

STOPPING BY THE CLUBHOUSE

A BREAKTHROUGH FEC FINDS A HOME ADJACENT TO A GOLF PARK



Darin Van Tassell (L) and Tony Ross have masterminded the construction of The Clubhouse.

By Frank Seninsky
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The Clubhouse Family Entertainment Center (42,000 sq. ft.) in Statesboro, Ga., with its 24 bowling lanes and 4 private VIP lanes, Ballocity, 3000 sq. ft. Zone laser tag, 4 Highway 66 mini-bowling, 3000 sq. ft. of debit card-operated games, full service restaurant and snack bar, and corporate meeting/birthday party rooms, opened its doors on Oct. 15, 2010 to a very excited Bulloch County community. Owners Darin Van Tassell and Tony Ross, are quite happy that their \$6.2 Million project is performing 12% above projections after 7 weeks.

The Clubhouse is actually the Phase 4 development of Hackers Golf Park that opened in 1998 and now encompasses 30-acres that include Twin Falls Mini Golf and ATEC Batting Cages. "The Clubhouse was designed to have the feel of an old minor league baseball park with a lot of brick and wrought iron," said Van Tassell, who is also a figure in the international baseball world, recently serving as competition director for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

Interestingly, the Clubhouse is completely non-alcoholic. "The decision to create an alcohol-free FEC was NOT an anti-alcohol decision," said Van Tassell. "It was a business decision. In order for a facility of this size and scope to flourish in a smaller market, we need lots of groups to be compatible with one another. Six-year-olds, 16-year-olds, 26-year-olds, and 60-year-olds—we



need all of them to be comfortable with each other. And I believe we have succeeded in doing so."

Ross adds, "Darin and I are in complete agreement. Due to the large population of college students in our market, we did not want The Clubhouse to turn into a nightclub on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights so we made a business decision to appeal to a larger market. It was a good decision also knowing that we are in a conservative family market."

Birthday parties have been strong since opening day, and will likely be a cornerstone for the facility. "We have had 120 birthday parties in the last four

weeks," said Ross.

