

Where golf isn't a matter of social class



Photo by [Jennifer Simonson](#) , Star Tribune

League golfers warmed up on the first tee at Sundance Golf Club. Not in the league? Don't know tee from tea? You're a dog and not a human? Don't worry about it. You're welcome in this club.

Call it the "Cheers" of golf courses: Everybody knows your name at Sundance in Dayton.

By [Brian Stensaas](#), Star Tribune

Last update: May 22, 2007 – 1:25 PM

Whether you're on two legs or four, everyone is welcome at Sundance Golf Club in Dayton.

Millionaires, record-setting hitters, once-a-week duffers and a dog named Texas are just a few of the patrons you'll find there each day.

"It's not who you are, it's who you're with," said Matt Just, one of the teaching professionals at Sundance. "Once people come to Sundance, there's something special here that makes it feel like home. It's a friendly, relaxed atmosphere, and that's why people stick around."

It's a concept that has made Sundance successful for years. Welcome everyone, turn no one away. Everybody is treated as an equal.

"There are people who shoot 140 for 18 holes and people who shoot 70 for 18 holes," director of golf Dave Leyse said.

But it wouldn't be uncommon to find those two golfers together sharing a story at the end of their rounds.

"It's all about that," Leyse said.

Leyse has been at Sundance since 1978. He did take a leave once, but was back shortly.

He and the rest of the staff know that some golf courses have a reputation for being stuffy, even stuck-up.

That's the complete opposite of how he runs Sundance, now open for its 37th season of play.

"People hear by word of mouth that they can come out here and have a good time," Leyse said. "That's important, and I'm trying to instill that into these guys." "These guys" are the so-called new wave of head staff at the course, including Just.

Most of that new wave was groomed by Leyse, Craig Waryan and Aaron McClay.

Waryan -- now at Edinburgh USA in Brooklyn Park -- is known to many around Sundance as the "Godfather" of the course's operations. He paved the way for Leyse and McClay, who in turn taught current pros like Just and Tom Weibusch how to play golf.

They started hanging around the club before they were in high school, and now in their late-20s and early-30s, they are doing the teaching.

Just, who left in 2000-01 to teach in Arizona, offers individual and group instruction every day at Sundance. Weibusch has moved on to teach at TPC Twin Cities in Blaine, but still comes back to work with the youth programs at Sundance.

"The future is untapped," Just said, "and I'm not going anywhere. It's going to be pretty neat in the years to come."

Just will give a free lesson to anyone who buys a beginner's set of golf clubs. Equipment is available ranging in price from several hundred dollars for a single club to \$69 for a lesser-known model.

At Sundance, it's anybody's game.

"The key is sustainable growth," Just said. "Look at Minneapolis. About 30 years ago they built a Dome and now it's out of date. We don't want to ever be out of date. We want to keep people coming out here."

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