

PHOTOS COURTESY THE MILBROOK CLUB



# Same Space, New Face

A sharp new look, inside and out, is helping **The Milbrook Club** stand out in the crowded and competitive Greenwich, Conn. market.

By Joe Barks, Editor

**If Frank Sinatra** had wanted to immortalize a club market where “if you make it there, you make it anywhere,” he might have sung about “Greenwich, Greenwich” instead of “New York, New York.”

The Connecticut enclave with just over 60,000 residents, located some 30 miles northeast of New York City, is defined by Wikipedia as the state’s “largest municipality that functions as a town.” But for those in the club business there, Greenwich brings all the challenges of the biggest of cities.

There are well over a dozen golf, country, yacht and social clubs within Greenwich’s confines that are vying for the loyalty, and discretionary spending, of its affluent population. And that puts a premium on having a club operation that never sleeps, to be among those who are kings of the hill and on top of the heap.

Among all that are in the market, The Milbrook Club in Greenwich draws special challenges from being the city’s only community-based club and having a unique physical makeup of its property. Milbrook was founded in 1923 as the club component within the former estate of William “Boss” Tweed, the notorious New York City politician, and the club’s campus occupies 71 acres in the center of Greenwich’s gated Milbrook district.

Sixty-one of those acres are occupied by the club’s tree-



The Milbrook Club’s new Grill Room (pictured at top of page) has become an especially popular post-renovation destination, helping to generate a nearly 30% increase in member F&B sales since it was opened last December. Improvements for the club’s pool area included creating an expanded eating area for the snack bar (pictured above) and renovating the snack-bar kitchen.



**Milbrook got out in front of the trend for more outdoor dining by expanding its spacious central patio (pictured above) in 2014. Its parkland-style nine-hole golf course (left) is now also benefitting from golfers' increasing preference for the option to play quicker rounds on still-challenging layouts.**

lined, parkland-style nine-hole golf course. While golfers' increasing preference for the option to play quicker rounds on still-challenging layouts has made that type of course come to be seen as much more of an asset, Milbrook's confined space and inability to offer 18 holes has led the club to also place greater emphasis on distinguishing itself from other Greenwich clubs through a wider range of activities and amenities. The club has drawn added incentive to develop family-friendly programming and encourage year-round use of the club from the fact that a large segment of its membership (now 55%) is comprised of residents of the Milbrook community (which has 179 homes).

All of these factors, says General Manager Scott Kloster,

CCM, have combined to lend a "more casual and collegial feel" to The Milbrook Club vibe. That helped the club get further out in front of the trend for more outdoor dining, by expanding an already-existing separate patio and kitchen/bar pavilion in 2014 to create a spacious and inviting new venue that extends farther into a central area near the clubhouse and entry circle (see photo above).

That was the club's first large facilities improvement project in some time, says Kloster, who came to Milbrook in 2006. Its immediate success was reflected in how members fully embraced the new space, to create what Kloster now describes as a "patio culture" and strong "summer presence" that defined the property.

**PROJECT SUMMARY**  
**The Milbrook Club**



*The Milbrook Club*

**Location:**

Greenwich, Conn.

**Founded:** 1923

**Members:** 286

**Clubhouse Size:**  
24,000 sq. ft.

**Renovation Project Cost:**  
\$7 million

**Construction Dates:**  
January-December, 2017

**Architect/Designer:**

Jefferson Group Architects/Judd Brown Designs

**Contractor:**

A. P. Construction Company, Stamford, Conn.

**Project Highlights:**

- Clubhouse expanded with new 2,200 sq. ft. two-story wing, and portions of existing clubhouse on both floors were renovated. New facilities included grill room, bar and lounge, private dining, activity room and storage.
- Pool area received expanded eating area for snack bar, renovated kitchen and restrooms, pergola over children's pool, and new kiosk for lifeguards and to monitor access.
- Three paddle tennis courts were restored off site and then placed in a new orientation along with a new fourth court. A new 1,300-sq. ft. paddle hut was constructed with vaulted ceiling, fireplace, stone terrace, pantry, office and restroom.



**The Milbrook Club is in the center of Greenwich's gated Milbrook district that was built on the former estate of notorious New York City politician William "Boss" Tweed.**

“In the past, if there was inclement weather, no one would show up. Now they love coming inside as much as they love being outside.”

—Scott Kloster, CCM, General Manager



And the success of the patio expansion—one of many recommended improvements for the club in a master plan that had been prepared in 2008, but then tabled during the recession—also “set the tone,” Kloster says, for Milbrook to move ahead with concepts designed to address the need to infuse the club with that same distinctive atmosphere throughout the year, and in all parts of the property.

“We needed to replicate the feeling of the patio and take it inside the clubhouse, with a better setup for casual dining and our bars,” says David Lee, Milbrook’s current President. “We also needed to make a big push to expand our paddle tennis program, by adding a fourth court and building a really nice paddle hut. So those were the next priorities, and because the patio [expansion] had been such a huge hit, we had the momentum to move forward with them.”

The momentum was strong enough, in fact, to generate 89% approval for a total expenditure of \$7 million, funded in part by a \$7,500 member assessment, to not only address those priorities, but also further expand amenities around the pool (see Project Highlights in Project Summary box, pg. 32). Construction began as 2017 began and was completed eleven months later, without ever having to close the club (no easy feat, given the tightness of the property) beyond its normal closing for the month of February.

