

Fall 2024
Volume 2.3

GOLF DESTINATIONS

MAGAZINE

Sweet Home Alabama

Where golfers won't be blue

PLUS: Sky Valley, GA • Plantation Bay • Horseshoe Bay
Golfing In Ireland • Gaylord, MI • Naples and so much more!



Fall 2024

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GOLF DESTINATIONS MAGAZINE

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FROM THE PUBLISHER

GOLF... *every* WHERE

John Glozek Jr.

Is it just us, or does it seem as if the sheer number of venues to take a golf trip has soared in recent years? There are certainly a multitude of cities, regions, countries, and courses to choose from, and our appetite has only increased with each passing year. And that brings us to this issue of DESTINATIONS Magazine. On the pages ahead, we invite you to explore ALL the places that would be great selections for your next golfing journey.

Let's start with our cover feature – located to our south. "Sweet Home Alabama" is more than a song that really kicks. It's also a way to describe a wonderful destination for great golf and more. It's fair to say that a single trip to Alabama would not provide enough time to play all the courses within that state. But the "Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail" would be a terrific place to start with 26 different courses on 11 different sites – a total of 468 world-class golf holes in all. Read and see (with photos) all about it as we take to you down to Alabama.

Elsewhere in this issue, we go coast-to-coast, with feature articles on Sky Valley, Georgia, to Plantation Bay Golf Club in Florida, and a trip west to La Quinta Resort in Greater Palm Springs, California. Each of those golf trips

offers something special. To the north, we also explore the incredible experiences found in Gaylord, Michigan, where I had the opportunity to spend some quality time on and off the golf courses there.

How about a trip outside the U.S.? Glad you asked. We have in-depth feature articles focusing on golf in Ireland – otherwise known as 'heaven on earth.' It is extremely difficult to find ANYONE who has returned from a golf trip to Ireland who doesn't say it was something they will remember forever.

But that's not all. Keep reading to find out why a journey to Casa de Campo in the Caribbean is such a treat, especially in that it's currently holding a 50th anniversary celebration down there.

You'll forgive us if we also include a number of other destinations, specifically Naples, Florida and Sea Pines Resort on Hilton Head Island. And for something a bit different but well worth checking out we send you to Horseshoe Bay Resort in Texas for the spectacular 18-hole

There is only one thing better than planning for a wonderful golf vacation. Actually taking that golf vacation, of course.

Whitewater Putting Course, billed as a 'rollicking 18-hole, par 72 Zoysia grass putting experience' that you won't find anywhere else.

Hopefully, this is more than enough for you. There are so many locations to visit with your golf clubs, and it's always important to enjoy as many of these places while we still can. As always, enjoy YOUR next golf destination, and let us know all about it!

John J. Glozek, Jr.
Publisher



COVER FEATURE



Sweet Home Alabama

WHERE GOLFERS
WON'T BE BLUE

By Phyllis C. Barone, QueenontheGreen

If you are serious about the game and want to play numerous courses all within one state, roll tide to Alabama and experience the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail. With 25 courses on 11 sites, featuring 450 holes of world-class golf, it's a golfer's dream — so create a spreadsheet and start planning!

It all began thanks to the enterprising David G. Bonner back in 1992 to boost tourism, attract retirees and spur economic growth within the state of Alabama. With the retired golf course architect Robert Trent Jones Sr. on board, it was an impressive project that started the first of many golf trails.

Bonner has managed the Retirement System of Alabama (RSA) since 1973. His profound mission for the investment fund has always been to effectively diversify the assets of the state's pension fund to help build a stronger Alabama. The end result being a more lucrative RSA. Creating a system of golf facilities throughout the state has resulted in a perfect fit for his investment philosophy.

Chip Purser, Director of Golf at Ross Ridge, a premier course on The Trail, agrees. "People from outside the state that have never seen it, don't have any idea how pretty Alabama is and what there is to offer here. The Trail has done a great thing by bringing



people through here and changing the image of the state through the use of golf as a tool. ”

I experienced Alabama and all it has to offer in both the Fall and Spring months with a fine group of golf industry professionals. Yes it took a couple of visits to get most of it in. With more to explore, I will be back!.

My first tee time was at The Ridge Course at the RTJ Golf Trail at Oxmoor Valley just outside of Birmingham. This track is fun and can be classified by fairly rugged undulating terrain with holes that stand on their own through tree-lined corridors.

