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Bunker Hill Farms: Your Own Course for the Day (or Week)

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By Kiel Christianson

What's your golf fantasy? Ask most golfers this question, and the list will probably be predictable: A membership at Augusta National? A round with Tiger? Your very own private golf course? I can't help you with the first two, but I do have advice about attaining the third, at least for a day or two or...more. For the cost of a few rounds at Pebble Beach, you and your golf buddies can experience what it is like to have your own private course—and chef, caddies, staff, and an entire estate to yourselves at Bunker Hill Farms, in Woodstock, Illinois.

You're forgiven if you've never heard of Bunker Hill Farms. There are people who live within a few miles of the place who don't know it exists. The photo below is of the front gate – with no sign at all to belie the “secluded opulence” that lies beyond.

History

Bunker Hill Farms started off in 2005 as a 150-acre family retreat for Mike and Amy Domek and their family. Mike is the founder of TicketsNow.com, which he sold to TicketMaster in 2008 for a handsome sum. With a portion of the proceeds from that sale, the Domeks embarked on a project that today includes 450 acres, a lodge and a cottage, a Silo Spa, a fishing and recreation lake, a 6,709-yard 18-hole golf course, miles and miles of trails, trap and target shooting, and, to be honest, pretty much anything else you can think of – which, I was repeatedly assured during my visit, the staff can arrange to bring in.



The Lodge at Bunker Hill Farms

The golf course officially opened in 2011, with a ceremonial first shot and commemorative concert by 80s hard-rock sensation Brett Michaels. In 2014, this musical tradition was scaled up with the first annual Rockin' the Hill concert, when Cheap Trick was invited to play an outdoor concert to raise money for local McHenry County charities through the Domeks' foundation. During these years, access to the property and golf course was strictly by invitation only. Celebrities, politicians, corporate giants – they were all welcomed and pampered on the down-low, just 60-some miles from downtown Chicago but a million miles from the flashbulbs of the paparazzi.



Photos of A-list Bunker Hill Farms guests like Darius Rucker line the walls of The Lodge.

In 2023, the Domeks moved from an invite-only model to opening bookings for the expansive, luxurious property, all geared to raising even more money for their charitable foundation. All proceeds from event and group bookings of Bunker Hill Farms go into the foundation, which to date has donated over \$3 million to McHenry County charities.



Signed guitars from all the musical guests and performers adorn the mantel in The Lodge.

Booking Bunker Hill Farms

Although Bunker Hill Farms is still a “celebrity haven” – as the property only books one group at a time and no one knows who is there or when – regular folks can book the entire property, including the golf course, now, too. Perhaps this needs to be qualified a bit: Regular folks who can afford \$1250 per day (with a one-time \$500 overnight fee if they stay overnight from one to however many nights) can book the entire property. The rules are pretty simple: \$1250 per person (basic fee), minimum 8 people, and the property and staff and all amenities are yours, all-inclusive. This means you get the run of the lodge (which sleeps 12-14), the cottage (6 more suites), all the activities (guided ATV rides, shooting, water sports, cooking classes, wine tastings, etc.), a personal chef, all the food and beverages you want, and an 18-hole golf course complete with your own personal caddies and top-notch loaner clubs. Operations Manager Gretchen Pembroke assures me that pretty much any other activity can be arranged, too – from hot-air balloon and helicopter rides to horseback riding to full-service spa treatments to...well, whatever you can imagine, assuming your budget can accommodate some additional charges.



Ride an ATV to the high point of the Bunker Hill Farms property.



The Cottage at Bunker Hill Farms



The Silo-Spa at Bunker Hill Farms



The pneumatic elevator in the Silo-Spa (VERY cool!)

Not everyone who books Bunker Hill Farms is a golfer (one recent group booked the resort for two days to play Dungeons and Dragons), but if you are, and if you have the budget for it, Director & Inside Sales Manager Kayla Forschler assures me that they can even bring in PGA Tour players to play golf with you on what is, for all intents and purposes, your own private golf course.



The plaque behind the 9th green commemorating PGA Tour player Brandon Hagy's monster tee shot.

Playing Bunker Hill Farms

Mike Domek loves golf. And his original plan, according to Joe NAME, TITLE, was for a full 18-hole golf course to cover around 120 acres of the original property. But Amy, his wife, did not want to look out her windows and see just a golf course. After some intense negotiations, Mike got approval for his full-sized golf course – 18 holes, 6,709 yards – to be built on just 60 acres of the property.