### The House is Rockin’

Once the renovated clubhouse was reopened in December 2017, it didn’t take long to see evidence of how Milbrook had been transformed to truly be a club for all seasons. From the new Club Room that had been redesigned, in what Kloster describes as a “cool basement” decor, for kids to use (or parents to park them), to the Woodside Room that offers spirited play on the club’s new custom shuffleboard table (see photo, pg. 33), members now had many more reasons to use and enjoy the club, inside and out, regardless of the prevailing conditions.

“In the past, if there was inclement weather, no one would show up on the property,” says Kloster. “Now they love coming inside as much as they love being outside.”

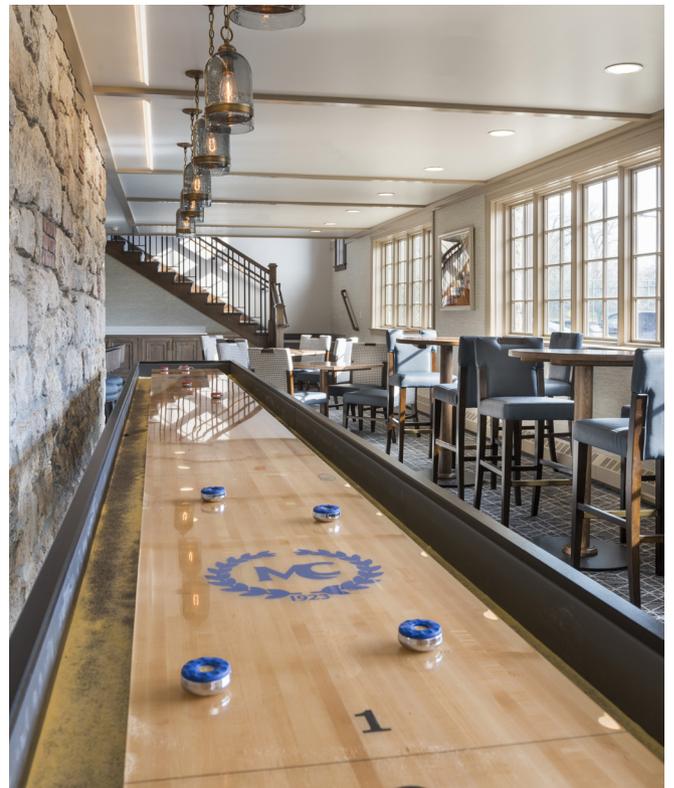
The numbers generated in the first months after the project was completed showed how immediately the Milbrook membership embraced the new facilities. Overall food-and-beverage sales in the first seven months of this year were up 29%; even more telling, to show the club’s new allure as a winter gathering spot, F&B member sales in December 2017 were up 90% compared to the average for the same month the previous two years.

For Lee, who has been a Milbrook member since 2003, it’s not necessary to look at the numbers to find evidence of how things have changed. “We have a lot of members who live within the community and can walk to the club, and now you see groups of them always gathering, inside and out, just to hang out together,” he says. The shuffleboard table, Lee adds, has been an especially big draw; it was selected over darts or other options largely because its long and thin

footprint best fit the way the Woodside Room is laid out, and it’s become such a popular attraction that Lee says plans are in the work to create a club championship competition.

Milbrook purposely stayed away from creating too much of a sports-bar look and feel for its new venues, Kloster notes; instead, TVs and foosball and shuffleboard tables are integrated into “adult lounge” areas more subtly, so they don’t dominate the rooms. “We wanted to have a full range of gathering spots that you can move around to, so you can stay on site for several hours without feeling locked in to one place,” Kloster says.

That’s become especially valuable as The Milbrook Club has welcomed an influx of new members, with 2018 already ranking as the club’s biggest year ever for membership sales, with 26 new members joining by the end of July. In addition to the appeal of the new facilities and amenities created through the renovation project, the club has also benefitted from the appeal of a membership initiative that created a two-tiered Intermediate Category to help attract younger families, and



The custom shuffleboard table in the renovated Woodside Room was originally selected over darts or other options largely because of how its long and thin footprint best fit the way the room was laid out; it’s become such a popular attraction that plans are now in the works to create a club championship competition.



As part of the renovation project, three of the club's paddle tennis courts were restored off site and then placed in a new orientation on the property, along with a new fourth court. All are now served by Milbrook's new 1,300-sq. ft. paddle hut (pictured, above left), which was constructed with a vaulted ceiling, fireplace, stone terrace, pantry, office and restroom.

from the success of a special outreach effort to the many foreign expatriates who come to the area to work for financial or legal firms or other businesses in New York or along Connecticut's densely populated Interstate-95 corridor.

Under Milbrook's "expat" program, a three-year membership can be secured for normal dues but only 20% of the club's full initiation fee. "In 36 months, they either convert [to full membership], or pull up stakes and walk away," says Kloster. Several of the new members joining Milbrook this year came through the expat program, and Kloster reports that those in that category "have become a very integral part of the club"—in large part because of how easy it's been for them to assimilate into the membership through the lively social atmosphere created by the facilities enhancements that have been made.

With The Milbrook Club still a month or two away from

the onset of cooler weather that will start to wind down its golf and patio seasons, but also kick paddle-tennis play into full gear, the full payoffs from last year's renovation projects will continue to reveal themselves.

"Within our membership, about 40 to 50% play golf and another 30 to 40% play racquet sports," says Kloster. "Our paddle program is especially robust, and now we have facilities to properly match the quality and volume of play here—and a paddle hut to match the social part of the game, too.

"There's also a 10 to 15% segment of our membership that doesn't play any sport," Kloster adds. "And now we have much more here for them to enjoy as well."

**C&RB**

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The new rooms inside The Milbrook Club's renovated clubhouse now complement its already popular outdoor space by giving members many more reasons to use and enjoy the club, regardless of the prevailing weather conditions.