We then grabbed our putters, a couple of wedges, a short iron and headed over to The Backyard at Oxmoor Valley. This nine hole course can be played in about an hour, the longest hole being 132 yards. There are no water hazards and just a handful of bunkers. Enjoy a beverage before or after, while relaxing around the fire pit, overlooking the first tee.

Just five minutes away, is RTJ Trail at Ross Bridge, annually ranked as one of the best in the State of Alabama. The course is vast and scenic with 18 holes on about 300 acres with a 30 acre lake down below that surrounds the front and back nine holes. Massive fairways and big greens require you to play to the center to avoid false edges and false fronts which can make it difficult to get up and down. If you come up short, and the ball rolls off, then you are looking at a big number!

Golf was followed by accommodations and dinner at Ross Bridge Golf Resort and Spa near Birmingham. Ranked among the top hotels in the world, the property features fine dining, a clubhouse sports bar, spacious fitness center, indoor and outdoor pools. Most notably, the exterior resembles a Scottish castle with soaring turrets and stonework. At dusk each day, a lone bagpiper plays his

way around the hotel, paying tribute to the birthplace of golf.

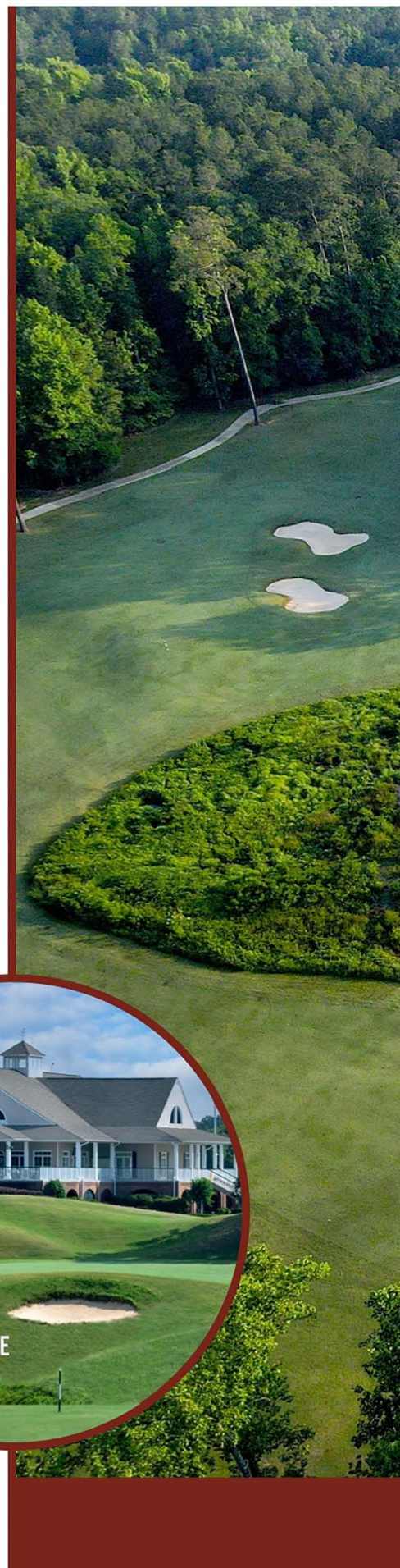
Back on the bus to depart for Tuscaloosa to play Ol' Colony, a Jerry Pate design. Although it's not a part of The RTJ Trail, it's a great option for an affordable course with plenty of character. The Alamite is an upscale boutique hotel situated in the heart of Tuscaloosa and within walking distance to the University of Alabama.

