

MUSKET RIDGE ADAPTS TO GOLF TRENDS

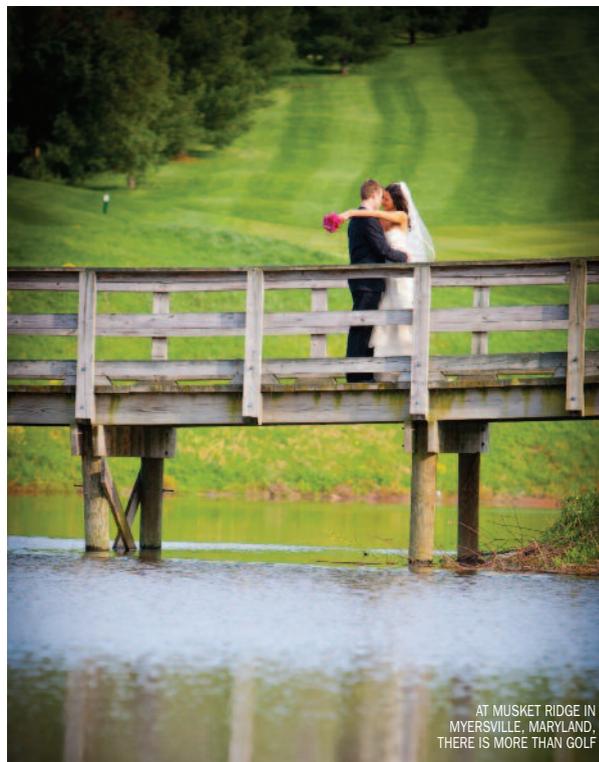
Catoctin Hall provides first class venue for outings and other events

As the number of golfers continues a gentle decline, courses are deciding how they will continue to compete and serve customers. Cutting costs and prices is a common choice that works for a short period of time, but ultimately the product and customers suffer. Many are trying to grow the game, with mixed results. Musket Ridge in western Maryland has pioneered a different approach.

A decade ago Musket recognized that the original plans to construct a third nine holes were in contrast with demographic trends. Instead the owners explored other options and committed to building an event venue that would provide creature comforts to golf outings and also enable the venue to serve weddings, parties and corporate events.

Catoctin Hall was built in 2007 as a first-class event venue with a view overlooking perhaps the most beautiful golf course in the state. Entering the domain traditionally occupied by country clubs, Musket hired a top chef from Legal Sea Foods and brought in a premier professional management company well versed in operating clubs with full-scale banquet operations.

Musket's Catoctin Hall combines a state-of-the-art banquet facility with the warmth and highly detailed finishes. The metal roof, beautiful stonework and classic exterior lines send a clear message of architectural integrity and construction quality. Inside, the vaulted ceiling, incredible natural light, fireplace and flat screen television that can be concealed behind wooden shutter doors are just some of the many interesting features. Ultimately, though, guests are drawn to the wall of windows offering sweeping golf course and mountain views. Outside on the terrace one can enjoy a cocktail, fresh air and a view unspoiled by homes or development.



The bet has paid off. The venue is a regular award winner in WeddingWire's Bride Choice selections having hosted hundreds of weddings. The outing business has grown to peak levels and food and beverage revenue grew larger than golf revenue for the first time last year following an expansion to accommodate parties of 250.

The successful event business also enables continued investment in the golf course. A multi-phase bunker renovation project is underway and a short game area was recently added. Course conditions are better than ever. Consequently the course jumped to No. 6 in Golfweek's state rankings.

Affinity Management operates the property and founder Damon DeVito observes, "There is tremendous synergy between the two businesses that allows us to elevate the experience for all customers. We've simply got more resources." ■

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