

# The Capital

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## Better practice range will help perfect South River experience

By DAVE BROUGHTON, Staff Writer  
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The decision to take South River Golf Links from a public facility to private was not made on a whim. Last year, Lex Birney, CEO of The Brick Companies, which owns the course under its Atlantic Golf brand, conducted an extensive study, soliciting opinions from local golfers on the best direction for the course.

Tucked away in the South River community, the Brian Ault design plays through the rolling countryside dotted with creeks and marshland - all environmentally protected. The back nine is marked by spectacular elevation changes.

But not all was perfect at the Edgewater course now known as the Golf Club at South River.

Chris Calvert noticed a shortcoming right away during his first visit.

"The dilemma and the challenge here is the driving range; you can probably only hit a 2-iron, at best," said Calvert, who was hired as the club's general manager in May and will lead the transition from public to private. "The number one thing mentioned in the focus groups was the practice facility. That's a big priority for us."

Finding your tee shot on the No. 9 fairway at South River sometimes requires sorting through the various range balls that have made their way over from the adjoining practice area. That's going to change in the near future as the club is planning to flip-flop the two. Plans call for a full-sized driving range and enhanced short game area to be located behind the first tee, along with a new No. 9 hole, a par 4, 370-yard dogleg right that will finish at the clubhouse.

"I think this will make No. 9 a more member-friendly hole because most golfers hit left to right," Calvert said.

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Calvert said the new range will also include a miniature par 3 course and a short game practice area.

"This will be a huge enhancement for us," said Calvert, who expects the change to be completed next year.

The Golf Club at South River currently has less than 100 members, with a target membership of 450. As membership grows over the next few years, more improvements will be made to the course, including a revamping of holes No. 3 and 8. The final phase will be an expansion and renovation of the clubhouse.

According to Calvert, many of the course's 82 bunkers will be shifted or altered. As well, additional forward and back tees will be added.

"The additional tees will make it more player-friendly for juniors and ladies, while at the same time adding some length to make it more challenging for today's technology," Calvert said.

According to Calvert, other changes have been added to the list as a result of input from current and prospective members, including expanded fitness programs and an inside practice area.

"The intention of the overall facility is to be family oriented," said Calvert, who previously managed a pair of Richmond-area courses, The Dominion Club and Hunting Hawk. "From the companies' perspective, this makes total sense. We want to have a membership that is totally engaged. We want them to feel like this is a second home to them.

"The plans will evolve and change as the vision of our membership evolves and changes."

Until reaching its membership goal, the Golf Club at South River will continue to offer daily-fee golf. Making the change to private will also mean the club won't be competing against the more heralded 36-hole Queenstown Harbor, also owned by The Brick Companies.

"Public golf is struggling right now - numbers have been flat and stagnant for a number of years," Calvert said. "It's a tough, competitive market, so instead of seeking the 20- to 30,000

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rounds of golf you would typically look for, we're looking for 400 or so members, who are interested in a higher level experience at a nice golf and sport facility, one that the whole family can be a part of.

"This will allow us to serve what I think is a high-potential niche market here in Annapolis," Calvert said. "There's interest in a serious, high-end facility and club with a high level of service. The best utilization of this facility is clearly as a private facility."

For more information on The Golf Club at South River, visit [www.golfclubsr.com](http://www.golfclubsr.com).