

HISTORIC TIGER POINT GOLF CLUB IN FLORIDA’S PANHANDLE RETAINS NATHAN CRACE, ASGCA FOR COURSE-WIDE NATURALIZATION PROJECT AND BUNKER RENOVATION STUDY

GULF BREEZE, FL. – Tiger Point Golf Club, a long time staple of golf in the Florida Panhandle, has new owners and those owners are wasting no time in re-positioning the course as one of the top places to play. Nathan Crace, a member of the American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA) and his firm Watermark Golf/Nathan Crace Design, have been brought on board to handle a course-wide naturalization project and bunker renovation study of the now 18-hole semi-private course. Originally opened in 1965 and once home to the PGA Tour’s Pensacola Open, the new Tiger Point is now comprised of what used to be the East Course and a new practice facility that was built last year. However, the owners wanted a new look and an aesthetic more befitting of the course’s coastal setting, so they hired Crace to do just that.

“Every golfer in the Florida Panhandle and in South Alabama has heard of Tiger Point,” Crace explains. “In its prime, everyone in the area had Tiger Point in their rotation of courses to play.” In recent years, however, those expectations began to slip. “When the City of Gulf Breeze decided to sell the course last year,” Crace continues. “The first thing the new owners asked themselves was ‘*How can we make Tiger Point unique and return it to its destination golf status?*’ That’s how our conversation began.”

Crace explains that the 150+ acres of maintained turf that make up the golf course weaves in and out of the surrounding housing development, along and across waterways, and even has a few holes that come right to the beachfront with a beautiful view of the Gulf Islands National Seashore across Santa Rosa Sound. But the new owners wanted a way to bring the coastal theme to other parts of the golf course and tie-in the aesthetic through all eighteen holes.

“There’s been a welcome shift in golf course architecture over the last 10 to 20 years toward sustainable design that produces a more natural look while improving operations by reducing resource inputs and labor in areas that don’t come into play,” Crace says. “We can achieve that and increase the aesthetic of the course by creating naturalized areas throughout the course that not only bring back the coastal feel, but also enable the staff to re-focus those input savings in other high traffic areas of the course such as greens, tees, fairways, and bunkers. The goal is to connect these new areas throughout, so you have that theme on all 18 holes.”

Speaking of bunkers, Crace says they will also begin a bunker renovation study and renovate at least some of the bunkers this year, with the goal of keeping the course open daily for play and working around golfers in the process. “The existing bunkers are worn and demand too many resources to keep them playable and looking good,” he explains. “We will soften the edges on all bunkers, re-size and re-shape most of them, and re-locate others to be consistent with the look that the new owners want.”

“We’re excited about the possibilities ahead at Tiger Point,” explains co-owner Brian Jones. “Nathan shares our vision of the tremendous potential this property has and what it can become with the right approach. We’ve already seen an increased interest from golfers and the community in what we’re going to do to really set Tiger Point apart and with our semi-private model, we’ll be looking to build our membership base while still attracting outside and public play. Needless to say, we hit the ground running.”

To provide the natural coastal look that Jones and the other owners desire, Crace says they will use a mix of different plantings and native grass types to add layers of texture and color to the course, starting with the holes closest to the clubhouse. “There’s a great view of the property from the clubhouse because it sits on top of this big hill that’s not indicative of the rest of the area,” Crace explains. “But as you look out over the course, you see primarily a sea of green bermudagrass with homes and the Gulf of Mexico in the distance. We want to break that up and make the view more exciting with layers of color, contrast, and verticality. By mid-summer, the look from the clubhouse and playing 1, 17, and 18 will be dramatically different. You won’t know if you’re in Gulf Breeze or in the South Carolina Low Country.”

Crace looks forward to starting the project in April and is confident that golfers will love the new look of Tiger Point. “[New superintendent] Chip [Owens] and his staff are already making a big impact on conditioning and the new look we are working on will be eye-opening for everyone. It’s going to be great! The new Tiger Point will be a must-play for locals and visitors alike!”

For more information on Tiger Point Golf Club, visit www.tigerpointgolf.com. For more information about Watermark Golf, visit www.watermarkgolf.com. For more information about the American Society of Golf Course Architects, visit www.asgca.org

Photo (clubhouse and 18th green):



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