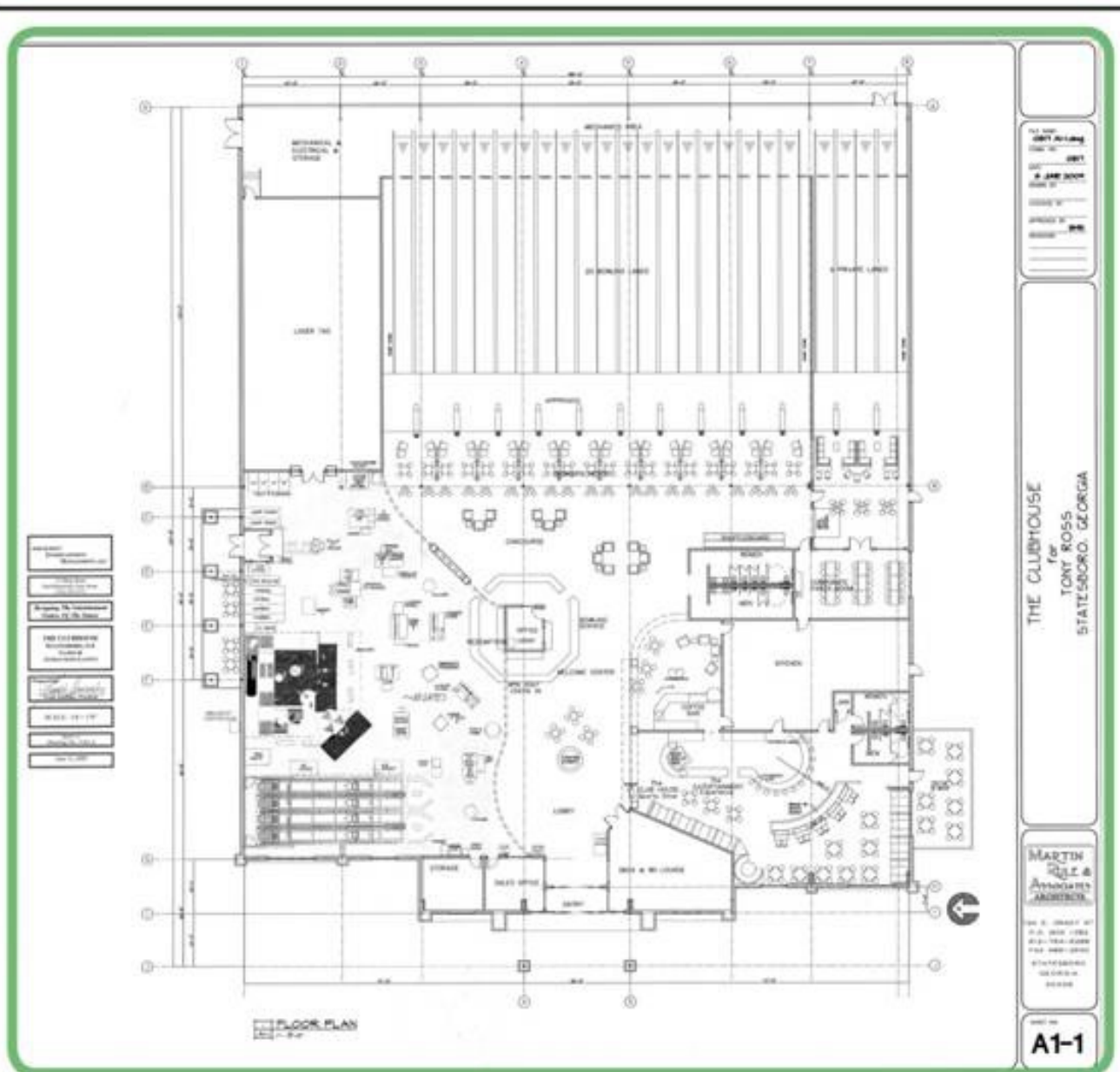
"We should be able to maintain that but don't see increasing to more than 35-40 per week because we will also be focusing on groups. Our largest group so far has been 100 but lock-ins and larger groups are being scheduled."

What are the strongest components of The Clubhouse? "The strongest anchor is bowling," said Ross, "and then comes the other attractions including the strong game component. Food and beverage are currently No. 3. Both Darin and I see a stronger potential in each category, especially with food and beverage."

What are the greatest challenges? "No. 1 was obtaining financing in the midst of a recession," said Ross. "No. 2 is staff training. We had so many people cross-training in different areas - laser tag, Embed System, kitchen, Conquer Pro, pin spotters, game repair - 8-10 different areas in which training was going on for three days prior to opening."

What was the biggest surprise? "Our biggest surprise was the quality and the presentation of the food that we are serving," said Ross. "Spikes Sports





Grill is a full-service restaurant, with a large and diverse menu. We have received rave reviews on the quality of the food. I attribute that to Gary Sussman and Lorraine Platman of Dynamic Dining Solutions."

What people or organizations were critical to the Project's success? "Attending Foundations University was very important to me to fully understanding the scope of what I was getting into," said Ross. "I found Doug Wilkerson (Dynamic

Design) to be extremely conscientious and very innovative in his design of the Facility. Frank Sensky (AEM) was pretty much the lynchpin in this project, as he brought together and kept track of so many good people. Frank was like a partner in The Clubhouse and continues to be. Dorman Spencer (Bowling Equipment) and Doug Wilkerson also acted as if they were partners with us. These three deserve the credit. They work because it is a passion and this passion has spilled over to others in the project and our staff as well."

What do you think the future will look like for The Clubhouse? "Being in the fun business is contagious, said Van Tassell. "There is nothing quite like seeing smiles and having our guests thank us for improving the quality of life in our area."

"The future looks bright," added Ross. "When time is right, we will add a go-kart track. We have an option for an additional 40 acres."

For more information, visit HackersGolfPark.net or TheClubhouseatHackers.com or call 912-871-1000.



