

Saddle up: Big plans set for Portage golf course, restaurant

From the Portage Daily Register - Oct 16, 2017 - [NOAH VERNAU nvernau@wiscnews.com](mailto:NOAH.VERNAU@wiscnews.com)



Dave and Margie Druce, the new owners of Saddle Ridge Golf Course (previously known as Pine Trail Golf Course), sit in the restaurant on site that they're leasing to Johnny Bliese, who will open the full menu for Johnny B's Rolling Smoke on Nov. 1.



Johnny Bliese, pictured here on Thursday next to his wood smoker, will open his full menu for Johnny B's Rolling Smoke on Nov. 1. The property is leased to him by Dave and Margie Druce, the new owners of Saddle Ridge Golf Course (previously known as Pine Trail Golf Course).

Info: [Facebook.com/johnbliese1](https://www.facebook.com/johnbliese1)

Portage residents might easily gain a sense of the playful atmosphere at Saddle Ridge Golf Course when they talk to its new owners, Margie and Dave Druce.

“This is her baby,” Dave said of their enterprise on Thursday afternoon, as Margie, a few feet from him, finished her conversation at the bar of Johnny B’s Rolling Smoke. The husband — waiting for his wife’s return — was more than happy to let her ride tall in the saddle, so to speak. Outside the window behind his table, league play at the golf course could be seen.

Do the Druces golf?

“She does,” Dave said.

New ownership at the golf course means “a positive attitude and great energy,” Margie said as she returned to the table. She and her husband purchased the property on Oct. 1, and they expect to make several improvements there in the months and years ahead. The Druces are leasing the restaurant that exists on site to Johnny Bliese, so there was much to talk about Thursday.

“It’s not real competitive,” Margie said of the several leagues that play at Saddle Ridge (previously known as Pine Trail Golf Course). “We have leagues for everyone. And they’re not strict; the members run them. You don’t even have to be a member” to play in leagues.

“This whole place is family-oriented,” Dave chimed in. “We like to keep everybody involved.

“We seem to think people enjoy the camaraderie.”

Saddle Ridge is a golf community with 350 homes, Margie said. She and her husband have lived in the community since 2006. Residents there play cards and golf, treating the Saddle Ridge like a community center. “It’s a nice, 9-hole course that wanders through the houses,” she said.

The Druces live on the fourth hole, right by the green.

“We love it out here. We really do,” Margie said. “We wanted to save it, to make it the best it can be for our community.”

Comfort food

Johnny B’s is open now with a limited menu including burgers. The restaurant will offer its full menu Nov. 1, including fish fries on Fridays, prime rib on Saturdays and Green Bay Packers and Wisconsin Badgers parties on football weekends.

Johnny B’s is Bliese’s first restaurant, though he has a degree in the culinary arts and has been in the food business for several years. “This is exciting,” Bliese said. “Everybody’s welcoming.”

His full menu will involve items like brisket, pulled pork, ribs and chicken dinners, much of his menu cooked outside on the wood-burning grill. Johnny B’s will be open year-round, from 8 a.m. to close on Sundays and 11

a.m. to close Monday through Saturday (“close” meaning however long customers would like to stay, within reason).

“This will be a place for comfort food,” Bliese said. “Comfort food at a good price.”

Wanna play?

Conditions at the golf course have slipped in recent years, Margie said. That’s already starting to change with work being done to shape up the greens. “We’ll improve the property, but we’ll also make it more reasonable (in pricing),” Margie said.

For the month of October, the Druces are offering nine holes of golf using a cart for \$15. If you buy 2018 membership now, you can play for the rest of this year for free.

“Last year, we played all the way to Christmas,” Margie said.

Membership costs include a single golf pass for \$510 (plus tax). Adding a spouse is \$269. Family passes are \$912.

“And we’ll take off \$100 if you pay before the end of the year,” Margie noted.

Dave doesn’t golf much anymore, due to bad knees, but he enjoys the sport nevertheless. Margie once fired a hole-in-one at Saddle Ridge — she’s quick to recite the date: June 17, 2014.

They both started golfing regularly in 2010, having never played the sport very much previously.

Seeing friends and neighbors play the sport every day seems to blend with their enjoyment of the sport itself.

“This is a family,” Margie said.

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