

FIVE IRON GOLF



Five Iron Golf

Sitting on Top of Baltimore's Leaderboard

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This is the first in a series of articles on theme bars and restaurants around the state of Maryland, and the District of Columbia. The first entry couldn't be cooler for those looking for a swinging club to swing their clubs. Five Iron Golf in Baltimore is part of a growing chain of businesses that offer golf simulators, indoor golf lessons, and top-quality food and drink choices. The goal is to re-shape urban golf culture with additional locations now up and running in Chicago, Las Vegas, Manhattan, Philadel-

phia, and elsewhere with more to come.

Frank Purdy, General Manager of Five Iron Golf in Baltimore, remarked during a recent interview with the *Beverage Journal*, "We are the nation's leading indoor golf and entertainment experience. We don't have a 'thumb-your-nose' country club vibe. All are welcome. And we combine the golf with excellent food and beverage service, as well. We have golf simulators where you're hitting a golf ball off a matt onto a screen. But after 15 minutes, you get lost in the [virtual reality] that

you're playing Pebble Beach or one of the great courses the PGA has to offer."

He continued, "There are a couple of courses in the city and a couple of driving ranges. But as those tend to book up on the nicer days really quickly, we offer another avenue for you to get your golf fix without having to travel outside the city 15 or 20 minutes at minimum. Five Iron Golf is a good thing to have in an urban area. They can walk over with their clubs or we have clubs for them to use. They can walk

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Frank Purdy, General Manager, Five Iron Golf

right in and get a round in."

And, of course, customers can walk right in and have a fine meal or a round of appetizers or just drinks. The golf-themed menu has creative categories like "Go for the Green" (salads) and "The Majors" (burgers, sandwiches, and entrees). Meanwhile, the drink selection is a solid mix of beers, wine, soft drinks, and specialty cocktails.

"We really lean into what our community likes to drink," said Purdy. "We listen, we pay attention. We want to make sure that we are bringing them the options they want. We have a constantly changing menu. Actually, I would call it a 'constantly adapting' menu. We have our golfers who love their certain types of drinks. Our service philosophy is whether we're setting you up on a Track-Man (a radar-based, \$20,000 unit that gives you real-time measure-

ments about your swing) or just bringing them a soda or a nice glass of whiskey, we want that service to be the same across the board. So, whether we're setting someone up on a golf simulator or just bringing them food and beverage to a table, we want that to be the best."

Purdy and his staff also offer certain drinks that golfers would expect to order if on a real course or clubhouse. "Our John Dalys and our Transfusions are our biggest sellers," he noted, "basically because they're 'golf drinks.'"

He added, "We've also developed some great relationships with our distributors. For example, we have a great relationship with one of the craft beer breweries, and they let us rename/re-brand one of their beers. It was the Duckpin Pale Ale, but it's now the 5i Pale Ale." Five Iron's Baltimore location also boasts a really





Five Iron Golf's Fitting Lab is a combination of best-in-class technology and club-fitting experts. Not to mention an expansive selection of club, shaft and grip options.

good bourbon collection, with Pappy Van Winkle being particularly popular.

Before getting into hospitality, Purdy started his professional career in corporate event coordination on the audio-visual side. He transitioned into an accounting role with a consulting company. On the side, he worked several odd jobs including sales at Bay Wine & Spirits in North Beach, Md., where his mother is the co-owner.

"Five Iron combines two of my favorite things in the world – golf and a bar!" he exclaimed. "I've worked my way up from server to manager to eventually being in charge of our Baltimore location, and here we are. Five Iron has been a unique experience in that we're not just food and beverage. The fact that we have the golf simulators, we were able to follow all of the rules put in place by our municipality as far as COVID restrictions. We initially opened back up as just a golf simulator and kept our kitchen and bar closed for a while. As restrictions started easing, we were able to open up with each new step and were able to serve food and drink and offer that whole customer experience. People in Maryland, they love their golf. And in the wintertime, when you can't go outside, our loyal customers come in, and we can't keep golfers away from hitting balls."

Along the way, Purdy has soaked in advice from several mentors across various industries. One key piece of advice that helped him as GM of Five Iron Golf was to "develop relationships." Purdy says

he treats every interaction as an opportunity for a new relationship, whether it's Five Iron's members who come in frequently or the various distributors who go from location to location. Perhaps the best advice he was given was from a former co-general manager at Five Iron Golf: "He once told me, 'The best ability is availability.' That will stick in my head forever."

Looking ahead to 2022, Purdy says there is reason for optimism at least with regards to Five Iron Golf. In early November, the four-year-old startup secured a \$30 million investment from golf-behemoth Callaway. Meanwhile, the Baltimore location's subscriber base continues to grow.

Purdy concluded, "I take it one day at a time, especially given how things are constantly changing. We like to be adaptable. I believe we have been here at Five Iron. Given how the community has stood behind us from the very beginning of the pandemic all the way through now, I am optimistic that we are going to continue to see success." ■

