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Already surrounded by a mouth-watering smorgasbord of golf courses, Vernon's adopted 18-holer just 40 minutes from downtown is holding its own in year two of full operation.

Run predominantly by Vernonites, the Canoe Creek Golf Course on the edge of Salmon Arm's industrial park is slowly becoming a destination spot for tourists checking out the Okanagan-Shuswap's golf course menu.

"We're getting quite a few of tour groups," said associate pro Jesse Crowe, a former VSS Panther golf teamer. "A lot of people are playing Black Mountain and Tower Ranch in Kelowna, us, Talking Rock (near Chase) and Tobiano (Kamloops), and what they're telling us is we're the most playable.

"The conditions are great. I'm not knocking any of those other golf courses; they're fantastic too. But as far as being able to go out there, have fun, not get too beat up but still get a challenge, our golf course is very playable."

Canoe Creek is a 7,000-yard, player-friendly course designed by former PGA player Dave Barr, who has been out to play the course once this season.

Hall Thomlinson, formerly GM of the Vernon Golf & Country Club, is the head pro, while the greens superintendent is another former Vernon club employee, Al Feenstra. Vernon's Mike Riva is the contractor. Tim Dedels of Penticton is also an associate pro.

The course features four sweet par 3s accenting Canoe Creek and natural wet lands. The four par 5s are highlighted by the 610-yard (from the tips) 16th hole, the No. 4 stroke hole. The par 4s are all distinctively different and give you variety of unique water and natural feature

"It's been good out here," said Crowe, in his first year at Canoe after spending four years at the Mabel Lake club. "The golf course is in phenomenal shape. I would put our greens up against anywhere in B.C. really and the fairways are great. We're still kind of a hidden gem, I think. There's still a lot of people don't know about us and how good we are."

"Sometimes people might get us confused because we're Canoe Creek and the other side of town is Canoe. Once we get them here, they love it."

Crowe says customers love the friendly and swift service, and the general golf course experience.

"And the course is different. It's an interesting golf course. Once you play it once, you want to come back and play it again. And once you've played it a few times, you really know where you can take advantage of certain spots and where you have to be careful so it's good in that way."

He says Canoe Creek provides a good option for tee time golfers who can't get a decent time at other courses. He says the glut of good courses is hurting everybody's numbers somewhat.

"Five years ago, people were members of golf courses but still had X amount of money set aside to go play

10, or 15 rounds somewhere else during the year. People aren't doing that. If you're a member at a golf course in Alberta, you might holiday at home and play your own golf course."

Crowe, who texts his buddy and PGA player Chris Baryla almost daily, feels things will turn around eventually, and that the demand for golf play is still strong.

Long-range development at Canoe Creek may include housing and hotels. The club is trying to get a better access road.

"It's been a great change," said the amiable Crowe, who often takes a dollar or two off his father-in-law Jeff Parker of the Spallumcheen Golf & Country Club.

"It's closer to home. Having a driving range here and having 18 holes is a treat. It's helped my golf game which is awesome, and it's fun. And the big thing is I get a bit more time off so I can be with the family"