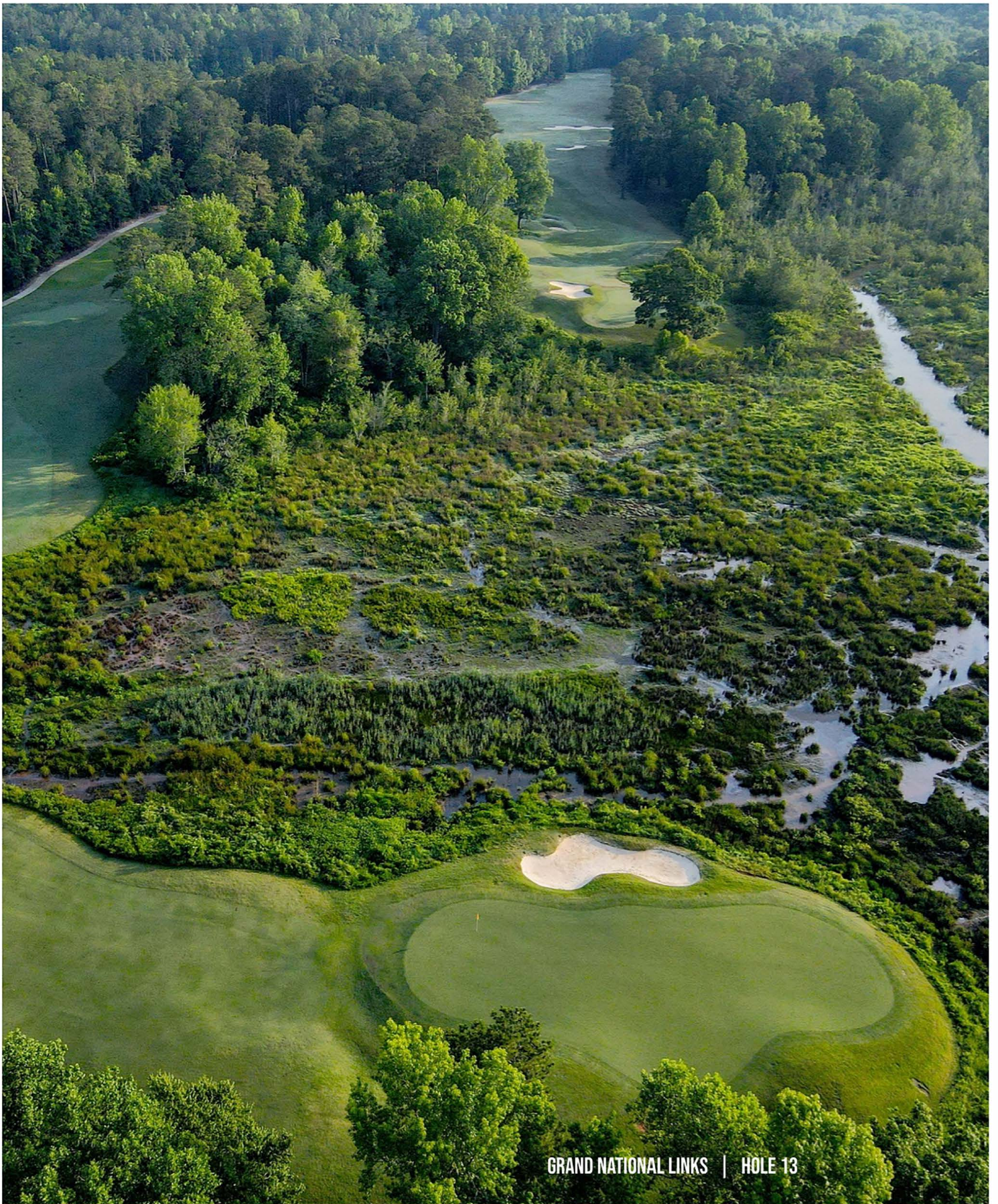
Moving south, we made our way to Prattville to play RTJ Golf Trail at Capitol Hill. Here outside the state capitol of Montgomery, you will find three very government named tracks: The Legislature, The Senator and the Judge.

With more than 1,500 acres of golf and nature, the pure magnitude of this facility is amazing and allows each course to be drastically different from the other. The Judge was intended to be one of the tougher public golf courses in the country, worthy of hosting a U. S. Open. It certainly lives up to that with 14 holes adjoining the water and one that showcases a bulkhead island green. You will likely leave with a depleted supply of golf balls! Nonetheless, a truly magnificent experience.

Accommodations at the Marriott Capitol Hill Hotel and conference Center in Prattville is a convenient location not only to golf courses on The Trail but close to the Rosa Parks Museum, Montgomery's Riverboat, The Shakespeare Festival and Riverwalk Amphitheater.

Our next stop was to Opelika to RTJ Golf Trail at Grand National, about





GRAND NATIONAL LINKS | HOLE 13



“LIFE IS GOOD WHEN GOLF IS IN IT.”

90 minutes northeast. Along the way, we hopped off our bus to see the Jordan–Hare Stadium at Auburn University. Although the University may boast one of the best football programs, and impressive locker room facilities, the Rane Culinary Science Center, the world’s finest teaching restaurant may outperform their team! The views from the Rooftop Bar are one of the most elevated experiences in Auburn.

