture and convert daylight into sufficient energy to power them all year-round, even on cloudy days.

Because the golf cars charge while they are being driven, they are more efficient than regular electric golf cars, and Sebonack’s not faced with having to rescue stranded golfers because of a drained battery.

It’s also estimated that the golf club will reduce carbon emissions by at least 6.5 tonnes per year as a result of the fleet’s reduced power consumption from the grid.

The solar-paneled roofs, fitted to the club’s existing Club Car fleet, will also lead to financial savings for the club. SolarDrive estimates that the consumption of grid electricity by the fleet will be reduced by between 50-75 percent and that the cars’ battery life will be virtually doubled.

“Power costs are very expensive here on Long Island and are getting more expensive around the world,” Pascucci says. “Why not take advantage of the free solar power we have on earth?”

But reducing the charging requirements for the club’s 40 golf cars and lowering its electric bill, isn’t the only reason Pascucci invested in the solar canopies, which are sold as an option on Club Car golf cars and can be retrofitted to any make of golf car.

“I think it’s really a positive thing for our members and their guests to see that they’re riding around on the sun’s power and reducing their carbon footprint. It makes a statement,” Pascucci added.

The system is now also being used on the 205-car fleet at the Jockey Club Kay Said Chua public course in Hong Kong and other clubs across the country are beginning to look at solar alternatives.

Other companies, including Solar Carts of Coconut Creek, FL are also developing solar initiatives.

“The advantages to retrofitting a golf cart with a solar product are relatively parallel across the board,” explains Solar Carts’ executive vice president Jon LoBello. “The electrical savings, battery life extension, and most importantly your carbon footprint reduction can all be achieved with a solar roof.

“We’ve dedicated ourselves to extensive market research, gathering valuable feedback from golf courses, the private sector, and myriad other target customers to hear what they have to say. With this new knowledge we believe we’ll be in a better position to build a product of value while at the same time building trust with its potential customers.

The company has undergone a complete redesign of its original prototype, the Sun Eagle™, but hasn’t announced a launch date for its new products.

No matter, change is happening, and solar golf carts on our courses are another important innovation that puts a thrust on “going green.” **BR**



KAU SAI CHAU GOLF COURSE, HONG KONG. THEIR FLEET OF 205 GOLF CARS IS EQUIPPED WITH SOLARDRIVE.



[COVER STORY] - 21

“We established a trial tee box using decorative gravel and wood chips. But our members favor the woods chips and even better, it’s available here.

“We’ve also used boulders to break up the larger areas, giving them height and definition,” he explained.

In the first year the turf removal and irrigation changes means savings of approximately \$30,000 in water costs for the club that’s using recycled water on the grass.

“The 30 and 60 foot irrigation sprinklers on the tee boxes are being replaced with smaller more precise 810 G Toro sprinklers. The smaller eight-foot heads apply water only to the tee surfaces, not the surrounding area reducing water usage by as much as 50 percent,” Pesicka added.

And the club has made big changes to its labor allotment saving both time and money. “We have scheduled a split shift for labor. Each shift is six hours, five days a week and a four-hour shift either Saturday or Sunday.

“We’re mowing in the afternoon when it is dry, and the operators experience less golf interruption, and I’ve seen an increase in mowing productivity and quality.” And golfers experience less disruption caused by the course machinery.



“I’ve assigned one staff member to be the wash man, who washes all the equipment, so the operators can maximize their mowing time. Essentially they mow until it is just a few minutes before quitting time and then park the machine until the wash man cleans it,” Pesicka explained.

“The overall effect to membership is still undefined but will probably be inconsequential because work is still being accomplished, only at a different time.

(maintenance staff) by focusing on areas where people play golf...not where they’re don’t play,” Fornaro added.

“We’re moving toward organic fertilizers and ultimately we’re saving hundreds of thousands of dollars using our water and electricity resources more efficiently.”

The changes don’t stop there. The pro shop is now using new “Eco Friendly” scorecards, printed using soy based inks and chemical free plating. “These scorecards are 100 percent environmentally friendly

We strive to be greener, healthier and leave as small as a carbon foot print as possible. Not all the projects we have implemented are that expensive, and in most cases we can calculate a very good return on investment. It’s just a matter of getting everyone – club members and our team – to think differently than they have in past.

“This means less time to mow, less fuel, only one person washing reducing the water used to wash machinery, a better quality of cut to the turfgrass resulting in healthier turf, removal of unneeded turf replaced with on-course generated wood trimmings, less water usage, less fertilizer being used, less grass being mowed and less everything associated with a mower,” Pesicka proclaimed.

