



PLAYER DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION

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# GOLF FORE LIFE LEARNING CENTER

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APPLEWOOD GOLF COURSE

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## INTRODUCTION | By Brit Stueven, Applewood Admin & Marketing Manager

“I didn’t even know this until the other day, but when Tim won Nike Learning Center of the Year, he was invited to do a clinic with Tiger Woods, and he declined it,” said Landon Willett, who’s been teaching with Tim Pratt for six years and transitioning into leading the Golf Fore Life Learning Center.

When I sat down with Tim to learn more about his 26-year golf career that started at Applewood, my first question to him was, “Why’d you skip that clinic with Tiger?”

“It was prime time here. We were in the thick of our busy season,” he replied.

I stared at him with confusion. He looked at me like I was crazy.

“What’s more important in that scenario?!” he exclaimed.

Any other instructor would’ve dropped everything for that opportunity, but not Tim. Take one look at the testimonials section, and you’ll see what was more important to him:

- his students.
- building a community.
- teaching the game.

Tim’s never been one for glitz, glamour or attention. He’s nowhere to be found on social media, and the only thing you’ll find on the internet of him is this YouTube video from 2009:



His only desired method of marketing has been word of mouth. He couldn't remember what year Nike awarded him Learning Center of the Year. And when I asked him for retention stats, it was like asking an artist how much paint they've ever used. #irrelevant

About nine years after he started teaching at Applewood, Tim took an opportunity at Park Hill Golf Course. With 80 hitting stations and a 5,000 square foot indoor facility, it was an opportunity to expand.

Before he left, the other pro at the time told him, "Think twice about leaving Applewood, because you'll never find a place like it again."

Sure enough, it didn't take long for him to realize something was missing.

"It wasn't a bad experience," he said. "Just a different kind of vibe. Lots of young executives and folks who only wanted private lessons. And let's face it, the best people in the world – from all ends of it – hang out at Applewood. So, when Brian became the GM and called me to come back, I couldn't wait."

In other words, he craved community.

Since his return in 2008, he's continued to build an incredibly engaged family of golfers who not only return regularly to work on their game, but to keep building friendships, thanks to the group lesson format of the classes. Nike Learning Centers, which Tim helped open around the country, had great foundational concepts that he has kept strong at Applewood.

"They weren't about private lessons and big money, but rather about getting players into golf and keeping them in the game. To this day, we try to talk everyone out of private lessons unless they're a single digit golfer because it's really just a waste of money for them."

When I asked Tim how many people he thinks he's kept in the game since learning from him, he said, "The numbers are extremely high -- unusually high -- but I couldn't put a number on it and nor would I."

Tim recently retired, but no one really knew except Landon. We all knew he was transitioning out, but in typical Tim style, he did it quietly, modestly and is still teaching a few lessons. He'll never be truly done with Applewood or mentoring others. He embodies what the Learning Center is all about: **Golf Fore Life**.

"I'm not gonna be gone totally," he said. "I'll be checking back in on these people who've had an impact on me."

Speaking of impact, hearing him recount some of his favorite career memories is now one of *my* fondest career moments:

“It’s been the little things,” he said with such heart. “I can’t even tell you all the wonderful memories I have. The kids we’ve helped. The Special Olympics groups we’ve had out here. The numbers of times adults have hit the ball and gone, ‘Aaaah!’ Seeing one of our students make the collegiate level. Seeing another one attempt to play on the Tour. Seeing all the kids in the high school programs we have here. Lots of fun moments. They’re almost daily.”

Countless students have been coming to Tim since he began teaching.

“Not only are there many high school and college kids who’ve grown up here, but I can go out on any given day and see a 40-year-old I’ve taught that’s here with their kids,” he said. “I even have players who started with me here, followed me to Park Hill and are now back at Applewood in Continuing Ed with me.”

So, with no advertising or social media presence, how does one build an empire of loyal learners of all ages?

### **1. Put junior golfers first.**

“The single best long-term development thing you can do is put juniors first,” Tim said. “I can’t think of other courses who have this many kids learning golf all day every day of the summer. Most GMs cringe at the idea of this. But juniors are the future. When families come back with their kids, they come back because they know this place.”

After helping run the programs, Landon sees this importance, as well as the growth that Golf Fore Life has experienced as a whole.

“In the last 10 years, every year we’ve grown 10%,” he said. “With junior camps, we’re running out of room getting 40-50 kids each week. My Junior Academy is the highest we’ve ever seen it. I have 25 kids currently in that, and JJ and Dave have been great in keeping that running well, too. It’s a great feeder program, as 70% of the kids in the academy have done our junior camps.”

