

A WEDGE ISSUE
A Golf Performance Center coach guides a junior athlete at GPC's facility on Route 7.



Driving Greatness

BRINGING THE GAME OF GOLF WAY ABOVE PAR // **BY GEOFFREY MORRIS**

» IT'S NOT unusual for aspiring golfers to wander into the Golf Performance Center on Route 7 expecting to hit a bucket of balls after work. And why wouldn't they? From the road, the facility looks exactly like a beautifully manicured driving range.

But step inside, and it doesn't take long to realize this is not your typical hacker's hit shack. The interior has the look and feel of an upscale country club. There are weight rooms, learning bays, and bio-mechanical body suits. The staff is well-dressed, clean-cut, and

attentive. And the balls for the range? All-new, out-of-the-box Titleist Pro-V1s.

In case you hadn't guessed yet, The Golf Performance Center is for serious golfers only. "I found out the hard way that there is very little support for young athletes that want to play competitive golf," says Roger Knick, president and founder of the Golf Performance Center. "If you're a high-school kid playing football or basketball, there are robust training and nutrition programs at schools and camps. But if you're a kid that wants to play golf? There's nothing."

Knick knows this because he was that kid. As a college student in the early 1990s, Knick was a gifted athlete and played baseball competitively. He played his first round of golf down in North Carolina when he was 20 years old. He shot an 88. And

in less than a year, he was a scratch golfer.

After an injury forced him out of baseball, he focused his attention on golf, intent on becoming a professional athlete. He sought the instruction of some of the game's premier coaches. But he



EXPANDING THE CAMPUS The Golf Performance Center on Route 7 recently purchased the former Stonehenge Inn & Restaurant property across the street to provide dormitory-style housing for junior golfers and to host corporate outings and dinners.

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struggled on tour, and lamented the lack of science dedicated to the modern game of golf.

Eight years ago, Knick bought the old Belmont driving range, next to Martin Park, with a vision—and a system. He wanted to build a facility to cultivate junior golf talent and give them a shot at a college scholarship, and perhaps a pro career. There is already a wall of college logos testifying to his success.

There are several different programs tailored to various age groups and ambitions, from the Fundamentals Program for ages seven to ten, all the way up to the Collegiate Player Program, where athletes are encouraged to devote 20 to 40 hours a week training and practicing their golf game.

Every engagement begins with Knick's custom "5 Elements of Success" evaluation, which includes an assessment of an aspiring player's physical, mental, and nutritional conditioning. Athletes that are accepted into the program then progress through a series of milestones, not unlike the blackbelt system that quantifies skills mastery in the martial arts.

Kids come from all over the world to train at GPC, which features a nine-hole short course, real bent grass greens, three different kinds of



SERIOUS GOLF Indoor swing training, academics, and fitness comprise GPC

sand, and a green fashioned after the famous 12th hole at Augusta.

There is also a fully accredited high school called Ethan Allen Preparatory School, with instructors, online curriculum, and a small, but well-equipped, classroom. And Knick recently purchased the Stonehenge Inn property across the street to provide dormitory-style housing for junior golfers and host corporate outings and dinners.

There are programs for recreational golfers too. An adult membership costs \$4,800, with additional costs for private and group coaching sessions. Kids can get started for \$99 a month for the most basic package.

It may surprise people that Ridgefield is becoming a destination for young golf talent. But after seeing Knick's passion for the game and vision for the center, it's easy to see why.