

Home again, they're on course for a grand opening

August 29, 2019



Jim Martin remembers hitting the Del Norte Golf Course off State Route 197 “way back when” he lived in Brookings in the 1980s.

His general-contractor’s job took him to Illinois in 1992, but his fondness for the nine-hole, 96-acre course would bring Martin back for a round of golf every couple of years or so.

Now, he’s returned to this region for good. His reasons: the climate ... and golf.

“In Illinois, the winters are too cold and the summers too hot. But in Crescent City, you don’t tan, you just rust,” joked Martin.

Plus, this year the opportunity arose to do more than just play golf again on the Del Norte Golf Course. He could buy it.

At the same time, Martin said, he has no plan to convert the property, using his years of experience building homes, condos and townhouses. Rather, with the help of his son, Alan, he’ll resuscitate the land and reopen the course for the next generation of golfers to enjoy as he has.

The purchase of the property cleared escrow last week, completing his acquisition of Del Norte Golf Course from the Elk Valley Rancheria Tribe.

The course is located about halfway between Brookings and Crescent City.

Martin admitted he had mixed emotions when he heard the course had closed in June last year primarily because of declining membership.

“I was disappointed it closed,” he said, “but I was glad, because it meant I could buy it for less than it would have been if it was still fully open.”

Martin declined to say how much he paid for the property.

As excited as he was to assume ownership, Martin knows the course is far from user-ready. After more than a year of disuse, nature has overtaken the typically manicured fairways and greens.

“I saw the golf course in May,” said Martin. “The grass was 10 to 12 inches tall. You couldn’t tell the sand traps from the greens.”

Alan Martin, who was living in Georgia at the time with his wife, Bobbie, was equally surprised when his dad sent photos of the course. “Well, we’ve got some work ahead of us,” Alan Martin recalls thinking. “But my dad raised me right. We’re not allergic to work.”

Alan, who graduated from Brookings-Harbor High School in 1993, both worked for his dad and played the Del Norte course. Now, he’s the property’s new general manager.

“I’ll just be the owner/worker,” Jim Martin said. “This will be the first time in his life he’ll get to tell me what to do.”

Alan Martin figures they’re only 30% to 40% caught up on the maintenance alone. “We still have to do mowing, lower and lower and lower,” he said. “The greens and the tee boxes still need to be aerated and reseeded.”

The fairways, Martin added, have years of dead growth waiting to be cleared, cut and mowed. Then, the new owners can water and feed the grass to grow it back right.

Lending the Martins some “grunt labor” is former Del Norte High School boys’ golf coach Kirk Burrows. He said he’s not the only one who was excited hearing of the Martins’ plans.

“The whole community is ecstatic, for many reasons,” Burrows said from a golf cart, armed with a chainsaw and ready to tackle more overgrowth. “It’s not just great for the golfers, but for the community.”

Jim Martin emphasized that the project wouldn’t have been possible without the help of Re/Max realtor Rose Peasley, who completed the complicated legwork for them.

As for their timeline, the Martins said the community won’t be playing the restructured course until December at the earliest. But the pushed-back grand revealing will give them time to do it up right, Jim Martin said.

“When we open the doors, we want to make people happy that they came out,” he said. “We want the course to look very nice when they come out that first time.”

To add to that experience, he said, the purchase of the golf course included the clubhouse building, which contained both a bar and a restaurant. Jim Martin plans to open the bar and offer limited service at the restaurant while the new owners get their feet wet and grow into ownership.

When that's accomplished, he said, he wants to turn back the clock on the Del Norte Golf Course to the 1950s, when it was more than a golfing destination. "Basically, I want to bring back the family atmosphere," Martin said.

"You can have a barbecue outside and don't have to worry about just golf. If you want a wedding or a reunion, you can have it here."