

A photograph of a golf course at sunset. In the foreground, a white Titleist golf ball sits on the grass. In the middle ground, a green is visible with a yellow flag on a pole, featuring a black number '3'. The background shows a line of trees and a body of water reflecting the vibrant orange and red colors of the sunset sky.

Missing Links

Though their home courses
Are just a mirage, *clubs without
real estate* are the association's
fastest growing clubs

A sunset over a body of water with trees in the background. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds in shades of blue, orange, and red. The water in the foreground is calm, reflecting the colors of the sky and the silhouettes of the trees on the horizon.

of the AGA

BY RUSS CHRIST

THERE ARE MANY INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED GOLF CLUBS IN ARIZONA.

Just thinking about some of their names: Desert Forest, Troon North, Desert Mountain, Grayhawk, Estancia, Forest Highlands and the Raven Golf Club at South Mountain evokes a warm and fuzzy feeling of excellence. And don't forget the history, high levels of service, well-conditioned playing surfaces and (sometimes) extravagant clubhouses at these facilities.

But what comes to mind when the following names of golf clubs are brought up in conversation: Coed Bogey Bunch, Par Gents, Desert Snakes, Golf on the Run Club, Duffers, Uninvited Golf Association or Desert Nomads? No, these aren't the titles of teams competing in a golf scramble every Sunday at the local municipal course.

Missing Links of the AGA

The New Definition of a Golf Club

Currently, there are three types of clubs that can join the Arizona Golf Association. Each golf club must determine its category.

Category 1

It is located at a single specific golf course with a valid USGA Course and Slope Rating where a majority of the club's events are played and where the club's scoring records reside (e.g., Desert Highlands or Arizona Golf Resort)



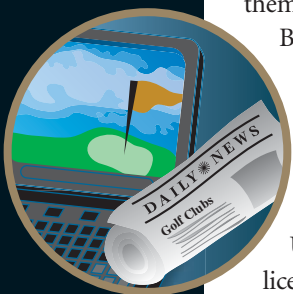
Category 2

Its members are affiliated or known to one another via a business, fraternal, ethnic or social organization. The majority of the club members had an affiliation prior to organizing the club (e.g., clubs without real estate like Spruce Goose or Desert Snakes GC)



Category 3

The members had no prior affiliation and a majority of the recruiting and sign-up of the membership is done by solicitation to the general public (e.g., Internet, newspaper).



In fact, these clubs are fully established affiliate members of the Arizona Golf Association. Their members have an AGA card and they comply with the rules of the USGA Handicap System.

A member of the Mile High Men's Golf Club, for example, has the same status with the AGA and the U.S. Golf Association as a member at the better-known Arizona Country Club. A good player with the Ten-Fifty Golf Club in Tucson can sign up for and, if he qualifies, compete in the Arizona Amateur.

There are actually two different categories of clubs now thanks to recent modifications by the USGA. There are traditional clubs with green grass and there are clubs without real estate.

The less the affiliation of the club member prior to forming or joining the club, the stronger the compliance requirements are to ensure that members don't just "buy" their handicap. They earn it legitimately.

"Most people think that a club means a country club or golf course," says Lorraine Thies, the AGA's assistant executive director. "But that's not the case. In the USGA's eyes, a club is a group of individuals. Individuals have always been able to create what's known as a club without real estate. In the past, there has been a requirement that those individuals have some form of affiliation among themselves before the club is formed.

Beginning in 2006, this non-real estate program is being expanded to include Internet-based clubs where potential members are solicited through mass media advertising."

For a detailed explanation of the USGA Handicap System and its new licensing requirements which will be enforced in 2006, log on to azgolf.org/handicapping. (See sidebar on this page.)

"OUR MEMBERS JOINED FOR FUN, NETWORKING, CAMARADERIE AND THE GOLF."

Eddie Popovitch

President, treasurer and tournament coordinator for the 9/80 Golf Club

A Trend Toward Growth

Currently, the AGA has 391 clubs and about 63,500 members. The largest percentage (about 88 percent) are affiliated with either traditional public or private clubs like We-Ko-Pa Golf Club or Tucson County Club. But, increasingly, the "clubs without real estate" option is becoming more and more popular with golfers. There are currently 94 of these clubs with 6,600 people (10 percent of the total membership) registered with the AGA.

Clubs without real estate are also the AGA's fastest growing type of club. Their members turn in scores at the computer at any golf course, receive AGA handicap cards and are eligible to compete in state competitions.

"As golf continues to grow in popularity, we get more calls each year from people wondering how they can get a USGA handicap," says Ginger Monroy, the AGA's director of member services. "Our clubs without real estate are the fastest growing segment of the membership right now."

