Air-conditioned mist the key to thriving bentgrass greens in Florida

By MARK LESLIE

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Fla. — When other Floridians in the 1980s were trying to grow bentgrass on their greens and watching it die, superintendent David Lowe and head mechanic David Smith were tinkering at the new Plantation Club, here. When others abandoned bentgrass and returned to the standard Bermudagrass, Lowe and Smith kept tinkering.

Today, The Plantation Club’s bentgrass greens are thriving, thanks to their ingenuity. Their secret goes beyond the usual bentgrass survival programs of adjusting cutting heights, applying fungicides, ventilating, misting, and watering localized dry spots ahead of time.

Lowe and Smith have added a crucial twist to the ventilation fac- tor. Instead of the conventional — and noisy — fans many superin- tendents place in nearby woods to put on with linkages and arms, and attached them to the system so that it oscillates.

“Basically, it’s a blower that you find up in attics of commercial buildings that blow into the ductwork,” Lowe said. “We put a transitional piece on the front — about 24 inches long and 13 to 16 inches wide at the opening. That funnels the air out and gives you static pressure.”

“We mounted it on a pedestal and put on a wheel bearing as- sembly,” Smith explained. “Then I took a small gear motor and put it on with linkages and arms, and attached them to the system so that it oscillates.”

Lowe said he has three to five blowers on the edge of every green, cooling the grass and lowering the soil temperature four to six degrees to a depth of three inches. “The heat of the day is 88 to 100 degrees and humidity many days is 80 to 100 percent. Lowe runs the blowers 24 hours a day. “We can turn the typical 70- to 75-degree nighttime temperatures into 52 to 60 degrees,” he said.

“They cause the turf to survive during the day and actually thrive at night. That nighttime cooling makes the difference because, typically, bentgrass will not grow when you reach July.”

“This is a major, major player in our bentgrass program,” Lowe said. “When you turn the misting system on with the blowers, you get cool air blowing across and it’s phenomenal — very effective.”

“We have eight or nine Toro Units around every green that can produce a very low amount of water and high mist. When tem- peratures exceed 90, we mist for 30 seconds every hour on the hour until it drops to 88 or 87 degrees.’

— Superintendent Dave Lowe, Plantation Club