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The Best of the Private Clubs

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Vaquero

Special Insert: Tournament Planning Guide

Feature



Vaquero Country Club

Private, First-Class

avidgolfer lets you in on who's the very best among area private courses and clubs.

BY CRAIG ROSENGARDEN

As spring approaches and the economy rebounds from its depths from late last year, many of us – having grown tired of not getting prime tee times at our favorite courses – have thoughts of moving into the country club life, the sacred place where everyone knows your name, clubs are cleaned, shoes are shined, and the 19th hole requires only a signature.

This is the first time in years there has been new entries, and one, Dallas National, has sent initiation fees to levels never seen before in this area. The range to join a club is still vast, from the \$150,000 for the right to belong to Dallas National, to as low as \$1,500.

Here is what we deem to be the best.

DFW Country Clubs

By the Numbers

Club Name	City	Initiation	Monthly Dues
Dallas National Golf Club	Dallas	\$150,000	\$550
Preston Trail C.C.	Dallas	\$100,000	\$650
Brookhollow Golf Club	Dallas	\$60,000	\$400
Northwood C.C.	Dallas	\$60,000	\$360
Dallas C.C.	Dallas	\$60,000	\$300
Vaquero C.C.	Westlake	\$60,000	\$285
Colonial C.C.	Fort Worth	\$60,000	\$250
TPC@Craig Ranch	Dallas	\$40,000	TBD
Royal Oaks C.C.	Dallas	\$40,000	\$310
Glen Eagles C.C.	Plano	\$38,000	\$426
Stonebriar C.C.	Frisco	\$35,000	\$417
Lakewood C.C.	Dallas	\$35,000	\$360
The Sports Club	Irving	\$32,500	\$455
Mira Vista Golf Club	Fort Worth	\$30,000	\$340
Shady Oaks C.C.	Fort Worth	\$25,000	\$443
Columbian C.C.	Carrollton	\$25,000	\$395
Bent Tree C.C.	Dallas	\$25,000	\$375
Ridgelea C.C.	Fort Worth	\$25,000	\$280
Las Colinas C.C.	Irving	\$20,000	\$370
Timarron C.C.	Southlake	\$20,000	\$325
Stonebridge C.C.	McKinney	\$18,500	\$350
Dallas Athletic Club	Dallas	\$18,000	\$335
Gentle Creek C.C.	Prosper	\$15,000	\$300
Prestonwood C.C.	Dallas	\$12,000	\$335
Hackberry Creek C.C.	Irving	\$11,000	\$322
The Ranch C.C.	McKinney	\$10,750	\$310
Oak Cliff C.C.	Dallas	\$10,000	\$303
Eldorado C.C.	McKinney	\$9,000	\$295
Canyon Creek C.C.	Richardson	\$7,000	\$300
Trophy Club C.C.	Trophy Club	\$6,000	\$320
Denton C.C.	Denton	\$5,000	\$250
Oakmont C.C.	Corinth	\$3,500	\$250
Thorntree C.C.	DeSoto	\$3,000	\$245
Brookhaven C.C.	Farmers Branch	\$2,500	\$272
Great Southwest C.C.	Grand Prairie	\$2,500	\$255
Diamond Oaks C.C.	Fort Worth	\$2,500	\$250
Walnut Creek C.C.	Mansfield	\$2,000	\$265
Shady Valley C.C.	Arlington	\$2,000	\$252
Woodhaven C.C.	Fort Worth	\$1,500	\$225
Eastern Hills C.C.	Garland	\$1,500	\$200
Oakridge C.C.	Garland	\$1,000	\$225
Eagle Mountain C.C.	Fort Worth	\$1,000	\$215

THE 5 BEST YOU CAN JOIN

1. VAQUERO GOLF CLUB
2. STONEBRIAR COUNTRY CLUB
3. DALLAS ATHLETIC CLUB
4. GLENEAGLES COUNTRY CLUB
5. ELDORADO COUNTRY CLUB