Landon loves working with the kids.

“Don’t get me wrong, the adults are awesome, but with kids, you get to see the progression over the years,” he said. “I’ve gotten to see all kinds of kids go from holding a club for the first time to now playing high school golf. They grow up in front of you.”

And even in the last six years, he’s been able to witness GFL students staying dedicated to the game.

“While it’s hard to know exactly how many people have stuck with it, I would guess that Tim and I have seen 90 to almost 100 percent of them continue on with golf. I’ve never had ONE person say, ‘Well, I’m never doing THIS again!’”

## **2. Make sure new golfers are comfortable.**

It sounds simple, but there's an art to making sure beginners aren't intimidated. It takes a special kind of empathy to challenge what newbies expect (There are stereotypes for a reason!), but the Golf Fore Life team does a great job of debunking these myths.

According to Landon, this is what makes Applewood stand out from other courses in terms of player development, and I'm confident the entire community would agree.

"It's all in the atmosphere," he says. "Most golf courses have a boxed-in culture that keeps new players from feeling relaxed, but I strongly feel that we do a good job of making people feel welcome. From the front desk to the snack bar to the driving range, it's vital that someone feels comfortable to ask questions or even know that they can go to the pitching green on their own. We know how scary it is to feel lost somewhere new, and everyone at this course makes an effort to make sure anyone feels welcome."

And when they start to learn the game, it's paramount that they feel at ease.

"Many instructors can easily overwhelm students, but Tim has established a great way for people to learn without too much information," said Landon.

## **3. Truly connect with your people.**

"I believe that people are so committed to Tim because of who he is," says Kathy Lower, one of his long-time students who helped fight for Applewood when it was almost bought out. "Plenty of people know how to teach, but they don't have his personality."

And how many instructors take 25 of their people on a golf vacation every year? When you read Chris Peterson's testimonial, you'll get a feel for how Tim has been more than just a golf coach to his people. He's been a connector and a great friend.

When I asked Landon what his most gratifying moments have been as an instructor, he said helping with the Special Olympics and working with the kids from McLain Community High School.

"It's been awesome not only to work with them, but to get to know them and talk to them about real things they're going through."

Clearly, Tim, Landon and team have made quite the impact on the game of golf and more. And as much as Tim will cringe at the attention this application will garner, the entire Applewood staff and I think they deserve all the recognition they can get.

Now, here's a look at their game-changing programs and initiatives:

## PLAYER DEVELOPMENT & RETENTION PROGRAMS

(All student totals are from 2019.)

### JUNIOR PROGRAMS

**Junior Camps** | 490 campers

*Full-Day Camps:* Includes 30 hours of instruction with afternoon on-course lessons and lunch. For ages 5 - 16. Both girls and boys are welcome. Instruction is based on swing mechanics, short game, practice skills, etiquette and rules. All levels are welcome and based on individual needs. Student instructor ration 1:7.

*Half-Day Camps:* Includes 15 hours of instruction. For ages 5 – 16. Both girls and boys are welcome. Instruction is based on swing mechanics, short game, practice skills, etiquette and rules. All levels are welcome and based on individual needs. Student instructor ration 1:7.

**Junior Academy** | 196 students

Jr. Academy is for new, intermediate or advanced junior golfers, boys and girls ages 6-12. These classes meet for one hour twice a week. They work on full swing, chipping and putting.



Pictured above: Landon and one of his Junior Academy groups.

### **Junior Academy High School | 12 students**

Jr. Academy is for high school students ages 13-18. These classes meet for one hour twice a week for 12 weeks. They work on full swing, chipping and putting.

### **ADULT PROGRAMS**

#### **Tee It Up Packages | 175 students**

This is a group-style series that includes four hours of instruction, three free 18-hole rounds of golf, three Play with the Pro sessions and a Player's Club Membership to Applewood. Instructor to student ratio is 1:6.

- **Tee It Up Level 1 - For the Beginning Golfer.**
- **Tee It Up Level 2 - For the Newer Golfer.** A level above beginner, focused on the basics.
- **Tee It Up Level 3 - Breaking 100.** They focus on understanding the full swing, ball spin, trouble shots and short game.
- **Tee It Up Level 4 - Breaking 90.** They work on the personal details of full swing, approach shots and short game skills.

#### **Continuing Ed | 260 students**

Running year-round and indoors when needed, Continuing Ed students are invited to join drills that work on swing path, release and more. These group drills run Tuesdays and Saturdays at various times. Students can sign up for 30-day or 90-day periods.