Background Tony Ross

Tony grew up Waynesboro, Ga. and graduated from Auburn University with a degree in Electrical Engineering. He worked in the electrical utility industry for the next 25 years in every phase of construction, sales, and marketing. He was the lead engineer for both Units 1 & 2 of the Vogtle Nuclear Power Plant, responsible for reactor building and fuel handling building (Unit 1) while overseeing several hundred electricians and management personnel. Tony's wife, Mary Allison Ross, is a professional baker specializing in wedding cakes, birthday cakes, and special events. They have two boys, Dylan and Dalton.

Background on Darin Van Tassell

Darin graduated from Georgia Southern University with a BA in political science and played baseball for the Eagles (85-89) and earned NCAA Academic All American honors as a senior. He received his PhD & MA in International Studies from the University of South Carolina. As a member of the International Baseball Federation, Darin worked in more than 20 countries side by side with many baseball legends, including Joe DiMaggio, Harman Killebrew, Hank Aaron, Lou Brock, and Duke Snider.

In 1996 Darin became the youngest head coach in Olympic history as he coached the Nicaraguan Olympic Baseball Team to a Bronze Medal against the USA Team at the Olympic Games in Atlanta, GA. He was the Technical Commissioner for the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens and the Competition Director for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. Darin's wife, Netra, is an adjunct professor at GSU in the Department of Family & Consumer Sciences. They have two boys, Whitt (age 12) and Payne (age 9).



History of Hackers & The Clubhouse

- **Phase 1** - Hackers Golf Park was opened in 1998 by Darin Van Tassell. For nine consecutive years, Hackers was voted as one of the 'Top 100 Golf Rangers in America.' 1.6 million golf balls are hit per year.
- **Phase 2** - Twin Falls Mini Golf opens in 2001 (designed by Harris Miniature Golf).
- **Phase 3** - ATEC Batting Cages open in 2003 with nine pitching machines (baseball/softball). 500 private lessons/year average.
- **Dec. 2006** - Tony and Mary Allison Ross begin to research building a bowling facility in Statesboro, GA. They called all of the bowling suppliers and Dave Cybykoski of AMF was the first to visit in January 2007. Tony credits Dave with pointing him in the right directions that led to Tony contacting Doug Wilkerson of Dynamic Designs and Frank Seninsky of AEM.
- **June 2007** - Tony hires AEM to conduct a full scope market feasibility study.
- **July 2007** - Frank Seninsky visits 23 properties with Tony in Statesboro, one being Hackers Golf Park, which was analyzed as a 'strong competitor.'
- **Sept. 2007** - Feasibility Study was completed by Jerry Merola. Doug Wilkerson was retained to design and theme the building according to the AEM space and component specifications. Tony continues to look for sites to acquire as well as financing.
- **March 2008** - Tony meets with Darin Van Tassell and forms a partnership to build The Clubhouse (as designed and budgeted) on land owned by Hackers and adjacent to Hackers. Darin owned existing land with partners Phil & Mary Anne Michel, They put up the land as collateral to get the loan. A new partnership was structured (Tony bought out one of the silent partners) to include the entire Hackers complex. There are currently three partners. It should be noted that the SBA guaranteed \$2 Million of the financing (which was the maximum at the time).
- **Phase 4** The Clubhouse opens October 15, 2010.

Suppliers of The Clubhouse (Alphabetically):

Alpha-Omega Sales - Games and related equipment, prizes, tickets, tokens.

Amusement Entertainment Management (AEM) - Feasibility Study & Project Coordination/Development.

Bowling Equipment - Dorman Spencer

Creative Works - Thematic design for laser tag.

Dynamic Design - Howard Ellman, Doug Wilkerson (Original Floor Plan by Dynamic Design.)

Dynamic Dining Solutions - Gary Sussman & Lorraine Platman

EMBED - Debit Card System-POS System

Prime Play - Ballocity

QubicaAMF - Regulation bowling and Highway 66 Mini Bowling

Zone Systems - Laser Tag

Amusement

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