



East Texas Golf

By Jeff Miller



[PHOTO] The first hole at Livingston Municipal Golf Course features lush fairways and an immaculate green to start your round of golf.

Ah, spring, when a young man's fancy turns to...golf? It's true, and not just for a young man. Men, women and even kids are hitting the greens in large numbers. Here's a look at nearby public and semi-private courses.

Livingston Municipal Golf Course

Bobby Brame has been golfing on the Livingston course since he was eight years old. The year was 1963, and the course was brand new. Fifty-four years later, he's still playing the course, but now as head golf pro.

The course has undergone many changes since 1963, including a spell when it was 18 holes and called Mill Ridge. It is owned and run by the City of Livingston now, and since Brame started running things a couple of years ago, the improvements are noticeable.

"We don't get the number of players we had back in the early 2000s when Tiger [Woods] got everyone out playing golf," Brame said. "But after a decline several years ago, we're beginning to see it climb again. We average about 12,000 rounds of golf per year."

Not bad for a city of 5,500 people. Part of the allure of the course is the fact that it is in Livingston, near restaurants, hotels and the lake. The other part is that the greens are some of the best in East Texas. Brame credits his maintenance staff for that.

"We made it through the winter, even with the freezes," he said. "Our staff was constantly mowing, fertilizing, aerating and sanding to make sure everything stayed healthy."

"Even though we're only a nine-hole course, the green fees cover 18 holes. People get excited to play it twice in the same round so they can try to better their score from the first time around," Brame said.

Neches Pines Golf Course, Diboll

In 1969, Arthur Temple, CEO of lumber giant Temple-Inland (now Georgia Pacific), had a vision of opening a nine-hole public golf course for the city of Diboll. Temple donated land to the city to create an attraction not only for his employees, but for other area residents as well.

In a short period, his course became recognized as one of the best public golf courses in East Texas. So, he decided to make it even better. In 1991, nine holes were added and Neches Pines Golf Course was born. Today, the public course offers scenic vistas and challenging holes at an affordable price.

Raven Nest Golf Course, Huntsville

Located off Interstate 45, Raven Nest offers challenges for golfers at every level. Tee options range from forward green tees measuring 5,416 yards to the most challenging black tees which measure 6,943 yards.

The course was designed in 2003 by Tripp Davis, who also created the famed Tribute Golf Club in Dallas. The natural rolling terrain of the area balances with the native trees and grasses, creeks and wildlife to recreate the essence of golf's earliest public courses.

Raven Nest is the home course for the Sam Houston State University golf team, and hosts



collegiate tournaments every year. It is also the home course of the Huntsville Hornets and New Waverly High. Raven Nest even hosts PGA Playing Ability Tests throughout the season. Not to worry, getting a tee time is easy, especially during weekdays.

For those thinking of taking up golf, or maybe golf course management, as a career, Raven Nest has one of 19 golf management programs in the country accredited by the PGA. The program lasts 4 1/2-years and includes classroom studies, internship experience and player development. The students apply their skills on Raven Nest, which is why the course features some of the best-kept greens in Texas.

Crown Colony Country Club, Lufkin

Year in and year out, one of the highest-rated golf courses in Texas is Crown Colony, located just south of downtown Lufkin. Crown Colony was built in 1979 among the Piney Woods in East Texas. Designed by Robert von Hagge and Bruce Devlin, Crown Colony not only offers golf, but tennis, swimming and dining.

This 18-hole, par-72 course has been ranked as one of the top-10 courses in Texas by the Dallas Morning News for 21 consecutive years. It has also been rated by Golf Week Magazine

as one of the top golfing destinations in Texas since 2004.

Known for narrow fairways, lots of water and tall pines, the course is semi-private, but accepts tee times and boasts villas that can be rented for short-term stays.

Cape Royale Golf Course, Coldspring

Cape Royale is the only course that was planned at the same time as the construction of Lake Livingston. It opened in 1972, the same year the lake was filled.

Designed by Bruce Littell and originally consisting of only nine holes, Cape Royale sits at the south end of the lake and features hills that give breathtaking views of the water and challenging elevation changes.

The course has had several management changes over the years, but recent rains and an increase in play have brought it back to quality standards. At just a tad over 6,000 yards, playing it can give even a beginning golfer confidence in the game.

Of course, it also features some extremely tough holes. The signature 18th hole is a 345-yard par-4 hole, and features a blind tee shot,

[PHOTO 1] The driving range at Raven Nest gives golfers a chance to warm up before hitting the challenging links course.

[PHOTO 2] The par-3 fourth hole at Crown Colony Country Club requires a full carry over water to the large green.





uphill play and a pond at the top of the landing area of the drive. Because of its proximity to Lake Livingston Dam and Lake Livingston State Park, don't be surprised if you are visited by deer, raccoons, egrets, herons and an occasional white pelican.

Westwood Shores Country Club, Trinity

Just a short drive from Onalaska, Westwood Shores Country Club is a beautiful, semi-private 18-hole course designed by Carlton Gibson. It features a driving range, putting green and bunker area for practicing those tough sand shots. The course also has tall pines and other native trees, lakes and plentiful wildlife. You may want to bring a camera in addition to your clubs.

The Club, including the course, fitness center and other amenities, was recently purchased by the Westwood Shores Property Owner's Association. The irrigation systems have been repaired and replaced, the sand bunkers were restored and trees were removed to restore the open fairways that were once the signature of the course.

The clubhouse has been renovated to include a fitness center and restaurant. Westwood Shores also has town home rentals for those

who want to book long golf weekend trips with their buddies.

Waterwood, Lake Livingston

No story about golf courses in East Texas would be complete without a mention of Waterwood. Located on the north shore of Lake Livingston, the Pete Dye-designed course was one of the premier courses in the nation when it opened in the mid-1970s.

It was named by the PGA as the second-toughest course in Texas in 1979, partly due to "the scariest shot in golf", the all-carry 227-yard 14th hole over the lake to a cliff-top green.

The PGA Tour even held its Qualifying School at this course in 1978, 1979 and 1981, and famous golfers Hal Sutton, Paul Azinger, Scott Hoch, John Cook, Chip Beck and Larry Mize earned their tour cards at Waterwood.

As other courses opened around the Houston area in the late 90s and early 2000s, Waterwood's attendance began to drop. The course closed to the public about five years ago, but is still played and maintained by residents who live on the course. Residents are assigned a hole to maintain, and the course gets plenty of play.

[PHOTO 3] Neches Pines lives up to its name, with tall pines lining virtually every hole on the course.

[PHOTO 4] An early spring in Trinity helped the greens at Westwood Shores Country Club.

