

By **Guy Cipriano**

COMPACT AMENITY

The 12-hole Saddle at GlenCove represents a personal project for a veteran of western North Carolina maintenance and development.

The most exciting project in a career filled with big pursuits close to his western North Carolina hometown means **Jerry West** relishes spending time at a compact course that begins and ends at an “entertainment barn” strategically routed within an “adventure wellness community.”

West is the director of operations at Old Edwards Club and his numerous responsibilities include guiding a development with few peers. The Saddle at GlenCove has matured nicely beneath Shortoff Mountain and Cowee Ridge. Opened in late 2019, The

Saddle is a 12-hole, 1,601-yard, par-3 course designed to connect generations of golfers.

Raised in Franklin, a small western North Carolina community less than 30 miles from Cashiers, home of Old Edwards Club and The Saddle, West’s relationship with the region’s courses started via accompanying his father to work. The older West was a contractor whose plumbing assignments often involved interior installations and repairs at golf facilities. West became intrigued by the courses, so he started working on them as a teenager.

Golf developments dot the Cashiers-Highlands area and West helped build the 18-hole

Old Edwards Club course within the Highlands Cove development. West occupied a major part in the project and a boulder named “Sitting Rock” featuring a plaque thanking him for his “energy, passion & love of this property” sits to the right of the 10th fairway.

The **Tom Jackson**-designed course debuted in 2009. West never envisioned the responsibility Old Edwards Club owners **Arthur** and **Angela Williams** delegated to him less than a decade later: oversee the development of a par-3 course created to help sell real estate.

“I would have never dreamt something like this would be possible,” West says while sitting on an Adirondack chair near a firepit overlooking a waterfall and rock wall fronting The Saddle’s 118-yard second hole. “My first question would have been, ‘Why?’ Everybody once wanted a big course; nobody wanted a



Jerry West

for stunning aesthetics. “You’d think all that rain is a negative for golf,” says Welling, whose Greenville, South Carolina, office is less than two hours from The Saddle. “But it makes the foliage so spectacular. It’s so green and verdant. It’s a spectacular part of the world that more and more people seem to be discovering.”

A superintendent by training, West has spent three decades handling weather extremes and absorbing the surrounding beauty. He oversees around 100 employees responsible for operations and maintenance throughout the 800 acres owned by Old Edwards Club. Superintendent **George Mason’s** team includes 27 employees who handle the 18-hole course and The Saddle from the same maintenance facility.

An eight-worker crew maintains The Saddle to the same standards as an upscale regulation course. The turf palette consists of 777 bentgrass greens, L93 bentgrass teeing areas, fairways and approaches, and a fescue/bluegrass rough blend. The course has 12 bunkers and around two acres of native areas planted with a blend of hard, sheep and red fescues. A 9-hole putting course and short game practice area are also part of the grounds. Welling designed the course to promote the ground game, thus giving players of all abilities, especially those at the beginning and the end

and growing in 13.6 acres of turf. The Landscapes Unlimited team building the course and the Old Edwards Club crew responsible for maintaining it endured 11 feet of rain in 12 months after the August 2018 groundbreaking. Heavy rain represents the norm in western North Carolina, a region Welling compares to an “elevated rainforest” ideal

of their careers, an opportunity to enjoy the experience. A pond on the second hole and wetlands on the ninth hole are the only forced carries on the course.

“If you can’t hit the ball in the air, there’s still a way for you to get to the green,” Welling says. “For the most part, we try to let that ground game be something that’s available. And it’s not just the tee shot. It’s also the recovery shot. There’s a lot of bentgrass around the greens, so we used the idea that the ball can be played along the ground for a missed shot to recover, whether that be with a putter, 3 iron, hybrid, 9 iron or whatever.”

West has observed various player combinations ranging from grandparent-grandchild pairings to teenagers spending evenings outdoors with friends. The course is walking only, parts of it are lighted, and three-, four- and five-hole routings reside within the 12-hole footprint.

Connecting generations sparked the methodology behind one of the biggest decisions of West’s career — naming the course. A saddle is the lowest point between two mountains and a view of the one between Shortoff Mountain and Cowee Ridge emerges on the 12th tee. The scenery convinced West to name the course The Saddle because the land also connects generations.

“In doing all the golf course construction and renovation that I have done, I have never done anything as personally impactful and meaningful as this,” West says before a guided tour of the course on a sunny August afternoon. “When you get out there and start walking around, you’re going to be like, ‘No way does that exist.’ It’s that cool.”

Fortunately, The Saddle exists. And it just might be cool enough for other developers to consider using short courses to attract homebuyers seeking active lifestyles.

“I think you’re going to continue to see them, especially if you can append them into existing golf operations,” Welling says. “It just makes so much sense. It’s a new market, new activity, new revenue. There’s a desire for fun, interactive, still on green, real-grass experiences. I don’t think we are at the end of this. We might be at the beginning.” GCI



▲ Welling

short course. I was so mistaken. The popularity and response of this ... it’s going to change golf and how people approach the game.”

The first 33 cottage units surrounding the 16 acres The Saddle occupies sold during their first year on the market, according to West. A 30-buyer waitlist for the final eight cottage units followed the initial sale. Yes, West and his bosses learned, a short course can resonate with prospective homebuyers.

Designed by South Carolina-based architect **Beau Welling**, who has co-designed par-3 courses with **Tiger Woods** at Bluejack National and with **Gil Hanse** at PGA Frisco, The Saddle opened in late 2019 after more than a year of clearing the wooded property, shaping the Golden Age-inspired green complexes