

Gates Four: Restoration Moving Quickly



Gates Four manager Kevin Lavertu has overseen eight renovation projects.
Howard Ward

By [Howard Ward](#)

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Kevin Lavertu doesn't really do golf course restorations and renovations; he just has a history of being around when a lot of them are going on.

Lavertu, the new general manager at Gates Four Golf and Country Club in Fayetteville, graduated from the Methodist University Golf Management Program in 2001. Since then, the 31-year-old Lavertu has been involved in the reworking of eight golf courses.

"It really started when I got to Methodist," he said. "The school had a nine-hole course and was in the process of building nine more. I spent three hands-on years there."

Like every other graduate of the Methodist program, Lavertu found immediate employment when he graduated. His first job was as an assistant professional at Gates Four. After a few months there, he was hired as the head professional at nearby Bayonet at Puppy Creek in Hoke County.

Eighteen months later, he moved to Baywood Golf Club in Fayetteville as general manger and head professional, then in 2005 was hired by Hilton Head ClubCorp and worked for Indigo Golf Club. After five years with that group, he made the move back to Gates Four.

And, of course, there was a major restoration going on at the old Willard Byrd Course.

Lavertu's wife, Brandi, played a major role in the move as she's a Fayetteville native and, after the couple adopted a 3-year-old son, she wanted to be closer to her family.

"We paid a visit here a few months ago and I heard that Gates Four was really having problems after the tough summer," Lavertu said. "I went out to take a look and couldn't believe how bad it was. I talked to Joe (Riddle, whose family owns the facility) and learned that he was talking to Kris Spence about a restoration project.

"We talked about the grass, trees and what the project was going to entail and one thing led to another."

Spence has an impressive resume, having earned high praise for work on restoring old Donald Ross and Ellis Maples courses such as Cape Fear Country Club in Wilmington, Sedgefield in Greensboro and many others. Riddle had already hired Spence when Lavertu signed on, but he's overseeing the project and is enthused by what's happening.

"This is a very extensive project," he said, "Most of our members probably won't see another of this magnitude in their lifetimes."

Gates Four is a private club with approximately 450 members, although many of those are not golfers and, according to Lavertu, the course had only around 11,000 rounds played last year. The late Byrd, a Carolinas Golf Hall of Fame architect acclaimed throughout the South, designed the course in 1967 and the greens had never been reconstructed.

"The greens are being rebuilt from scratch," Lavertu said, "with all new drainage and crunch gravel. We're coring them out 18 to 24 inches, redefining the edges and contouring them back to the original design and sizes. The putting surfaces are being seeded with A1-A4 bentgrass, the same as that being used on Pinehurst No. 2. The only difference is that they sodded theirs and we're seeding.

"We're reshaping the bunkers and tees and increasing the practice area by almost double. We're taking out some trees that have encroached in areas and changed playability, but no more than necessary. We're not reworking the fairways, but pretty much everything else.

"We're planning on resodding more than 100,000 square feet and some of the fairway contours will flow a little better. We're trying to return it to the original design that Byrd intended as close as possible. We're planning on some beautification in areas that haven't been addressed for the past 25 or 30 years.

"We're also completely renovating the bunkers, both greenside and fairway."

Members are not being assessed for the project and Lavertu promises dues will not be increased during 2011.

"As of now, we're going to operate as a semi-private club until we reach the numbers we need in membership," he said. "We'll continue to have members' tee-times blocked off, but we will take some package play and we're planning on increasing the number of tournaments that we host to help offset the revenue losses and expenses."

The restoration is expected to consume eight months, with the course reopening in June if all goes according to plan.

"We had originally planned to seed one nine and open it for play before doing the other nine," he said. "But in order to have all 18 greens maturing together, we've decided to seed them all around the middle of March and have the grand reopening in June.

"The snow we've had recently has delayed things, but Spence is bringing in a couple of extra crews to try to get us back on schedule.

"People look at Gates Four as a premium facility and the restoration is only going to enhance that. We're doing everything first class and there's no question that the course is going to be better than ever. It's going to be well worth the wait."

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