Our final tee time on this tour was The Links course at Grand National, a Jones Sr. layout. Described as the “cornerstone” of the entire Grand National complex, the brutish Links Course is links in name only, as the course contains plenty of elevation changes and is carved from the forest. Multiple hazards usually guard the greens: bunkers, marshes, lakes, and native grass areas are among the many effective defenders of scoring a par.

The Marriott Grand National Resort



GOLF Alabama



and Spa, located just 90 minutes from Atlanta’s Hartsfield International Airport offers 54 holes: The Lake, The Links and a Short Course, three pools, pickle ball

courts and an award winning spa to wind down after a long day on the links.

About six months later, I joined a Spring Tour that included Gulf Shores and Mobile, with the first stop being, the Short Course at the RTJ Golf Trail at Magnolia Grove in Mobile. Although a torrential rain prevented us from playing all 18, it was easy to visualize why this may be one of the best par 3’s in the country. Recently renovated, with newly designed greens and all-new putting surfaces, this par 54 with a length of 3140 yards, is as good as any collection of one-shotters on a championship course.

Lodging for two nights was at The Renaissance Battle House Hotel and Spa. One of the premier locations on the RTJ Hotel Collection, this historic landmark boasts luxury suites in downtown Mobile with historic and modern amenities. The hotel features a spa, fitness center a rooftop pool and several dining options.

If you are lucky, you will meet Mr. George, a 96 year old historian. He will

enthusiastically escort you around the Battle House telling an encyclopedia of stories. Mr. George took us up to The Whispering Arch on the second floor where you face the wall at the end of the arch and whisper. Think before you speak as a friend at the opposite end of that arch is able to hear you clearly.

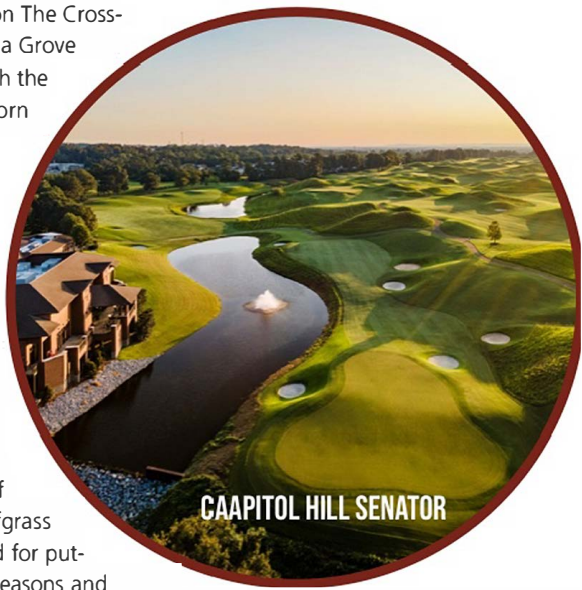
Dinner that evening was at Dauphin's, one of the best restaurant views in America. On the 34th floor of the RSA Trustmark Building in downtown Mobile, Alabama, you will experience panoramic views of the bustling port city and the highest water dining on the Gulf of Mexico from the Rio Grande to Key West. When I asked members of Alabama Tourism what to order, they all suggested Cobia, a relatively new kid on the block because most people, like myself have never heard of it. It's got a naturally mild buttery taste that's unlike any other fish with a flaky texture that stays moist. When Cobia was on the menu, that became my go to entrée for the rest of the trip! Bread pudding, a culinary Alabama delight wasn't easy to

refuse either.

Our next 18 was on The Crossing course at Magnolia Grove which has hosted both the LPGA Tour and The Korn Ferry Tour Championship. Several water features and crushed oyster shell waste areas were added to provide an exciting new look along with it's parkland-type ambiance. All holes feature the acclaimed Mini Verde Ultradwarf greens - a type of turfgrass or bermudagrass used for putting greens in warm seasons and transitional locations.

Following a delightful lunch at the course, we ventured to tour Mobile's delta, known as America's Amazon, via airboat to check out alligators and other wildlife. Our crew named our boat Captain "Crocodile Hunter" as he was quite knowledgeable about the delta and where to possibly site a gator. As we whisked through the edge of the wetlands at higher speeds, I leaned heavily into my colleague on my left, clinching onto their arm, fearing that one of those creatures would suddenly hop on to join us! Hunter also provided a set of headphones to deafen the noise of the engine. Worth the adventure, if you can handle the elevated heart rate throughout the ride!

