

# Falcon Valley, "Where Everybody Knows Your Name"

Atmosphere takes top-ranked Lenexa 9-hole course to a higher level.

Editorial and Photos by Alan Hoskins, Feature Writer



The 541-yard 1st hole is typical of the large, well-manicured greens with subtle undulations that are a trademark of Falcon Valley's 9-hole course in Lenexa, KS.

**T**he official name is the Pub at Falcon Valley. But for those who know best, it's a page out of TV's Cheers, "*Where everybody knows your name.*"

"We even have a Norm," laughs veteran bartender Kent Schmutz of the Pub that elevates Falcon Valley's award-winning 9-hole course to another level.

"I'm not saying there's no other courses like this, but I think you'd be hard to find very many as friendly and welcoming as we have here," says co-owner Dean Ralston. "We're truly a 'Mom and Pop' course. We're a 'Commoner's Club' versus a country club."

Ralston (*in photo on right*) and Paul McKeown (*in photo on left*) are in their 10th year as co-owners; a partnership they believe has built a measure of stability and consistency that separates Falcon Valley from the many public courses that have undergone ownership and management changes in recent years. "Everyone knows who we are and everyone does know your name," agrees McKeown. "If you're new, you'll be welcomed and everyone will soon know your name."

The camaraderie enjoyed by members and the course is even put on display — nearly 70 flags from courses all over the nation and a couple of European courses fill the walls of the Pub that

it shares with the pro shop. "Our members bring them from all over," Ralston says proudly.

Even the partnership between Ralston and McKeown is right out of Americana. "We're both from Minnesota, but I'd been here in Kansas for a long time and worked at Falcon Valley before we bought it," says Ralston. "Paul moved here from Minnesota into a house right across a cul-du-sac from my house. He came out and played some golf, and we got to know each other, talked a lot and said, 'Wouldn't it be nice to own a golf course?' We ended up buying it from the course developer."



Kansas City's only 9-hole championship course, Falcon Valley is well-located at 9801 Falcon Valley Drive in the heavily populated city of Lenexa and is less than five minutes east of I-435 and north of K-10 at Woodland Drive. Rated the "14th Best 9-Hole Course in the U.S. by *Golf Week* in 2010, it's consistently listed among the top-rated courses by *GolfAdvisor* and the "Finest Nine-Hole Layout in the State of Kansas" by *Midwest Golf Guide*.

Boasting five leagues, Falcon Valley is particularly popular with the fairer sex whose "Par-Tee-Girls" League late Thursday afternoons is one of Kansas City's biggest with 80 members and 50-60 playing each week. A Monday Men's League has a membership of 120 and a Tuesday Senior League of 60-70. A favorite for corporate and charity outings, along with corporate leagues, daily green fee revenues have been on the climb.

As for the 9-hole course itself, it must be emphasized, it is not an “Executive Course.” Anything but actually. For instance, the two par 5’s stretch out 543 and 536 yards from the tips, and the five par 4’s average 391 yards. When 18 holes are played, it’s 6,796 yards from the tips, 6,308 from the back and 5,820 from the middle tees. It’s a par 36 (for 9 holes) carrying a 74.0 course rating and a slope of 138 at the longest.

The course meanders through wooded areas the first three holes before channeling through stunning housing developments. Lakes flank the par-5 1st hole and the signature par-4 9th and add to the splendor of the course. Fairways are spacious and greens large — both are in A-plus condition under the direction of new superintendent Tyler Anderson, a former Milburn assistant. While without much undulation, the greens are nevertheless quick and carry enough slope that keeping the ball below the hole will save a lot of strokes.

“The only thing that separates our course and others is that we have nine holes and they have 18, but my opinion is that it’s by far the most fun and yet most challenging course in the city,” says Ralston. “There’s not one boring hole. Each one is set out by itself and provides a different challenge, making it unique in that you have to be thinking your way around. However, if you hit the tee ball well, you can have a good day scoring.”



*A deep ravine and a large bunker must be avoided on Falcon Valley’s 150-yard 5th hole.*

A 1990 graduate of Marymount College in Salina where he played golf all four years, Ralston’s resume includes the Country Club of Blue Springs, Alvarado and Swope Memorial before opening Falcon Ridge in 1997. In 2002, he took over as general manager of both Falcon Lakes and Falcon Valley and then became an owner when Falcon Valley was put up for sale.

McKeown, on the other hand, brought a background of business and marketing into the partnership after a career in the insurance business as a senior vice president. “Dean knew the owner was going to sell the development, and we got to talking and he said, ‘Man, I wished I could own a golf course’ and I said, I would



**Always  
Time  
For 9...**

*With a pond in front of the tee box, a lake running the length of the fairway on the right side and a bunker and out of bounds on the left, Falcon Valley’s signature 380-yard 9th hole is not only the course’s most spectacular, but the most challenging.*

The signature 380-yard 9th hole, in particular, offers both beauty and challenges. Water runs in front of the tee box and the length of the fairway on the right side with out of bounds on the left. “It’s a very demanding tee shot because of the lake on the right and very little bail out area on the left, and a fairway bunker that is very reachable off the tee,” says Ralston. A deep green, 40- to 60-foot putts are not unusual and pin placement on the right side brings the lake into play. “It’s very scary visibly because of the water and requires a very precise second shot. I’ve tried about everything and still have not figured it out.”

be interested,” said McKeown. “We made some changes, closed down the restaurant and concentrated on what we knew best.”

With a motto of “There’s time for nine,” nine-hole green fees with cart are \$29 Mondays – Thursdays; \$32 Fridays – Sundays and holidays. It’s \$18 for a second round (of 9 holes) on weekdays, \$20 on weekends. Juniors 16 and under and seniors 58 and older can play for \$25 Monday – Friday with \$12 replays. Tee times can be booked online at [www.falconvalleygolf.com](http://www.falconvalleygolf.com) where one may find “dynamic pricing” or by calling 913.780.5976. ☞