

Verde Valley catches disc-golf fever

A culture is forming and you could be a part of it



By Sean Morris
Sports Reporter

COTTONWOOD-In a little over a month the new disc golf course at Riverfront Park has taken off like a perfect drive right down the fairway-it's a hit in a big way.

As long as there's daylight and good weather, the 9-hole course has disc golfers consistently playing on it, so if you ever decide to check out the course you'll likely run into friendly enthusiasts who are more than happy to give you pointers or lend you a disc.

Hibbett Sports in Cottonwood sold out of starter disc sets, but an employee said they were expecting a shipment of discs by Friday.

How could a Frisbee game get so popular so fast? Simple. It's a fun, low-cost, all-ages activity in a picturesque location with a moderate climate.

Disc golf takes skill to master, but it's fun even on your first time and you can take it however far you want to. A course can be played with one disc, but the professionals have a bag full of discs. Yes, there are professionals in the sport and they're amazingly good.



Paul Wurzer throws for a birdie opportunity on the first hole at the Cottonwood Disc Golf Course at Riverfront Park Monday. VVN/Sean Morris



Marshall Martin throws for a birdie opportunity on the first hole at the Cottonwood Disc Golf Course at Riverfront Park Monday. VVN/Sean Morris

The object of the game is simple; try to get your disc in the basket in as few throws as possible.

Every hole has a tee box where golfers throw their first toss. Some people use a classic across the chest delivery, others go sidearm, and some throw it like a baseball. All those styles come in handy when navigating the obstacles of the course.

The giant Cottonwood trees and other vegetation at Riverfront Park create natural boundaries for each hole. Staying out of trouble and utilizing accuracy over power will lead to pars, but to shoot under par players must possess power and accuracy.

Local enthusiasts Paul Wurzer and Marshall Martin were the architects who designed the course.



"I saw online in the city council minutes that Dan Lueder, the city development manager, had proposed a disc golf course to the council, so I emailed him and told him that I'd be willing to help him out in any way. He got back to me and we put together a proposal and took it to the city council and they loved the idea," said Wurzer. "I met Marshall through a disc golf website and he and I designed the course. The city workers did all the work, clearing out the weeds and brush and dead limbs and stuff like that. It's really been a great thing to get this piece of land that is so beautiful and it's something that everyone can use."

Wurzer and Martin are amateur players, but they've played a lot of disc golf. They had plenty of courses to reference when designing the course at Riverfront.

"I've been a disc golfer for a little over two years now. I traveled around the country for eight months and I've probably played close to 70 courses. That helped in designing the course. Me and Paul are just amateur players, but we came out and basically laid out the pins where

we wanted the tees and other pins where we wanted the baskets. We enlisted some of the

top pros from Arizona to come out and walk through it with us to make sure we were doing everything right," said Martin. "They all said it was great. This course is awesome. Anytime there's a new course everybody that's an avid disc golfer has to check it out right away, and every single one of them said 'Awesome course, phenomenal, great layout.' I've heard a few say, 'This is my favorite 9-hole course in Arizona.' It's got a good reputation for a course and it's only going to get better."

City Councilman Terrence Pratt was a supporter of the course. He, along with the other members of the council, saw the potential benefits for having a course in Cottonwood.

"I hopped right on it. One of my biggest things is recreation and sports and providing opportunities for people to get involved, so it improves their quality of life," said Pratt. "The other thing is it brings people to town and it's good for the economy too, but that's kind of the side benefit of it. It's been a big success-in fact I'm about to buy three discs, which is a beginners kit, and I'm going to try it out."

The disc golf course has been such a success that sometimes the 9-holes get crowded. Discussions about expanding the course are happening. If enthusiasts are already calling the Riverfront course the best 9-holes in Arizona, they might be calling it the best 18-holes in Arizona. If that happens more people will be drawn to the area and bigger tournaments will be possible.

"It's been discussed and I would certainly think it would be possible," said Pratt. "One of the things you'll see happen here is there will be tournaments, and that will bring people from out of town. I think it will be so successful people will be saying, 'Yeah, let's put in another 9-holes.' It's growing here, and all over the country it's popular."

Martin and Wurzer have big plans for the New Year. There is a charity "Ice-Bowl" tournament and chili cook-off scheduled for February 20. They also plan to run leagues.

"On the first Tuesday of the year we'll start our first leagues. Every Tuesday we'll start them at 3:30 p.m. There will be a flyer out [on the course] and it will be Verde Valley Disc Golf Club League," said Martin.

It's safe to say the Verde Valley is catching disc-golf fever. People from all around are driving to the course and a lot are returning for more.

"We're developing a pretty good disc golf community. There's regulars out here every day," said Wurzer.

"People just get hooked. They come out here and play a round and they just want to play more, get more discs, and get better. Every day there are more and more people out here that are becoming regulars," said Martin.

On the Disc Golf Association website a park commissioner from Ohio is quoted saying, "Disk Golf may be one of the best-kept recreational secrets."

In Cottonwood the secret's out, now it's your job to try it out.