

# **George Vitense Golfland, Inc.**

## **A Family Entertainment Center**

George Vitense Golfland, Inc., a multifaceted recreational golf facility, was started by George Vitense in 1955 on farmland he purchased in the Madison area. He started the business with a golf range and a par 3 golf course. George soon expanded the business to include a miniature golf course and in the 1960s, he built a second 18 hole miniature golf course with expansion continuing in the 1970s. After George died in 1988 and his wife died in 1990, his three daughters inherited and managed the business together.



In 1992 Joel Weitz, George's grandson, was hired to manage the business and, subsequently purchased the business in 2001. Since that time, both 18-hole miniature golf courses have been renovated, the par 3 golf course has been renovated and lengthened, the golf range has been improved with additional grass tee areas and range targets. Additional activities of Water Wars, HiBall and the rock climbing wall were also added. The George Vitense Golf Academy was formed in 2005 and features some of the finest teaching professionals in the State. All outside activities of Vitense Golfland have been greatly improved.

2006 brought the addition of a new 20,000 square foot building that houses a year-round family recreation center. SBA was able to be of assistance to Joel with this expansion through its 504 program. Inside the new building is a new restaurant-Green Tree Grill-named after the neighborhood in which it resides and a unique "Madison" themed miniature golf course that celebrates many unique landmarks and events of Madison. Each hole describes history of the landmark as well as history of the unique sponsoring historical Madison businesses such as Oscar Mayer and American Family Insurance. The community's involvement in this project is a testament to the community importance of Vitense Golfland in their 52 year history in Madison.

The facility is located at Whitney Way & West Beltline Highway in the heart of the west side of Madison and allows them to maximize their existing activities and generate revenue 12 months of the year despite adverse weather conditions. The facility includes a "Top 100 Rated Golf Range in America" that is open all year and the only lighted golf course in the Madison area as well as, along with the 18 hole miniature golf course, 8 baseball and softball batting cages, a 24 foot five station climbing wall and concessions.

They offer year-round golf instruction and small and large scale event space options and a comprehensive catering menu and beverage service.

Joel and Vitense Golfland are very supportive of their community. They have a Vitensefest Fund Raiser that raises funds for the Capital Candle Lighters organization that helps children battling cancer. They have given out thousands of dollars worth of free passes for all their activities to numerous organizations that include churches, schools and community organizations that do silent auctions or fund raisers. They have a program for Big Brothers & Big Sisters where the little sister or brother play free when the adult pays as well as one for disabled children where the child pays \$1.00 to play their activities.

The strength of the business comes from the quality and commitment of its management and teaching group. Joel is an experienced CPA and his experience in auditing large and small businesses is beneficial in operating Vitense Golfland. He is a PGA golf professional and member of The PGA of America. His peers also recognized his commitment and leadership potential by electing him as a board member of the Wisconsin Section of the PGA where he recently served as president from 2003 through 2005. Joel is on the Pastoral Council for Our Lady Queen of Peace and a board member of the Madison Junior Golf Foundation.

Joel has received the prestigious 2005 Golf Professional of the Year award for the Wisconsin Section and was named as a Top 50 golf instructor in America by the Golf Range Association of America. His partner and wife Sarah is a skilled physical therapist. She participates in day to day management and provides valuable strategic planning skills in many areas of the business. Other staff includes PGA golf professionals with over 70 years of combined experience at the facility.

Joel and Vitense Golfland was the recipient of SBA's 2007 Family Owned Small Business Award called the Jeffrey Butland Family Based Small Business Award. This award is given to a family owned business that has been passed from one generation to another. Nominees serve as the majority owner and operator for operating the small business with at least a 15 year track record. They were judged on evidence of their success as measured by sales and profits as well as the increase in employment opportunities for both family and non-family members. All told, Vitense Golfland employs approximately 100 people. They had to demonstrate their potential for long-term success and economic growth along with their voluntary efforts to strengthen family owned businesses within their community.

This successful fifty-two year old family owned business has maintained the vision that George Vitense had that led to the creation of Vitense Golfland. SBA is proud to have been able to be of assistance to Joel in the success of his business and looks forward to hearing about what comes next!