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GOLF

Wednesday, April 9, 2003

Golf mall provides one-stop shopping for motivated competitor

By **DAN RALEY**
SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER REPORTER

BELLEVUE -- You walk into the cream-colored building because either your swing, club or body is broken, and all of it can be fixed in this one centralized location.

This is the Seattle Golf Academy, offering a new concept while operating out of a recycled facility and using an old name.

In short, this is a golf mall.

Once inside, the first door on the left belongs to the bespectacled Tim O'Brien, 48. He's a club-maker, club repairman, if not general all-around golf inventor.

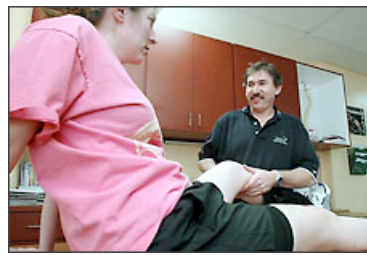


zoom Gilbert W. Arias / P-I
Club maker Tim O'Brien, owner of Club Crafters, adjusts the loft and lie of a club at his academy shop.

The next door opens to the work studio of Doug McDonald, 47. He's a keep-it-simple golf instructor, book author and newspaper tipster, a teacher once unconventional now a little more mainstream. In other words, the ponytail is gone.

Around the corner, surrounded by oversized exercise balls, is Mike Litke, 24, an athletic trainer with a golf emphasis. Lack flexibility or enough fitness to play the game? This strapping University of Washington alumnus might have the solution.

Upstairs is the man who owns the operation, Neil Chasan, 43, a physical therapist by trade. He does body repairs for the injured and hobbled attempting to return to the golf course. Chasan keeps his office, Sports Reaction Center, as a separate entity, yet it's just a few steps away.



zoom Gilbert W. Arias / P-I
Physical therapist Neil Chasan, owner of Seattle Golf Academy, examines Rachel Hannah's knee at the Sports Reaction Center, upstairs in the Bellevue complex.

It's one-stop golf shopping, with the specialists situated under one roof, along with a generous indoor practice area.

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"This whole notion of integration is something Doug and I have been talking about for years, and it's handled nicely here," Chasan said. "It gives people the sense they have to work on their game."

Since August, everyone has been operating out of a building previously called Studio Fore, acquired from former LPGA Tour player Leslie Hobert, who since has moved to Nevada.

Year earlier, longtime partners Chasan and McDonald had formed a loose-knit association and called it Seattle Golf Academy, but each had separate work sites. Except when giving clinics together, they were forced to refer golfers back and forth with driving directions. Now they're practically side by side, keeping the business nameplate.

Rob Codo, 43 and a Microsoft sales representative, is a client with specialized golf needs. He lost a leg and part of his right hand in a boating accident as a teen.

A golfer for three years, Codo has received special techniques from Litke and customized swing tips from McDonald, and had noticeable results. His scores have dropped from the 120 range to consistently in the 90s.

"I like the people who run the place; it's like a family atmosphere," Codo said. "I took up the game and developed horrible habits, and Doug has helped me take those out of my game. I would highly recommend this to anyone."



zoom Gilbert W. Arias / P-I
Trainer Mike Litke works with one of his clients, Steve Milligan, on an exercise ball at the Body Balance for Performance at Seattle Golf Academy.

Golfers can use the facility in any number of ways, with some investment involved. Yet people usually will pay for results.

Daily use is \$15 an hour, which includes access to the nine-stall range, putting green, bunker, interchangeable lie platform, and computer technology, the latter providing a self-serve lesson or club-fitting information. Monthly use is \$75.

Monthly range use and a McDonald lesson is \$140 per month, with a golf lesson alone running \$85 per hour. Among the teaching tools is a digital camera, supposedly the latest thing in dissecting a swing.

Litke largely relies on the nationwide Body Balance for Performance system created by Paul Callaway, the PGA Tour's original physical therapist, and now owned by Chasan nationally.

Litke's fees range from \$115 to \$150 per session, and could include everything up to deep-muscle massage.

O'Brien builds new sets of clubs, does repairs or alters equipment. His 30 years of experience have allowed him to build an ample reputation and customer base.

He's known for his speedy work.

"People don't like to wait long these days," he said.

Chasan, of course, is upstairs, seeing his own patients, having observed the downstairs golf operation the past five years.

He witnessed the instruction business dwindle with the previous owner, and thought he could do better with the facility, integrating different golf facets.

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"Our fantasy in the long run is to have lots of these around," Chasan said. "But we have to make this one work."

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Please visit Neil Chasan's website at www.SRCPT.com or call (425)643-9778 for more information about the Golf Mall as it is today.

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