The routing diagram for the 18 holes at Bunker Hill Farms

How, you may ask, can a championship course fit on 60 acres? Enter landscape architect turned golf course architect Harry Vignocchi, whose other credits include Bull Valley in Woodstock, IL, and Bittersweet Golf Club in Gurnee, IL. Vignocchi stitched together a routing that shares fairways and greens in such a way that the back nine holes look and feel different from the front nine, even though all but one green is played to multiple times. The secret of pulling off such a design is two-fold. First, the angles and yardages into the greens on the front and back nines vary so much, it's difficult to recognize them the second time through. Second, because the resort property is so exclusive, everyone on the course is from the same group – meaning just one or two foursomes most of the time. Occasionally, the property books larger groups for a corporate golf outing, but even then, every group will have their own caddie, and those caddies are equipped with walkie-talkies, so they can ensure everyone stays spaced out and won't hit into each other.



The tee shot on the 12th Hole — over the 11th green. One of the routing quirks at Bunker Hill Farms.

I cannot stress enough how impressive it is to play a course with such a small footprint but completely regular-length holes. Impressive and confusing! Without a personal forecaddie and being shepherded around by Joe Domek, Director of Outside Sales, I would have had no idea where to go — signage is non-existent. In this way, Bunker Hill Farms is similar to some historic Scottish Highlands courses, including the most famous of all, The Old Course at St. Andrews, where fairways cross and multiple greens are shared. The immense inventiveness also brings to mind [The Loop](#) at Forest Dunes in Michigan, which can be played forwards and backwards.

Equally impressive is the unmatched exclusiveness of Bunker Hill Farms — it is YOUR course while you play it: YOUR staff, YOUR beverage and food service, YOUR loaner clubs (also included, if you don't have your own) — your EVERYTHING. You can hit 20 tee shots in a row on a par 3, if you want, to see how close you can get to the hole. You can replay the entire course as many times as you want in a day — sunrise to sunset, if you wish. In 26 years of golf writing, I have never experienced anything quite like it. No wonder it's so popular with celebrities.



Hole 1, Bunker Hill Farms



Hole 3, Bunker Hill Farms

As one might imagine of a course that gets VERY limited play, conditions are immaculate. The 450-acre property is run with just five full-time employees, but there are a few who are dedicated solely to the golf course. Greens are large and subtly contoured, and they run around 12 on the Stimp meter. Good luck finding even one unrepaired ball mark. Fairways are generous, but there are plenty of hazards – seen and unseen – including dense underbrush, high fescue, and water. The fairways are all native fescue, and the tees and greens are bentgrass. Ironically, given the name of the resort, there is just one sand bunker on the entire course (but it is a deep one).



The lone bunker at Bunker Hill Farms

The entire course design radiates out from a pond at the center of the layout, sort of like a watery hub. Five holes (four on the front, one on the back) play across the pond in some way, with another couple skirting its shores. Most memorably, the tee box of the 137-yard 8th Hole is a small island in the pond, accessible via a stone walkway—a great photo op.



The author, teeing off on Hole 8



Hole 8 tee box (minus the author)

There's only one set of tees per hole – the full 6,709 yards. However, for families or groups with mixed skill levels, the staff can set up tees at really any distance for every hole, so that even the course set-up is customized to your group's needs.

It's worth repeating again, too, that despite the petite footprint, this is a brawny, difficult course. The opening and closing par 5s measure 580 yards and 560 yards, respectively, there are four par 4s over 400 yards, and only one "short" par 4, at 303 yards. I felt like I was hitting some solid drives, but then discovering repeatedly that I still had a mid- to long-iron into many greens.

There are, nevertheless, some routing quirks imposed by the diminutive size of the course. For example, on your way to the 3rd green, you take your driver with you to tee off on the 530-yard, par 5 4th. On the 505-yard, par 5 12th Hole, you tee off over the 11th green. And the green on the 392-yard, par 4 15th Hole is the only one you play just one time. Fortunately, your personal caddie will guide you through these potential confusions, so you hardly even notice them.



Approach, Hole 5



Approach, Hole 6



9th Hole, behind the green



The 15th green at Bunker Hill Farms

Bunker Hill Farms: The Verdict

Bunker Hill Farms is by far the most exclusive golf course I have ever played, or likely ever will. It is as unique in its routing as it is in its philanthropic mission. For anyone looking for a corporate retreat, family reunion, luxury “destination” wedding (without having to fly across the globe), or just an ultra-exclusive, ultra-pampered getaway, Bunker Hill Farms is without peer. For golfers in particular, it is THE place to live out one of your golf fantasies: your own private course for a day (or two or three)!