

# TRAVEL + LEISURE

## Lone Star Secret

Once an outlaw's hideout, now an intimate nine-holer

From September 2008 By Art Stricklin

For years it has been a well-kept secret in Texas golf, a nine-hole course laid out over rolling, oak-dotted ranchland that once served as a hideout for the nineteenth-century stagecoach robber Belle Starr. One reason Starr Hollow Golf Club is so little known is that it's located in the sleepy town of Tolar (population 504), sixty miles southwest of Fort Worth. Another is that it's a private club, contained within a secluded family estate. But the family that owns Starr Hollow, the Leonards—whose patriarch, Marvin Leonard, founded a department-store chain and backed Ben Hogan's first stab at pro golf—allows a limited number of visitors to play the course. You must call in advance and be willing to be paired with a member.

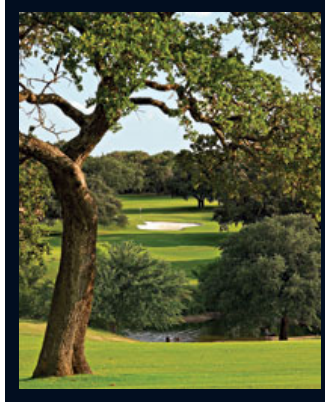


Photo: Stephen Karlisch

Like storied Colonial and Shady Oaks Country Clubs, both of which Leonard also founded, Starr Hollow places more demand on shotmaking than on power. Leonard, working with Houston-based architect Joe Finger, routed the course around the same live oaks, small caves and scenic lakes that provided cover for Belle Starr and her one-time lover and partner in crime, Cole Younger. Almost every hole bends one way or the other, requiring players to work the ball or at least to think their way around. A par thirty-six, it has two sets of flags, offering variety for those who choose to go around twice. The last hole—a par five with a water-guarded green shaped like the state of Texas—provides for a rousing finish. No less an authority on the game's reach in the Lone Star State than Ben Crenshaw considers Starr Hollow a jewel. "What a great gift that Marvin Leonard gave to Texas golf," Crenshaw says.

Nearly four decades after Leonard's death, Starr Hollow is run by his amiable daughter Marty, a lifelong golfer. The club's profile is so low—it doesn't even have a website—that the course generally gets little play. "It's a peaceful, pristine place," Marty says. "Dad would be proud.

"Most appealing is the unhurried nature of the club. Marty Leonard tells visitors to "play as many holes as you like and come inside when you get tired." The walls of the simple wooden clubhouse bear photos of her father and his friends, particularly Hogan. Every afternoon, the grillroom fills with the aroma of sizzling beef: The burgers, by far the most popular order, are made from cattle that graze just beyond the course's borders. Crenshaw calls them "absolutely the best hamburgers anywhere." Just don't spread the word too far.

### Trip Planner

#### Starr Hollow Golf Club

5717 Starr Hollow Court, Tolar, Texas.

### Architects

Joe Finger and Marvin Leonard, 1969.

### Yardage

2,975.

## Par

36.

## Green Fees

\$64–\$74.

## Contact

254-834-3464.



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