Of the contract clubs that are open and have memberships currently available, these are the best overall for the money. **Vaquero** is brand new and still operating without a clubhouse, but the ambience, service, commitment to members, and a hot new Fazio-designed golf course make this our top choice. It comes complete with caddies and a hired gun as a caddie-master. **Stonebriar**, with its two stellar golf courses and other facilities, also remains at the top. The members prefer to play on the private course, but the Fazio-designed resort course provides a great alternative. At **Dallas Athletic Club**, the golf courses, practice area and commitment to being a family-style club make it one of



The signature hole #13 at Eldorado.

the best. **Gleneagles** has a great location, a great clubhouse and great facilities. Some may say that their golf courses are not the best, but the rest of the facilities are world-class. **Eldorado** has revamped their greens and bunkers, which along with their great clubhouse and inexpensive price make it a top choice.

THE 5 BEST YOU CAN'T JOIN

1. *PRESTON TRAIL GOLF CLUB*
2. *BROOK HOLLOW GOLF CLUB*
3. *DALLAS COUNTRY CLUB*
4. *COLONIAL COUNTRY CLUB*
5. *NORTHWOOD CLUB*

The number of private clubs with waiting lists has diminished greatly over the last year, but these five facilities still have enough demand that their waiting lists remain plenty long. **Preston Trail** is still the most prestigious of all clubs in the Metroplex, with the top golf course and most prominent membership, though its membership is strictly limited to men. **Brook Hollow** has a great golf course and a great facility with a well-heeled membership. **Dallas Country Club** has the best and most celebrated (men only) lunch in town and maintains its family-friendly atmosphere. **Colonial** has the preeminent golf course in Fort Worth, but its star is tarnished by having too many members and a lengthy waiting list. **Northwood's** membership remains highly selective.

BEST NEW CLUBS

1. *VAQUERO GOLF CLUB*
2. *DALLAS NATIONAL GOLF CLUB*
3. *GENTLE CREEK GOLF CLUB*
4. *TPC AT CRAIG RANCH*
5. *OAK CLIFF COUNTRY CLUB*

For the first time since Timarron Country Club opened in the mid-1990s, there are new entries in the private-club sector. **Vaquero** is exquisite. It will have all of the amenities of a full-service, neighborhood country club once its clubhouse is completed. Caddies, Titleist Pro V1's on the driving range, a chef grilling lamb chops at the turn—such features make this the most decadent club you can join today. One caveat: You have to pur-



Solving the irrigation issues has made Eagle Mountain a great value.

chase real estate to gain membership, which potentially makes this the most expensive club in North Texas. Sitting on perhaps the best piece of land for a golf course, **Dallas National** will open in June with the most high-flying membership group in the area. Among the prominent Dallasites rumored to have already purchased memberships are Lee Trevino, Roger Staubach, Texas Rangers pitcher Kenny Rogers, entrepreneur Scott Ginsburg, financier Richard Rainwater and Pepsi Chairman Roger Enrico. Since it's solely a golf club, most of its members will likely keep a country club membership elsewhere. Most golfers expect this to be the best pure-golf course in the area, with the prestige to go with it. The best-kept secret of the new clubs is **Gentle Creek**. This course, located in Prosper and scheduled to open this spring, is one of D.A. Weibring's finest, and it will have a clubhouse with all of the amenities you'd expect to find in a new facility. Membership is a great bargain, and they are offering lengthy payouts. **TPC at Craig Ranch** is not scheduled to open anytime soon, but it's the first design that Tom Weiskopf has done in the area since his breakup with Jay Morrish. Craig Ranch will have all of the amenities and reciprocity of a true TPC club. Although it's not new, **Oak Cliff Country Club** completely renovated their golf course and made all of the old members pony-up again. The renovation is masterfully done, and updating the clubhouse is next.

The Fazio course at Stonebriar.





Chef quality food is available during your round at Vaquero.