#### **Private Lessons | 115 students**

#### **Special Olympics | 6 students**

Started by Brian Melody and now in its second year, this group meets at Applewood every Friday for 12 weeks.

“My Special Olympics Golf Team has worked with Tim and Landon for two summers. Every year the pros from Applewood go above and beyond for our group, and we have the gold and silver medals to show their hard work has paid off. My team and I look forward to many more summers of learning from Tim and Landon. Thanks for everything, guys!”



— Bernie Pfeifer, Special Olympics Golf Team from Wheat Ridge Regional Center

## **McLain Community High School | 20 students**

Every Friday, Landon works with 15-20 kids from McLain, which provides the rigor of high school in safe, alternative setting. This program started on August 16 of this year and will go through October.

### **SPIN-OFF PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES**

#### **Welcome2Golf Clinics | approximately 80 golfers**

As part of the Welcome2Golf initiative, a pilot program led by the National Golf Foundation, Tim and Landon held 10 free hourlong clinics this summer for beginner golfers. Each Saturday, the numbers continued to grow, and some of these participants signed up for Tee It Up packages.

#### **Beginner Scramble Clinic | approximately 25 golfers**

After one of our Welcome2Golf members requested a night like Ladies Night Out but specifically for beginners, we hopped right on that fantastic idea. We held our first 5 at 5 Beginner Scramble (a 5-hole shotgun scramble at 5pm for beginners) in September, and Tim and Landon gladly held two free drop-in clinics beforehand.

#### **Junior League | 10-12 juniors each week**

Every summer, Applewood hosts a weekly Junior League for kids to learn the rules, etiquette and game of golf. On Mondays, starting at 1:30pm, four back-to-back tee times are saved for the juniors to go on the course with an Applewood staffer. A ladder is also kept between the kids to keep track of how well they're playing.

#### **Play with the Pro | 1-4 each week**

These sessions are for students in the Tee it Up Lesson Package. Students are given a punch card they can use for 3 Play with the Pro sessions. These are 9-hole on-course group lessons with maximum 8 people. JJ Amato is the instructor and takes folks on the course to work on course management, rules/etiquette and swing.

#### **Ladies Night Out | 40-70 women weekly**

This was started by Tim Pratt when he first took over the Learning Center in 1994, and many of the first players continue to play in it today! It's a 9-hole shotgun scramble that takes place every Monday night from April through September. In peak summer months, this event often sells out with 72 women in attendance!

## MORE NUMBERS

Tim and Landon combined teach well over 1,200 students a year, including juniors and adults. And as mentioned above, those numbers increase by 10% every year. And thanks to the group lesson format of their programming, Applewood welcomes more students than the typical course.

“I probably teach more people in one week than a private instructor teaches in one month because of the types of programs we do,” says Tim.

And while it’s impossible to put a physical number on how many have stayed in the game since taking lessons, judging by Tim and Landon’s observations, something is sticking at Applewood.

In fact, we found something fascinating when we pulled some numbers:

- In the last four years, 200 GFL Learning Center students have played the course.
- And when it comes to revenue, every single one of them ranks in the top 20%. They’re not just “one and done” players.
- Many of those folks started their lessons in the late 90s and are still playing Applewood today. If that’s not retention, we don’t know what is!

SNAPSHOTS



## TESTIMONIALS

When I needed an instructor in 2008, Tim was the first person I thought of. He's perfect for this profession in so many ways: He's always positive, always super professional and always on time.

In the 15 years I've worked with him, I can't think of one time where Tim didn't show up for a lesson. Something undoubtedly comes up with someone who has a schedule like him, but not with Tim. That's been wonderful to have here. His daily regimen is so consistent, and that's why he's been successful with teaching the game of golf.

I always feel confident giving a new golfer his phone number, because I know he's going to be reliable and do a great job. He truly cares about his students -- so much so that he hasn't gotten back into his own golf game until recently. He's always putting others in front of him.

I'm very proud of the foundation that Tim has built here at Applewood and what him and Landon have done to grow and retain an incredible community of golfers.

— **Brian Melody**, General Manager

I have gone to Golf Fore Life since I was 8, and Tim Pratt has been my golf swing instructor since I can remember. The relationship we have built over the years is amazing. He has become like a second grandpa to me.

Golf Fore Life has helped me find my love for the game of golf, while teaching me the importance of confidence and hard work.

