

New business model hopes to increase traffic at Sonora Dunes golf course

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Jae Hendrickson, the new operations manager at Sonora Dunes Golf Course in Osoyoos, said offering great value for the dollar will be the key to attracting more golfers to the picturesque nine-hole course during the 2017 golf season. (Keith Lacey photo)

Offering value for your hard-earned dollar is going to be the new business model for success at the Sonora Dunes Golf Course in Osoyoos.

The picturesque, nine-hole course, located at Nk'Mip at Spirit Ridge Resort in Osoyoos, has just hired Jae Hendrickson as its new operations manager and he's committed to turning around the fortunes of the golf course.

"We want to find our little niche ... and appeal to the recreational golfer that can only commit to playing eight or 10 or 12 rounds a year," said Hendrickson. "There are a lot of recreational golfers who can't justify buying a membership at Osoyoos Golf Club ... and there are many others who can't afford \$90 a round at up the hill in Osoyoos or at Nk'Mip Golf Course or Fairview in Oliver.

"We want to offer value in everything we provide to a golfer when they come out, be it with customer service, having a cleaned up and attractive golf course and good food. We have to charge what the market will bear and to be honest, that hasn't been the case around here for a few years now."

Despite the long and harsh winter of 2016-17, the course has "wintered very well" and

the greens are in outstanding condition and the course in general looks great three weeks into the new golf season, said Hendrickson.

"We're very happy with the conditions we're opening under," he said. "Our snowbird customers are very loyal and we've been pretty busy since opening in early March, despite the lack of our usual great spring weather."

Hendrickson reiterated there is a strong market for local golfers and tourists visiting Osoyoos who can't justify or afford to spend big bucks to golf.

Sonora Dunes has arranged a "stay and play" package for visitors at the Watermark Beach Resort as well as Nk'Mip at Spirit Ridge Resort and all Osoyoos residents will be offered a "loyalty program" where rates are reduced if you purchase multiple rounds, he said.

The entire course has been cleaned up and looks better than it has in many years, he said.

"This year our job is to market and promote this golf course," he said. "We want people to know they will pay less to play, will play on a better and cleaner course, there will be better and cheaper food and beverages and it will be a better overall golf experience."

Last year, it cost \$170 for a family of four to play 18 holes at Sonora Dunes with a cart and that rate will be reduced to \$60 for 2017, he said.

"You have to offer value for the dollar," he said.

There will also be a special focus to attract junior golfers because they represent the future of the game and are key to making places like Sonora Dunes successful, he said.

"We will be offering free junior golf to any golfer 13 and under accompanied by an adult," he said.

Sonora Dunes has also signed a deal with JoJo's Café in Osoyoos to provide sandwiches and other food to the course, he said.

Hendrickson said he's excited about his new job and believes all of the efforts to improve the golfing experience at Sonora Dunes will result in increased traffic and an improved bottom line.

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