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## Golf's Short Course Craze



The short course at Forest Dunes

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Golf's short course movement is in full swing.

Whether it's a layout with fewer than 18 holes, or one consisting solely of par threes, truncated golf is appearing with increasing regularity as America discovers how much fun it can be, how great it is for introducing youth to the game, how inexpensive it is, and how it might be all people have time for.

There are a number of short courses that have found fame and recognition in recent years. Nine-hole [Sweetens Cove Golf Club](#) in South Pittsburg, Tenn., enjoys enormous popularity among an enlightened group of golfers who favor sound design and a simplified version of the game over an elaborate, and invariably more expensive, bell/whistle approach.

And the [Winter Park Golf Course](#) just outside of Orlando in Winter Park, Fla., affectionately known to regulars as “WP9,” has also become synonymous with right-thinking golfers seeking quick, affordable entertainment.

For WP9 to succeed as it has, it needed willing and devoted local residents, a visionary mayor in Steve Leary, and the design talents of Keith Rhebb and Riley Johns who transformed the more than 100-year-old layout into a nifty playground suitable for every kind of golfer.

It would be a couple of years before they got the opportunity to assure everyone their debut success wasn't a fluke, however. Lew Thompson, owner and developer of [Forest Dunes Golf Club](#) in Roscommon, Mich., wanted a short course he could play with his grandsons and gave Rhebb a call in April. Though he was working for Bill Coore on the renovation of the Plantation Course at Kapalua Bay in Hawaii, Coore insisted he accept the offer. Johns too had been involved at Kapalua but was also able to make it work. They were done in just 81 days.

“We didn't start out with that goal, but it all went incredibly smoothly,” says Rhebb. “Lew had everything set up for when we arrived, the weather was good, and we had local school kids come out and remove rocks.”



*Camarillo Springs*

The course, still to be named, will open next spring when golfers who have played the Tom Weiskopf-designed Forest Dunes or Tom Doak's The Loop earlier in the day will be able to kick back, go barefoot, put on some tunes, open a beer, and hunt an ace.

“It's meant to be fun,” Rhebb says. “Golfers should come off a short course like this, and immediately want to do it again.”

Like they do at The Greenbrier's [Ashford Short Course](#) which opened a year ago, either [Top of the Rock](#) or [Mountain Top Golf Course](#) at Big Cedar Lodge, [The Sandbox](#) at Sand Valley Golf Resort, the thankfully-revived par-65 [Goat Hill Park](#), or Pinehurst's [The Cradle](#) which, it was reported in September, recorded 68,000 rounds in its first year.

Dave Axland and Rod Whitman's 10-hole course currently growing in at Cabot Links in Nova Scotia promises to be similarly amusing. Set on a 12-acre parcel inland and uphill from Cabot Cliffs, holes will range from 85 to 230 yards, says Keith Cutten who is part of the design team. "It isn't a pitch and putt," he adds. "It will be a genuine test but enormous fun."

Two-and-a-half thousand miles away in Cleveland, Texas, is another short course(s) that's yet to open but is likewise highly anticipated. Nine Grand at the Grand Oaks Reserve development is not only an innovative mix of nine-hole course, nine-hole par 3, and nine-hole putting course—Rhebb and fellow shaper Angela Moser helped build it, and it is designer Mike Nuzzo and contractor/superintendent John Mahaffey's first collaboration since they created the amazing Wolf Point Club in Port Lavaca, Texas, in 2009.

New Urban West (NUW), a Santa Monica, Calif.-based developer, is currently seeking permits to build something similar in Camarillo, 50 miles west of Los Angeles. Camarillo Springs will have a 12-hole main course and a six-hole short course that Damian Pascuzzo and Steve Pate have already routed.

"We were actually hired by industry veteran Gary Lewis who was hired by NUW as they had no experience in developing golf," says Pascuzzo. "Gary made it clear that while length and rating weren't important, building fun and interesting holes was."

That was obviously the recipe at [McVeigh's Gauntlet](#) at Silvie's Valley Ranch in Seneca, Ore., home of the goat caddies. Dan Hixson's thrill-packed seven-holer (five par threes and two par fours) climbs up and tumbles down some dramatic terrain and could make a claim to be the game's most exciting 1,135 yards. Hixson has a soft spot for short courses.



*McVeigh's Gauntlet*

"I love them because we designers can get away with things that would be lambasted on a full course," he says. "Short courses are full of quiriness, extreme shaping, and imaginative golf shots."

In describing what motivated some of the holes at McVeigh's Gauntlet, Hixson surely defines the very essence of short course adventure. "I tried to envision what would make my friends and I laugh as we watched each other play these crazy holes."

Amen to that.