Felix's Fish Camp was on the agenda for dinner that evening. Live music and a premier choice for fresh Gulf seafood, and fried green



CAAPITOL HILL SENATOR



ROSS BRIDGE

tomatoes, the breath-taking views on the Mobile Causeway add a toast of the town experience. Cobia was on the menu so I looked no further. Our server suggested to try a Bushwacker Cocktail — a yummy dessert alternative that was shared by all.

The evening was still young so our hosts from Visit Mobile suggested we visit the unique Las Floriditas for after-dinner cocktails, located across the street from our hotel. This prohibition-era speakeasy was designed in tribute to the birthplace of the daiquiri- El Floridita in Havana, Cub, one of Hemingway's favorite bars he frequented for his cocktail of choice.

To build intrigue, the entrance is located behind a secret library wall where you are greeted by a doorman. A password, which changes daily is posted to followers on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter at 12 pm on Thursday. Once inside the concealed bar, you will also find a bank vault which opens up to a dining area reserved for private groups.

Our 7:20 departure to make an 8:30 tee time came around too quickly. The Dogwood Course at The Lakewood Club situated at The Grand Hotel in Point Clear was on the docket. Host to the 59th Senior Women's Amateur



IN ADDITION TO THE AMAZING, CHALLENGING GOLF COURSES, THERE IS PLENTY OF OTHER FEATURES TO ALABAMA THAT MAKE IT UNIQUE AND ENTICING. CRAFT BREWERIES, WORLD RENOWNED BASS AND RED SNAPPER FISHING, A THRIVING CULINARY SCENE OF SEAFOOD JOINTS WITH THE FINEST CATCH, FINE DINING PUBS AND A UNIQUE BBQ TRAIL ARE ALL WHAT MAKE ALABAMA SO "SWEET."





Championship in 2020, the course winds in and around marshes and features a spectacular collection of demanding holes. After we found the beverage cart, all play improved!

Lunch was hosted by The Grand Hotel Golf Resort and Spa followed by a tour of the property set on 550 acres of stunning natural beauty on Mobile Bay. An enchanting destination filled with gracious Southern charm for over 175 years, this is another exceptional RTJ Golf Trail Resort Hotel.

Dinner and accommodations were at The Beach Club by Spectrum Resorts in Gulf Shores. We were greeted by Easton Colvin, Public Relations Specialist for Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism. Easton wears his name well and is easily identifiable by sporting his big western hat, slim tall stature, and projects a laid back demeanor.

Speaking of laid back, the stellar, mesmerizing views from our condo above the clubhouse at Kiva Dunes enticed you to do just that! The soothing sounds from the Gulf provided the perfect remedy for drifting into a dreamy, peaceful sleep.

My colleagues were thankful for the 10:30 am tee time at Kiva Dunes, one of Alabama's highest acclaimed public golf courses. This Jerry Pate design presents Alabama's coastal beauty and charm with rentals ranging from beach homes to condos overlooking the 18th green.

My terrific threesome included Easton and a fellow writer, John Price. When I challenged Easton to a match, he eagerly accepted and was determined to win. Our round became heated as our shot distances were even on most holes, but he started to make pars easily and won the match, four up.

His prize, unbeknownst to him, was a new hat. I presented it to Easton later that evening at Zeke's Restaurant, located at Zeke's Marina Landing. He wore it proudly and immediately texted all his colleagues that he beat a golf writer!

Although Zeke's menu features plenty of fish options, Cobia was once again my choice.

Easton, being a music buff, escorted us all to Flora-Bama, home of the famous Bushwacker Cocktail that was previously poured at Felix's. The Flora-Bama is located uniquely on the Orange

Beach, Alabama and Perdido Key, Florida line. With five stages for live music, you can relax in any of the areas and select the entertainment of our choice from country, rock dance and beach music. We decided to hang out for a few to enjoy the music and finish our bushwackers! If you're feeling lucky, you can purchase a Florida lottery ticket right across the street!

All good things must come to an end and so it did when we reached our final course on our spread sheet — Cypress Bend at Craft Farms. This Arnold Palmer designed course has a coastal feel as it traverses a unique system of cord-grass accented lakes which come into play on nearly every hole. The layout offers wide fairways, vast landing areas and large undulating greens.

As we packed up our clubs in our travel bags to head for the Pensacola International Airport, I embraced our colleagues that became forever golf friends over our 5 days together and expressed my mantra to all:

"Life is Good when Golf is in It."