When people call the AGA to inquire about joining, a staff member—usually receptionist Barbara Hannah—advises them to register with an affiliate club to get a handicap. Many prospective members go to their local public golf course and sign up there. But some people, for any variety of reasons, will seek other options. They'd rather start or join a club with people at work, golf with their cronies or have some other affiliation. "We'll let them know

THE LATEST BUZZ:

AGA Club Management System Introduced

If you're thinking of turning your club into more of an interactive, close-knit community the timing may be perfect. The AGA recently signed an agreement with software company Golf Fusion (www.golffusion.com) that should facilitate this goal. Officially called the AGA Club Management System, the Internet-based service helps members manage their clubs with easy-to-use online tools.

"It's a new club program where members can join the club online, sign up and pay for tournaments, post and view results, share news via an online newsletter, search the club directory for playing partners, shop for merchandise and a lot more," says Ginger Monroy, the AGA's director of member services. "We can actually help non-real estate clubs grow their membership through this program."

The service also reduces administrative workload with automated applications and generates a sense of community through sharing of information among members. The system has the



ability to create an e-mail blast or allow a member to post a bulletin board message. Players can create their own profiles, import photographs or check on availability of other members for a golf game. Golf shop staffers can post announcements about equipment sales, apparel and other news.

One big advantage for clubs is it reduces costs associated with sharing this information.

"It's a service that enhances our communications and gets members more involved with their events and fellow members," says Monroy. For more information, call the AGA at (602) 944-3035 or send Monroy an e-mail at gmonroy@azgolf.org

about our clubs without real estate program," says Monroy, "or the USGA's new Internet-based option, and give them the software they need to record scores and keep track of the handicaps."

What's been the impetus behind this growth? Golfers join for fun, friendship and competition—the same reasons members at Papago Golf Course in Phoenix or The Rim Golf Club in Payson might cite.

Eddie Popovitch, a senior material specialist for Raytheon in Tucson, volunteers as the president, treasurer and tournament coordinator for the 9/80 Golf Club. The club, formed in 1997, currently has 212 members, 150 of whom have an AGA

handicap. "Our members joined for fun, networking, camaraderie and the golf," Popovitch says. "People know each other here and they like the structure of this club and the way we do things."

Interestingly, the club's unique name materialized because of a work schedule policy at Raytheon, an industry leader in defense and government electronics, space, information technology, technical services and business aviation and special mission aircraft. "Our company says if you work nine days that total 80 hours you have every other Friday off," Popovitch says. "Hence, the name '9/80 Golf Club.'"

Reggie Browning, who also lives in Tucson, helped the Ten-Fifty Golf Club, a

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Missing Links of the AGA

35-member, eight-year-old group, sign on with the AGA as a club without real estate. One reason Ten-Fifty joined, he says, is it helped make his group of friends more valid. "Being members of the AGA is a way to legitimize our club," Browning says, "and become an "official" club versus just being a bunch of guys who play golf together. In addition, the handicap system, website, AGA events, etc. add value to our membership."

Originally organized by a bunch of guys who played golf at Davis Monthan Air Force Base, Ten-Fifty's name, says Browning, originated from a game. The bets/skins were 10 cents per par and 50 cents per birdie. Though they no longer play the Ten-Fifty skins game most of the members still have an affiliation with the Air Force or work in Tucson.

Cec Morris, tournament director and board member for the Arizona Sunset Golf Association, a Phoenix-based group founded in 1967, says many of his 130

members would not have joined the AGA on their own. "Most of our members have told me that they joined because it is fun to play 12 different courses a year," Morris says. "We can play golf from sunrise to sunset, therefore the name Arizona Sunset GA."

Browning, an IBM employee for the past 27 years has no qualms about endorsing the AGA's clubs without real estate program. In fact, he says the AGA made it easy for Ten-Fifty to get started. "With its initial by-laws, website, communications (rules questions, etc.) they have been very helpful in getting organized and staying organized. We are proud to be members."

Extending Its Reach

"We at the AGA strive to grow the game and reach out to new and potential members. Providing services to clubs without real estate provides an effective venue to accomplish those goals while introducing golfers to the traditions of

the game. One of the challenges is reaching golfers who don't know yet what the AGA can offer."

"At the AGA, we are actively tracking these groups because we think it's good for the game and the association," Monroy says.

Thinking about forming your own club?

In order to become a club without real estate affiliated with the AGA, a group will need the following: Ten members, at least. "We'd like 25, but if they have 10 with the intent of growing it we'll work with them," says Monroy. The club's name should reflect the membership base. They'll also need bylaws, a handicap committee and a handicap chairman. This person will need access to a computer and the ability to run software provided by the AGA. Annual dues of \$25 per golfer will cover the cost of the all the services provided by the association. ■

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