“At the end of the day we win every which way by saving money on water and fertilizer, and we cut labor costs

and recognized by the Audubon International,” added Bella Collina’s director of golf and PGA professional Phil Vigil.

In the dining areas, menus are also “eco-friendly and we’ve used recycled wine barrels and converted them to new tables. They’re great for several reasons,” says GM Shumate.

“They’re obviously made from recycled material so no additional trees were needed for their construction. Because they’re wood and athe-



istically pleasing, we been able to cut our linen usage and cost by 75 percent.

“This also is an advantage in the long run since the linen we now won’t be using doesn’t need to be laundered, therefore reducing water and chemical usage from the cleaning process. The overall ‘look’ of the tables is beneficial and the uniqueness of the tables make them a great conversation piece,” Shumate continued.

Inside the clubhouse, 100-year old, embalmed olive trees, give a touch of greenery in various areas, along with the Italian artwork.

And on the outside grill patio area, refurbished of 20 year-old metal chairs and tables offer a ‘new’ look, thus saving the club the cost of new furniture.

“They look as good as new and we’re getting positive member feedback,” Shumate added.

On the way to self-sufficiency, Bella Collin and its members can now get their fresh vegetables from VR Green Farms’ market garden, perched on a south-facing hillside near the clubhouse and also featuring an increasingly popular members’ terrazzo (patio).

It’s also rapidly developing into a most interesting education center (*see Bella Collin Market Farm story on page 21*).

The first of the club’s wine plants now adorn some of the sunny garden areas near the clubhouse, and the club is also selling its used kitchen oil to a Temecula, CA firm that’s using its as fuel for tractors.

“It all comes back to the private club lifestyle and what we can do to make even more of an impact in our community,” Fornaro opined. “We’re looking at everything we do for our members and making the club’s offerings better with the purpose of being more and more sustainable while making a difference in our members’ lives everyday.”

“We strive to be greener, healthier and leave as small as a carbon foot print as possible. Not all the projects we have implemented are that expensive, and in most cases we can calculate a very good return on investment. It’s just a matter of getting everyone – club members and our team – to think differently than they have in past.”

What’s happening adds to Bella Collina’s mystic as an authentic Italian town, with town center as the draw for its community.

And that’s just one of the many outstanding benefits accruing to the club, its members and the community because of a strong on-going commitment to “going green” and self-sufficiency.

“Society has struggled over the years, and continues to do so even today with many disparate philosophies of what’s good and what’s right, but embracing green and sustainability today makes sense,” Fornaro commented.

A club can go green in many areas including water conservation (and many strides are being made by course superintendents and vendors in this area), less fertilizer and chemical use, vegetable and herb gardens, energy conservation and prudent waste management and recycling.

And development of a “green” plan can also help with a club’s recruitment and retention program as people seek alternatives closer to home for their recreation and socializing. And ultimately, recruiting and retaining members is the number one thrust for private clubs today.

“Embracing green gives the private club industry positive public relations and private clubs today can set the tone for the community and lead the way by introducing sustainability practices,” Fornaro commented. “Country clubs in particular, need to be viewed as ‘not a place where water is wasted’, but as a club community with a strong commitment to environmental values, the community and environmental leadership.

“We need to focus their energies on sustainability, do it well and earn positive media coverage. This counts for a lot and will help differentiate our clubs, because there’s a need to meet the demands of a new club generation and going green and sustainability is a significant part of that differentiation.

“Absolutely, it’s been a marketing success for both new and older members, who are prouder than ever to belong to Bella Collina,” Fornaro enthused.

“It a matter of for us in the private club industry to talk about what we’re doing...and what we plan on doing because at the end of the day sustainability and conservation also meets the bottom line,” Fornaro concluded.

He’s right. Green practices and sustainability save time, money and waste and few clubs and boards of directors will argue with that. **BR**

Partners John Fornaro and Mark Zane own Bella Collina Towne and Country Club, in San Clemente, CA. Fornaro is also the publisher of BoardRoom magazine.



many years, got an 'itch' to do something quite different. Initially, that something was a winery development in Temecula, CA. but that all went down the tubes, "in 2008 when everything went for a dive," related Romano. What happened three months later, happened by accident.

"Just by fluke, I met John Fornaro, a partner in the Italian golf course. We talked and thought, "A farm, why not? I visited Bella Collina and he said, 'take this land and go for it. Let's start on the hillside near the clubhouse where everyone can see it.'

"Now I'm Italian and I've always wanted to do something like this. We

brought in soil experts, water analysts and weather gurus...found out the soil is terrible, so told them to 'make it natural, no funny pellets, amend our soil in a good way.'

And that's what's happened. "The garden is in a wonderful location. Everything we're growing now is organic, although it won't be certified for another couple of years," Romano added.