BEST VALUE

1. *ELDORADO COUNTRY CLUB*
2. *LAS COLINAS COUNTRY CLUB*
3. *HACKBERRY CREEK COUNTRY CLUB*
4. *RIDGELEA COUNTRY CLUB*
5. *EAGLE MOUNTAIN COUNTRY CLUB*

There are posted initiation fees, and there are the prices you pay when you're ready to join. **Eldorado** has a golf course with new greens, new bunkers, a central location, a great clubhouse and a pleasant family atmosphere. The best part is the price: as low as \$5,000 for a non-equity membership, and payouts are available. The folks in Las Colinas have some great options for club memberships. **Las Colinas Country Club**, one of the best-kept secrets with one of the top golf courses in the area, is offering new memberships for as little as \$15,000, with payouts available. **Hackberry Creek**, also in Las Colinas, is offering non-equity memberships for as little as \$7,000; nearly half of past membership fees, and is offering payouts as well.

Considering the current economy, it was startling to see that **Ridgelea Country Club** increased their initiation by \$10,000 to \$25,000. However, they also spent \$8 million reconstructing their golf courses, built a new clubhouse and

added new locker rooms, so the increase may be justified. And, if you ask nicely, they'll still let you join for less than the same amount as last year. The management at **Eagle Mountain** has found the money to bring back a club that was run-down two years ago and make it a startlingly nice facility. They have upgraded the clubhouse and cured irrigation problems, making it seem as if they have an unlimited water supply. All for only \$1,000 initiation.

MOST OVERPRICED

1. *COLONIAL COUNTRY CLUB*
2. *THE SPORTS CLUB*

Some clubs charge a lot of money and sometimes members get little in return. **Colonial** has so many members that, even if you can get in, the course is so crowded it's difficult to get a tee time. Adding another golf course would fix this immediately. **The Sports Club** has great amenities, but it's the only club in Las Colinas not offering incentives, and for years has had the most expensive "other costs," such as cart fees, monthly locker rentals and club storage fees. They have kept their prices constant for the last few years, however, and the rest of the pack is



The 15th hole at Oak Cliff Country Club.

catching up. Isn't it interesting that the two facilities hosting PGA events are considered most overpriced?

TOUGHEST CLUB
CHAMPIONSHIP TO WIN

1. *BROOK HOLLOW GOLF CLUB*
2. *MIRA VISTA COUNTRY CLUB*
3. *HACKBERRY CREEK COUNTRY CLUB*

Don't join these if you want an easy route to the club championship. **Brook Hollow's** Wall of Champions has had roughly the same names since 1971. It seems that the club's champions are age-

less and that there's little new blood to knock them down. Legendary amateur, Chip Stewart has his name plastered on the wall, winning his first championship in 1976 and winning his last only a few years ago. **Mira Vista** has the best players

in Fort Worth and the most competitive club championship. **Hackberry Creek** has been known for years to have the toughest games with some of the top players in the area.

Isn't it interesting that the two facilities hosting PGA events are considered most overpriced?

Dallas National has invested over \$1 million in bridges to make best use of the land.





Las Colinas Country Club

BEST CLUBS FOR FAMILIES

1. *GLENEAGLES COUNTRY CLUB*
2. *DALLAS ATHLETIC CLUB*
3. *THE SPORTS CLUB*
4. *BROOKHAVEN COUNTRY CLUB*
5. *DALLAS COUNTRY CLUB*

Golf is not the only amenity that clubs can offer. In fact, a club needs to have more if it wants to attract the interests of all family members. **Gleneagles** was designed to cater to the family. For the kids there's a lot to do, including holiday events, a junior golf and tennis program that draws hundreds, a swim team and an exhaustive list of summer camps, from flag football to volleyball. Perhaps the most special event is Family Night every Friday, with a regular buffet and one just for the kids, and various entertainment including clowns, magicians, balloon artists and movies. Everywhere at **DAC**, the focus is on the family, especially in their golf and swimming programs, and they have the facilities to back up their family orientation. Any family would enjoy **The Sports Club's** five swimming pools—including one indoor—along with a playground and courts for tennis, basketball and racquetball. The Sports Club uses the Byron Nelson Golf School for kids programs and has an active youth tennis group. **Brookhaven** also caters to the family, with an abundance of children's programs in which lots of active kids participate. Their golf program may be the biggest in the area, and their tennis program is not far behind. **Dallas Country Club** proves that just because a club is expensive and exclusive doesn't mean it can't offer plenty of family activities.

