By MARK LESLIE

Golf-friendly, eco-friendly and economic are all what novices in the design game believe in.

"I want to make sure I've used as many of the natural features as I can," said William Bradley Booth. "I want to enhance those features, as opposed to being contrary to them... I want the shot values to feel natural, too."

At the new municipal course, designer Randy Russell will use 57 acres of manmade lakes as "wet ponds to filter out nutrients and pesticides if we make any mistakes." The course will be irrigated with reclaimed water. Prairie buffalo grass, which requires little or no irrigation, will be planted in the roughs.

Environmental and natural sensitivity was tantamount at Tidewater Golf Club and Plantation in North Myrtle Beach, S.C., which is five holes on the Intercoastal Waterway and four on the ocean inlet at Cherry Beach.

"Golfers [at Tidewater] are going to feel at peace, at harmony with nature, not like they're out in a violent ocean," said designer Ken Tomlinson.

Booth described his design philosophy as "naturalized." "I like to see things blend. I think some of the greatest architects were able to make their courses look natural, but weren't very subtle," said the Maine man, who described himself as a 'foot-to-soil' designer.

"A lot of people can do a routing just looking at a contour map. But I find those to be very contrived golf courses. This particular site is extremely hilly. It's a woodland course with a 75-foothigh elevation change of almost 200 feet. When you have that kind of elevation movement, it's very difficult to find golf holes. And unless you are a good golfer you really can't know what it's going to feel like once you get a golf hole out there." 

Booth takes plunge

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Tomlinson said: "My philosophy is, if it doesn't make sense don't do it. Tidewater has no buried elephants or chocolate drops. I tried to make it look like I didn't do anything — like it naturally flowed. In some places it didn't. I'm proud of the 3rd and 4th holes along the marsh. They were as flat as a pancake, so we had to work in some areas to make it look natural."

Tomlinson sees balance as crucial to his design. "I want to see if a hole is asymmetrical — in balance, but done so because of a mixture of shapes and forms," he said. "I think you're born with that ability. I can look at a fairway or green and tell if it's in balance. You can't take credit for that."

Good golfers, all these designers know another important factor for architecture: how to execute great golf shots.

"You have to know how to hit great golf shots in order to design great greens to reward the very best golf shot. That's the scientific part of the playing strategy," Tomlinson said.

"Every single shot at Tide-water is there for a purpose. You can elect to hit it to a place you get rewarded on the next shot, or you can bail out. But I'm going to force you to have a good time. What appears off the tee to be an easier, safer place, could get your blood pumping on your next shot."

"I think I'm in a vast minority in that regard. Architects I've talked to say people don't want a hard golf course. If they shoot 80 at home they want to be able to shoot 80 elsewhere. I don't believe that. I think it's a game, it's for fun and I want to get their blood pumping."

Russell said his maintenance background is very important. "A well-maintained course will hide a lot of design flaws," he said. "If an architect gives a superintendent a lot of problems in order to make a course dramatic, the superintendent is left trying to make it look nice."

"On the other hand, it's going to be a dull world if you strive strictly for maintenance. You have to strike a balance and that's determined by the use."