"The garden's been a huge attraction. I honestly believe we've sold memberships to people who have never thought they'd belong to a country club, because of the garden and the experiences it provides," injected Fornaro, who's fostered the garden concept.

"We've germinated over 30 heirloom vegetable seeds from Italy, transplanted them in the Old World tradition, and planted them with our Italian ancestors in mind," Romano explained.

Then the word got out about the farm's Italian vegetables and fellow paisanos

called? with offers of vegetable seeds from their Italian gardens, first planted by their grandparents when they arrived in America.

Now we have Old World tomatoes from the Commardi family from Cupertino, frying peppers from the Infantino family (our cousin) in San Jose, and even a cactus from the Madella family of San Diego, whose first shoots originated in Sicily and were brought through Ellis Island in 1915.

In return, we've named them after the donors, which makes them now official "famiglia" vegetables and now available to our Centi' Anni (may you live to be 100) members for the first time commercially," Romano related.

Not incidentally, the space is more than just a garden; it's an enticing focal point for Bella Collina.

"One day last year, it was hot. I was working on the garden and wondering what my grandfather would do in the field. And I thought, 'He'd have a little arbor...made of stones, and a little shed.' A week later I got a stone artisan and friend of mine Roberto Romano (no relation) interested in doing something, and he drew up a design on a napkin.

"We purposely broke all the design rules as if a contadino (farmer) from the 1800s built his own shaded escape from the Mediterranean sun, stone by stone, and from material found on his farmland," said friend Roberto. "We gathered river rock from the golf course stream beds, pine timbers, and foundation rocks uncovered by the club's maintenance crew from the club's 27 golf holes."

"We invited our friends and neighbors of VR Green Farms to contribute stones so they will always be a part of the stone arbor," intoned farmer Nic. On a step leading to the grass edged arbor, the words 'Earth, Wind, Fire and Water' are engraved in Italian (Terra, Vento, Fuoco, and Acqua) in the stone...a subtle message to celebrate the natural elements of the farm.

There's also a stone fire pit, used for heat on cool evenings, in-garden cooking



demons, and for conversation starters. And the arbor is used as an educational classroom, artist studio, cooking school, small intimate weddings, and al fresco dining amidst rows of Italian vegetables and herbs.

"It's our showcase. Customers sit at the recycled wine barrel turned into tables, taste our veggies, sip wine and learn about our vegetables every week. We've become an education center with both kids and adult classes," says Romano.

"People are starving for this kind of education...and food. We've got kids who planted vegetables and come every week to check how their plants are doing. They're taking a real interest in how their food is grown and what it can mean to them.

"We show everyone how get soil ready, how to plant the seed, how to water the plants, and then take the veggies and cook them," he added.

"If we can buck this trend of obesity, we might not change the world, but we can help this generation of kids and get people to better understand their food and to eat better.

"There's 17,000 new products are introduced into our supermarkets every year, and most are designed for an eight year old to microwave. A lot of kids think food comes out of a white frozen box...that's a disaster," Romano opined.

VR Farms has grown very quickly at Bella Collina, so quickly in fact, that Romano knew he couldn't grow the business fast enough to meet demand. So he's "hooked in with a farm in Bell Garden, north toward Los Angeles. They're helping with my growth and I've got expert farmers with me as well."

VR Green Farms working the reclaimed land at Bella Collina is based on a community supported agriculture format (one of 3,500 CSAs in the United States), with limited production for members who purchase shares for three 16-week harvests planned for each year.

It's no surprise Romano is looking for more growing space, so much so that he's in serious discussions with a vendor to build five greenhouses at Bella Collina to grow five different vegetables hydroponically (without soil and a lot less water required).

Word has traveled fast about this venture in southern California. Some other clubs, including The Bridges in Rancho Sante Fe, a few minutes south of Bella Collina, already has a successful garden and winery going.

Others are figuring ways to get started but private club aren't the only ones interested. The Bridges sells to local buyers and Romano is getting phone calls from five-star hotels in the vicinity. They want what we've got and they want us on their menu. That's a plus," Romano exclaimed.

"I'm really good at marketing the concept, but we really need to get this one right," he concluded. Judging by the acceptance of Bella Collina members, it seems like Romano's doing a mighty fine job so far. **BR**



- SPA
- DINING
- KITCHEN
- HOUSEKEEPING
- FORMAL
- INFORMAL
- WRINKLE RESISTANT
- MOISTURE WICKING
- MEN AND WOMEN

Country Club Uniforms

*FREE SHIPPING on orders of \$200 or more.
VGM members receive a 5% discount.

1-877-473-5920
www.sharperuniforms.com