With Tim's help, I played Varsity golf all four years of my high school career, was First Team All-Conference all four years, First Team All-State two years, and helped my team to a state championship my sophomore year. Today, I am playing college golf at the division two level at MSU Denver. I credit the Learning Center with my ability to get to where I am today and still go back and see them once a week.

I believe Golf Fore Life would be an excellent recipient for the award. I owe so much of my success to their hard work.

— **Sydney Eye**

My son loves the Applewood junior golf program and has been with them for about 4 years. This well-developed program provides a strong golfing foundation, teaching fundamentals with a fun and competitive edge. Applewood junior golf program molds students into well rounded golfers by encouraging proper technique, accountability, sportsmanship, a strong golf IQ and etiquette.

Coach Landon Willett is a talented, positive and trustworthy influence in my sons life Thank you Applewood, Tim and Landon.

— **Carolyn Lehto**

The adult and youth instructional programs at Applewood Golf Course have an excellent reputation and draw participants from across the Denver metro area. Golf lessons, continuing education classes and youth camps are run by knowledgeable professionals who teach their students with individualized instruction and dedication that is rare. Costs are very affordable, and students of all ages and skill levels have fun while learning the great game of golf.

But these facts don't explain the entire story behind the Golf Fore Life Learning Center at Applewood. In my experience with the Learning Center, golf lessons are just the tip of the iceberg. I am a resident of Lakewood, Colorado, who has been taking lessons at the Learning Center since 2014.

During those years, the lessons and practice sessions provided by Tim Pratt have become a regular part of my schedule. I've developed a deep love for the game of golf that has affected many facets of my life. I progressed from a beginner golfer in 2014 to a club champion in 2018, and have made many wonderful friends and golfing companions through the Learning Center. All of this is due to the atmosphere of acceptance, support and dedication to the game that Tim Pratt has created. He is a unique individual who brings a level of expertise to his teaching that inspires his students.

Tim's positive personality and fun approach to teaching have developed loyal friends and followers who have attended classes year-round year after year. Tim addresses every aspect of the game in his classes. He teaches the mechanics of the golf swing with an emphasis on each person's style of learning and athletic abilities. He places special emphasis on the short game and uses it as a foundation for the full swing.

During Continuing Education classes (which are held multiple times per week), Tim oversees "supervised practice" with individualized input for each student. This unique format allows each student to work on their swing, regardless of their skill level. Tim also teaches his students about physical fitness, especially as it applies to the golf swing. With Tim's help, I learned about resistance training in the gym, which has become the foundation for my own health and fitness.

The mental aspect of golf is also a focus of classes at the Learning Center. Tim teaches his students to maintain a balance between improving their game and simply having fun. I can attest that this balance can be difficult, but having fun and enjoying the game is the ultimate goal.

Many of us have made the Learning Center a "second home" where we learn about the game of golf, develop friendships and enjoy the company of a special group of people. A good

example of this dedication is seen below; this photo was taken on a Saturday morning in March after a long winter.

Students arrived to shovel off a place to practice on the range, to gather with friends, and enjoy the morning, despite cool temperatures and several inches of snow.



In 2015, the golf course and the Learning Center were in jeopardy. A developer submitted a rezoning application with Jefferson County with plans to convert Applewood to a housing subdivision. After the initial shock of the announcement subsided, friends of the golf course mobilized and fought the redevelopment.

The effort was led by Kathy Lower, a student of Tim's and devoted member of the Learning Center. A highly accomplished attorney, Kathy gathered a formidable army of Applewood supporters and mounted a campaign to discredit the developers, who made multiple unfounded claims about the golf course. Through the efforts of the "Applewood army", the developer's application was denied and the golf course was saved.

I was privileged to participate in the effort and can attest that a major impetus for the fight was to save the Learning Center.

As a complement to lessons, the Learning Center group has ventured outside of Applewood for several fun golf trips. For the past four years, about 25 members traveled to Phoenix, Arizona, and St. George, Utah, for annual Tim Pratt Invitational golf trips.

We played golf during the day and gathered together in the evenings for dinner and conversations and fun.



These trips brought our group even closer, and we now share funny stories and memories that we all cherish. Truly a special group of diverse individuals – lawyers, teachers, pilots, doctors, scientists, contractors, accountants, etc., all united by a love of golf and a leader that brought us together. Thank you, Tim!

— **Chris Peterson**

My experience with the Golf Fore Life learning program at Applewood Golf Course (AGC) goes back to 2003, so about 16 years' worth of experience. That is a long time. I want to briefly tell our family story because it highlights many aspects of the AGC learning program that set it apart.

