

## Myrtle Beach Golf—Better Than Ever



By Bruce Vittner

In May a small group of Golf Travel Writers of America were invited to Myrtle Beach to play three of the fine courses that are part of the **Founders Group International**, a group of owners who own 21 courses at 18 different locations in and around the Myrtle Beach area.

I was fortunate enough to be part of this group, probably because I have traveled and written about golf in the Myrtle Beach area for over 30 years.

When people ask what is your favorite golf destination in the United States, I have no problem thinking of an answer — MYRTLE BEACH. A group of three friends and I who love golf started traveling to Myrtle Beach in 1986. Since I was a teacher, we would find out the dates of the Spring Vacation the previous September when school began and make reservations for the 850-mile trip for the following April.

The trips were great and the group soon rose to a dozen golfers, and everyone always had a great time with wonderful golf and fine places to eat. It was only a couple of years later that a partner and I started Ocean State Golf that became Southern New England Golfer, a publication that lasted for 34 years.

Enough about nostalgia. My wife and I drove to Myrtle Beach in early May. We were staying at **the Marina Inn at Grande Dunes** right next door to **Grande Dunes Golf Course** along the Intercoastal waterway, so it was an easy sell to my bride. The rooms were wonderful and the views of the water and marina were stunning. The resort has many combinations of rooms, including many with connecting doors for larger groups.

The first day we traveled to **Pine Lakes Country Club** that is in the center of Myrtle Beach, a few blocks from the ocean and just two miles from our accommodations. Pine Lakes is **called the Granddaddy** for obvious reasons. It was the first course built in the Myrtle Beach area and opened in 1927. Yes, the course is making plans for a great big celebration in 2027. Head professional **Kurtis Kuhn** says that big plans are already being organized for the centennial.

The condition of the course was truly amazing. Kuhn said that a great deal of work has gone into getting the course in fine shape, and it really shows. The fourteenth hole is the one that we always remember. It is a par 4 that starts downhill then requires an uphill second shot over a good-sized pond. Definitely the most difficult hole! With four sets of tees, each with their own design makes it easy to choose the best distance for each player's preference. The course is in the middle of a very nice neighborhood, but as you can imagine the course was there much before the homes. The homes do not come into play at all.

We had lunch after the round then given a tour of the clubhouse that has great memorabilia. **Sports Illustration** had its founding in 1954 when a group of sports writers sat and created the publication after playing a round of golf. Make sure you visit the exhibits.

Our second day we traveled about 15 minutes to **King's North** that is off Route 501. Yes, the "King" stands **for Arnold Palmer** whose company built the property in the 1970s. The course has just been redone on one nine and it is amazing, probably one of the best nine holes this reporter has ever played. Plans are underway to do the second nine holes in the near future. We did not play the other two courses, but golfers we asked said the courses were fun. One hole that players always remember on King's North is **"The Gambler"** a par 5 that can be reached in two if you hit to an island with your tee shot and then to an island green with your second shot. No, we went around and made bogey.

There is quite a bit of water on the course, so make sure you are playing the correct tees. They have 7 sets of tees, so there is no excuse to say it was too long or short for your game. They had a nice clubhouse and plenty of choices for food and a large selection of golf attire.

On our third and final day of golf we took two minutes to get to Grande Dunes from our hotel. Just cross over the bridge with the intercoastal below you. Actually five holes are played along the waterway that is really scenic. No, the waterway does not come into play, but there is plenty of water throughout the course with the par 3 8<sup>th</sup> over the pond being the most intimidating.

The course also has six sets of tees, so pick the right one. The 13<sup>th</sup> hole is the most difficult. You must hit over water off the tee, and then over a quite large pond before heading up to an elevated green. Par and you are very excited. None of us were!

**Tom VanHoogan**, general manager at Grande Dunes who grew up in New Hampshire, but stayed in Myrtle Beach after going to college there, gave us plenty of knowledge about the course that was designed by New **Englander Roger Rulewich**. He talked about the very large fairways and greens and the excellent shape that the course is always in.

The three days of golf were just right. The Founders Group should be very proud of the quality of the courses. We have played many of the other 18 courses under their ownership and the quality and hospitality makes for a great golfing vacation.

Another organization that you should be aware of is **MyrtleBeachGolfTrips.com**, the leading provider of stay-and-play packages and online tee times. They can help you set up any type of golfing vacation that fits your budget and your golfing requirements. This reporter guarantees you will not be disappointed.