

North Carolina community unveils flexible short course

Palmer Practice Park at Balsam Mountain Preserve comprises five acres.

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Balsam Mountain Preserve, a conservation-oriented residential community in the Blue Ridge Mountains, recently unveiled Palmer Practice Park, a new state-of-the-art golf practice facility designed by Arnold Palmer Design Company. The facility is located steps away from Doubletop Village, an upcoming mountain hamlet of 23 new residential cottages, dining and recreational amenities all currently under development and scheduled to open in early 2020.

The uniqueness of the Palmer Practice Park stems from its design, which represents golf's evolving nature by providing a richer, more interactive golf experience compared to standard one-dimensional driving ranges. The new park also opens up the game to golfers of all ages and skill sets with the built-in flexibility to play as a par 3 course or a "choose your own adventure" pitch and putt. As Balsam Mountain Preserve attracts an increasing amount of multi-generational families, this hybrid facility illustrates how it continues to grow to meet the needs of its expanding community.

"Arnold Palmer's mission was to share his love for the game in hopes of growing the sport," said Thad Layton, vice president and senior architect for Arnold Palmer Design Company. "Balsam Mountain Preserve is staying true to that mission with the new Palmer Practice Park. As one of the few golf courses implementing this radical design, it is leading the charge in introducing golf to a whole new generation."

As one of only a handful of existing golf parks within the United States, Palmer Practice Park will provide Balsam residents an exclusive golfing experience in an unparalleled natural setting. Sitting at 3,400 feet above sea level, the park is centrally located between the 10th hole and the new village center and will overlook the Arnold Palmer Signature golf course and Plott Balsam Mountain Range. Spanning five acres, the practice facility will feature six unique greens, three bunkers and multiple teeing grounds, creating an unlimited number of ways to set the course up day to day. This variety will ensure the course never plays the same way twice, while also promoting a low-pressure, smaller-scale game that will appeal to golfers of all abilities. Players will still have the option of a practice range with a full length of 260 yards, in addition to the par 3 and pitch and putt course options.

“A driving range that doubles as a par 3 course is quite rare. Typically, the targets on a driving range are not puttable due to the barrage of balls and resulting pitch marks,” Layton said. “We overcame that obstacle at the Palmer Practice Park by partnering with Tour Greens to create synthetic surfaces that would look and play like real greens without having to worry about repairing pitch marks. This gives us the ability to shift gears from a range to a par 3 setup without delay.”