BEST GOLF COURSES

1. *PRESTON TRAIL GOLF CLUB*
2. *BROOK HOLLOW GOLF CLUB*
3. *COLONIAL COUNTRY CLUB*
4. *NORTHWOOD CLUB*
5. *VAQUERO GOLF CLUB / DALLAS NATIONAL GOLF CLUB*

For golf only, these are the overall best courses to play. **Preston Trail** is still the granddaddy of all Metroplex courses. Nearly everyone who has played this course—it was designed by Mr. Nelson and Ralph Plummer and was the original course of The Byron Nelson Golf Classic—will tell you it's his (no "hers" are allowed!) favorite in the area. And the greens are perfect and fast. Renowned architect A.W. Tillinghast, designer of **Brook Hollow**, is best known for designing more-famous courses including Olympia Hills, Winged Foot, Baltusrol and Baltimore Country Club. Brook Hollow is comparable to those courses and has been rewarded with the privilege of hosting the U.S. Mid-Amateur and the State Senior Amateur tournaments. There is no disputing the greatness of **Colonial's** golf course. An annual stop on the PGA Tour, Colonial is adored by all but the very longest of hitters on the Tour. **Northwood** is a traditional golf course originally designed by William Diddel. It's most famous for having hosted the 1952 U.S. Open, won by Julius Boros. **Vaquero** and **Dallas National**, traditional Tom Fazio designs, have big fairways, large greens and cart paths that are difficult to see while you're on the course. Over time, both of these courses are positioning themselves to best the others in this group.

HIDDEN GEMS

1. LAS COLINAS COUNTRY CLUB
2. THORNTREE COUNTRY CLUB
3. LAKEWOOD COUNTRY CLUB
4. GREAT SOUTHWEST COUNTRY CLUB
5. GENTLE CREEK GOLF CLUB

Las Colinas Country Club has one of the best courses in the city and some of the best greens, and it's the only club in Las Colinas with a true private-club feel. Often overlooked because of its better-known neighbor (The Sports Club), Las Colinas' amenities perennially keep them at the top of this list. The clubhouse is a little dated, but members don't seem to mind. **Thorntree**, hidden down south of Dallas, has a tricky golf course that will be updated very soon. The club is inexpensive, and it's known for its late-night card games. The big house on the golf course is Spud Webb's, so stop in and have some tea with the former NBA Slam Dunk Champ. **Lakewood** is very family-friendly, has a great traditional golf course and is most convenient to those in East Dallas. Although the course is relatively short by today's standards, no one seems to play it well. **Great Southwest** finally changed their greens from bent to Bermuda, and now that the course can maintain good conditions through the summer, it's a great facility for pure golfers. It remains one of the best layouts in the area. **Gentle Creek** is not yet open, but it seems that management knows what it takes to build and run a great club. Its course looks great, and it's inexpensive for what they'll be offering.



Gentle Creek Country Club

QUESTION MARKS

1. BENT TREE COUNTRY CLUB
2. ROYAL OAKS COUNTRY CLUB
3. TPC AT CRAIG RANCH
4. SHADY OAKS COUNTRY CLUB
5. SKY CREEK RANCH GOLF CLUB

These clubs were not reviewed this year because of questions regarding their future. There is a hint of dissension among the members at **Bent Tree** involving possible renovations. Although updates to the course and clubhouse were voted down this year, they are needed, and the facility could get high marks if they ever get approved. **Royal Oaks** has closed their golf course for much-needed renovations, including to the course, which stayed very wet after rains. **Craig Ranch**, which won't be open for another two years, is currently accepting members, though it's difficult to determine its value until construction progresses a little further. **Shady Oaks** is a hidden gem in Fort Worth and one of the homes of the great Ben Hogan. It's always rumored to be a takeover possibility; with the current economy, if there's any truth to the rumors, something may actually happen this year. It's also been rumored that **Sky Creek Ranch**, a public facility in Keller, will convert to private. It has a great clubhouse and a wonderful golf course and would be an excellent conversion candidate. □

