



Good to

PHOTOS BY RILEY MORNINGSTAR | THE JOURNAL

Gary Smith, vice chairman of the renovations task force, takes a swing off a tee box at Keowee Key's golf course in Salem on Monday.

Golf course renovation unveiled at Keowee Key

'It's a great piece of property with great lineage. Now it's met with a great infrastructure as well.

Even though it's taken longer than everyone wanted, it's a feat from the staff to get to this point.'

Richard Mandell
Keowee Key golf course architect

BY RILEY MORNINGSTAR
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SALEM — After two complete washouts and nearly two years without one of its primary amenities, Keowee Key unveiled its latest upgrade on Monday.

The community's golf course, originally designed by George Cobb in 1977, reopened for members after an 18-hole renovation project that first closed the course

down 21 months ago.

"It's been the most challenging thing I've done in my career, for sure," course superintendent Josh Sawyer said. "We basically rebuilt this golf course with the plan and opened up about 60 acres, and the biggest challenge was the storms we experienced in 2018. We not only had the challenge of rebuilding a course, but having storm

SEE COURSE, PAGE A6



Local dignitaries and Keowee Key residents stand at a tee box for the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the community's renovated 18-hole golf course on Monday.

FROM PAGE A1

events. It's been a challenge, and I've leaned on my staff a lot. They're the ones that deserve a lot of this praise."

The golf course renovation represents \$4 million of \$14 million spent on amenity upgrades at Keowee Key dating back to early 2018.

Sawyer alluded to the fact workers encountered heavy amounts of rainfall during the lengthy project.

Gary Smith, vice chairman of the renovations task force, said two particular periods of rain threw the projected opening date of October 2018 off.

"This is awesome. Driving in this morning and seeing pins on the greens — it's just a good feeling of the culmination of this to be finished," Smith said. "We had two complete washouts once the course was ready to be planted. Back in April we had 14 inches of rain that completely washed everything out, and then they got it ready to plant again and had another 8-inch storm, and it washed everything out. I can't say enough about our superintendent, Josh. I think a lot of other superintendents would've walked out. He never wavered and always had a real positive attitude."

During the 21 months the course was closed, Keowee Key director of golf Rion Holmes said his staff booked tee times at 30 different courses within an hour and a half of the community for members to play during the week.

"I'm thrilled to have been a part of this here," he said. "It's kind of a burden off our shoulders, because we were taking



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Seventy-two people sit in golf carts awaiting final course instructions Monday before playing on Keowee Key's golf course that was renovated to the tune of \$5 million.

golfers to other courses in the area."

The course renovations included work done to the course's greens and infrastructure.

"We did irrigation and drainage work," Holmes said. "Being able to spread our tees out and add tee placement and the dispersion of the tees so everyone can play equally. We switched the greens out to Royal Zoysia, and you walk out there and feel like you're on carpet. We've seen nothing but positive results with the consistency of roll, and it will only get better as the greens mature."

A negotiable cap of 33,500 rounds played per year is currently the course limit, Holmes said.

Cobb's son, George Cobb Jr., was among the dignitaries invited for the grand opening ceremony.

"He would've been very proud of how it's transitioned," Cobb Jr. said of his late father.

Community general manager Kevin McCracken said the package of \$14 million in renovations continues to make Keowee

Key a highly marketable area.

"This is huge. I think it's an important element of our whole amenity package for all of our members," McCracken said. "Even if they don't play golf, it's hugely important we have a successful golf course, because it's all part of the package. The person they're selling their house to at some point in the future might be interested in golf. It's really, really critical that we have a flourishing golf program of everything we do."

A total of 72 people played on Monday, with the men and women's winner each having

their picture taken as the course record holders.

Even though the project was thrown off of its initial opening date, it remained on budget.

For club members, they can now play on Keowee Key's historic golf course, which is embedded with upgrades that have spruced it up to a tee.

"It's a great piece of property with great lineage," course architect Richard Mandell said. "Now it's met with a great infrastructure as well. Even though it's taken longer than everyone wanted, it's a feat from the staff to get to this point."

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