My daughter was ten years old when she started going to the Junior summer camps and this was followed about 6 years later with my son attending multiple weeks of camp every summer for many years. Both kids continued beyond summers and took the fall twice-weekly classes, and both played golf in high school. AGC offers access for local high school teams to practice at AGC. The junior and high school golf programs were not just a way for my kids to get introduced to golf, but also to improve their skills, and most importantly as kids, to have fun doing it. But they also formed bonds with the instructors, whether temporary instructors or with the year-round pro Tim Pratt. AGC brought something to my kids besides golf instruction, it showed them what it is like to be part of a community.

And now, I myself am taking lessons (again) and in fact, I may be a life-long student! The Continuing Education Group lessons are a phenomenal deal. If you take advantage of the dates and times offered, you have access to several days per week of instruction for one hour/day. I smile when I play with my kids now, because as we play, they say things like "did Tim teach you the big circle and small circle concept on the putting green?" and many more things that they learned in their years of golf lessons. I can visualize my kids teaching their kids someday all of the things they learned at AGC. It truly is "Golf Fore Life".

— **Karen Kelley**

Can you imagine looking forward to being nagged? I couldn't, until I signed up for golf lessons with Tim Pratt at his Learning Center at Applewood Golf Course. Of course, I didn't know about the nagging at first. Five years ago, I decided it was time for me to learn to play golf. Out of sheer luck, I found Tim's Learning Center and signed up for his four-week group lesson for beginning golfers. When those sessions ended, Tim invited me to join his Continuing Ed class. That's when the nagging began.

Continuing Ed is just what it sounds like – a group of students practice together with Tim and he comments, nudges, suggests – OK, nags – us about our mechanics. And we love it. Many of his students have been with Tim for years, some even following him to Applewood from another golf course. And having worked with him for five years, I know why. He's a great golf coach. He knows how to work with students of all ages and abilities. He's a patient, hilarious, generous,

caring nag – I mean, person. So many Tim-isms: Oh, did I say that out loud? Do I have to use my outside voice? SWEEP THE GRASS. Are you married (if you've been lucky enough to hit a pretty shot)? FINISH!

You should count yourself lucky if you ever have a chance to work with Tim. I do.

— **Kathy Lower**

As a golfer, the BEST decision I made was to enroll in Applewood's Golf Fore Life program with Tim Pratt as the instructing Pro. I decided to 'play golf' after I retired and was so frustrated that I was either going to quit, or learn how to play. Over 5 years in the Continuing Ed group, my game has evolved into something I am proud of, although it is a work in progress. Tim is a great teacher, and an amazing mentor. He has such a can do spirit and makes our 'lessons' not only a learning experience, but fun.

— **Barbara Schirkofsky**

My family and I have been involved in the Learning Center for over seven years and each of us has benefited from the experience. Personally, I started playing golf seven years ago and was referred to Applewood by a scratch golfer who said the environment was positive and the instruction would be tailored to my learning style and present abilities. That has been absolutely true!

In particular, Tim Pratt was able to gently suggest changes I needed to make without overwhelming me. Every time I had a question about why certain things would be happening in my game, he could give an explanation as well as drills that could help me solve the problem. The attitude of taking golf seriously enough to get better but also encouraging everyone to enjoy the sport has invigorated everyone in the classes.

My husband, Kirk, has been playing golf since childhood but has struggled at times to get his game back in order. Tim helped him buy golf clubs that would fit his swing and has helped him make the changes he needs to consistently solidly hit the ball.

My grandchildren have taken up the sport after becoming involved in the children's program. They started at around age five and want to keep playing whenever possible. The young instructors have been able to give them skills that can make them feel successful and competent while creating fun games that keep them engaged and smiling on the course.

My daughter, daughter in laws, and nieces had a group class with Tim. Again, they still talk about what fun it was and how the specific, consistent instruction has allowed them to play golf in different social situations without embarrassment. Several have found their own "mom" golf groups to enjoy.

In my son's work, he needs to play golf competently to connect with business associates. He has participated in the coaching groups and has been so encouraged by how quickly his stroke improved. He and his wife feel very welcomed by all the participants in these coaching classes.

Overall, Tim and Dave have made golf fun! The community that has developed with fellow golfers has made Applewood feel like hanging out with family. I feel so fortunate that our friend encouraged me to start golf through the Learning Center at Applewood. I have continued to recommend Applewood to so many people, especially when they notice improvement in my game!

— **Sara Quackenbus**