

hidden gem

The Republic

Foresight's philosophy is a winner:
quality public golf at a reasonable price.

By Rebecca MacDonald

Foresight Golf's environmentally sound practices recently won the course a Water Saver Award.

In the world of daily fee golf, it seems that most courses fall into one of two categories. There are the crowded, inexpensive muni tracks where course conditions are questionable and service nonexistent. Or you can shell out \$100 or more on stuffy, overpriced layouts where, too often, you leave wondering what all the fuss was about. The owners of Foresight Golf, based in Boerne, set out to offer something different, and the results are as satisfying a golf experience as you'll find anywhere.

The word here is value: Foresight's three San Antonio courses: The Bandit, The Buckhorn and The Republic, (the company recently added Cypresswood Golf Club in Houston

to its repertoire) feature excellent conditions, warm, friendly service and interesting layouts, all for around \$50 – on a weekend, no less. While the first two require a bit of a drive outside San Antonio to reach, the most recent addition to the trio, The Republic, is only 10 minutes from downtown San Antonio, perfect for a midweek afternoon getaway from the office. Yet the course's peaceful, tree-lined fairways will have you thinking you've escaped the city limits.

The secret to Foresight's great value is that, instead of hiring outside development and management companies, most of the work is done in-house. The staff wear many different hats, and it's not unusual to find one of the managers out on the course driving a bulldozer. That's not to say that Foresight cuts corners on expertise. Co-owner Ed Miller is a top-notch agronomist whose experience includes stints at some of the finest golf facilities in the world, including Pebble Beach Golf Links, Cherry Hills Country Club, and Ventana Canyon Golf and Racquet Club.

In addition, the owners are ecologically minded and take care that the courses are designed with conservation in mind. All three are built in flood plains and use reclaimed water. In fact, The Republic recently won a Water Saver Award, sponsored by the San Antonio Water System and local media

for conservation practices which allowed the course to save approximately 114 million gallons of potable water in 2004. When the Republic was built, the trees that were cleared from the property were turned into compost that was used on the fairways and greens, which in turn helped the grass retain more water. It's a smart approach to golf course construction and maintenance that saves on cost, and those savings are passed on to the golfer in the form of reasonable green fees.

As a host site for the San Antonio chapter of the Executive Women's Golf Association, The Republic takes women golfers seriously. The club recently added Holly Tothe, head coach of the University of Texas San Antonio's inaugural women's golf program, to its instruction staff. More evidence of The Republic's women-friendly attitude can be found in the setup of the course, and the difference in yardages between the different sets of tees, two of which have been professionally rated for women. While many courses have a huge jump of 1,000 yards or more between the forward and middle sets of tees, The Republic offers five sets of tees starting at 4,683 yards from the Copper Tees, increasing gradually to 5,540 yards from the Stone tees for those with a little more experience and distance in their game. Even the Blue tees provide a very manageable 6,147 yard layout with a lot more challenge. For example, on the par-5 11th hole, there is a 221-yard carry over a yawning ravine from the blue tees to the fairway. The hole is much more manageable from the two forward sets of tees and requires no forced carry.

Designed by Art Schau-peter, who worked with Keith Foster on the design of Foresight's other two courses, the Republic's fairways are broad swaths of Bermuda grass for the most part, although enormous live oaks and elms dot the course in strategic places, and Salado Creek winds its way through and alongside most holes. However, the real hazards on this course are the greens; they are enormous, fast and undulating. You'll wish you'd spent more time on the practice green when you face your first double-breaking downhill putt from 20 feet.

Number six is the course's signature hole, a 401-yard par-5 that takes a sharp dogleg left off the tee. Although there is more room out to the right off the tee, the best approach is to place your shot carefully to the left side of the fairway. If you hit it out to the right, you'll find when you get there that it's still a long way to go to reach the green, and odds are you'll have to lay up in front of the dry creek bed that bisects the second half of the fairway. A large oak in the center of the fairway next to this creek bed makes shot placement critical.

The Republic features Foresight's hallmark Texas hospitality. The staff are friendly and welcoming, and explain, without ever condescending, the information you need to enjoy your round. The practice range is directly outside the clubhouse, and the first tee a short distance away, so newcomers never feel intimidated or lost. The clubhouse is pure Texas, with wood and leather accents. There are no frills here, but it is comfortable and the food is surprisingly good. The pro shop includes some women's apparel, mostly Adidas and Ping, selected with the athletic golfer in mind. This is not the place to find pink skorts and matching visors.

All in all, The Republic is a welcome antidote to the intimidation factor found at many public tracks, with their assembly-line mentality of pushing golfers through the course, and the rarefied prices and atmosphere found at higher end daily fee courses. 



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