SUPERINTENDENTS DEVISE INNOVATIVE NEW WAYS TO PUSH WILDLIFE ENVIRONMENT

By MARK LESLIE

Casting aside the "chemical revolution" of the past, golf course superintendents have taken a long trek toward heightened environmental awareness, adding innovative twists of their own to the standard Audubon fare.

Witness Director of Grounds Don Ewoldt of Sand Creek Country Club in Chesterton, Ind., who started a Junior Conservation Society among his club members' children.

Or, John Netwal of Gymniss Creek Golf Club in a county park in Long Grove, Iowa, who takes interested campers on a tour of his course, then gives them bird boxes to place in their own backyards.

Or, Hank Kerfoot of Carmel Country Club in Charlotte, N.C., who with his wife this fall will instruct K-12 teachers about the outdoors and wildlife in a new program called Project Learning Tree:

"I farmed for 35 years and have been in this business for 15," said Ewoldt, "and I'll tell you: Golf courses are the least of our problems. I look back and cringe at what I did [on the farm]. So many homeowners are causing much more problems than golf course managers. Granted, we manage a lot more property, but we're doing it right."

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NORMAN STAKES CLAIM IN BERMUDAGRASS MARKET

By HAL PHILLIPS

SOUTH LAKEHOLD, Fla. — With more than 400 golf course openings projected for 1996, September's opening of The Club at Eaglebrook here shouldn't cause too much of a stir, ... Right.

Wrong. The Club at Eaglebrook, designed by Ron Garl, is the first course in the United States to have 18 holes of GN-1, a new fairway Bermudagrass strain marketed by Greg Norman Turf Co.

Several other GN-1 projects are in various stages of development. Sugarloaf, the Norman-designed course outside Atlanta and future home of the Bell South Classic, will feature GN-1, as will Real Mar, another Norman design under construction in Puerto Rico. Also, The Medalist Club — a Norman/Pete Dye collaboration in Hobcaw Sound, Fla. — has two holes grassed with the new Bermuda.

However, Eaglebrook will be the first fully operational golf course featuring the hybrid Bermuda on all 18 fairways. Consequently, warm-climate superintendents and sod growers across the country are eager to see how the new grass fares. "It looks fantastic," reported Eaglebrook superintendent Bob Wagner in mid-July. "I've had three superintendent jobs... and they've all been grow-ins. And this stuff [GN-1] grows like wild-fire. It's green as can be and it's very aggressive. We started springing April 16 and by the end of May it was completely covered.

"Time will tell and it's hard to predict what extra things I might have to do. But everything I've seen so far has been real encouraging."

GN-1 is the first commercial release

DUPONT DESIGN IMPROVES GROUNDS CREW'S MORALE

By MARK LESLIE

LANDENBERG, Pa. — When DuPont Country Club determined its maintenance facility would be "world-class and compete among the best," some say it went one better: It became the best.

"We feel it has done good things for the morale of the crew as well as their professionalism," said Earl Shafer, head superintendent at the 54-hole club. "It's a source of pride. It sets a tone. And when you have visitors, it shows your professionalism. It's not an old-barn, out-in-the-woods operation."

No, indeed. DuPont CC's maintenance structure met and exceeded its needs so fully that Shafer said, "The only problem is, we are running out of phone capacity and could use a larger cable." That's because some of the folks in the clubhouse took a fancy to extra space in the two-story building and moved in their operations.

But they didn't move in before Shafer accomplished his purposes. Namely:

- Individual offices — of "sufficient size to be private" — for Shafer, his three golf course superintendents, a landscape coordinator and an administrator responsible for the workforce and safety programs.

Shafer and the superintendents had all shared an office of about 4 by 10 feet, he said.

- A lunch room that seats 50 people. "That's our peak," he said. "We wanted a lunch room that would be comfortable and clean. And we have snack and soda machines, a television, and refrigerators to store lunches. We were eating in the shop and you can't — and shouldn't — do that."
New Bermudagrass puts Norman's emerging turf reputation on line

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from Greg Norman Turf, a subsidiary of Great White Shark Enterprises. According to Norman's staff agronomist, David Barnes, GN-1 is the brain child of Australian Hugh Whiting, who had cultivated a field of GN-1 at Pacific Sod in San Diego as early as 1988. Whiting has since patented the strain.

When Dye and Norman were working on The Medalist, Norman asked Barnes to search for Bermudagrass alternatives. There were only enough sprigs to grass two holes, but Norman and Barnes were so taken with the strain, they decided to market it nationwide under the name GN-1.

"In order to have a patent on something, you have to prove there are at least three things that set it apart from other products in the marketplace," explained Barnes. "The three things Whiting cited are: It thatched less in the same growing conditions, greener color and better cold tolerance.

"We have a lot of confidence in this grass. We've been working with it for nearly two years and Pacific Sod has had it since 1988... We feel this grass is an improvement on the norm."

Of course the "norm" is 419, which has set the industry standard for more than 30 years. Don Roberts of Southern Turf Nurseries, which grows and produces 419, said he isn't terribly familiar with GN-1 but is keeping an open mind.

"We're eager to look at any new variety," said Roberts. "And if we find it stands the test of time, we'll be the first ones to sign and become a contract grower — if it truly is the next best grass, the future grass, let's say."

"I think the industry is ready for another grass that will do things better in certain environments."

What sets GN-1 apart? According to Wagner, its aggressive nature and green color do. Before sprigging in April, Wagner visited The Medalist Club where areas of GN-1 meet 419, making comparisons easy.

"Originally, the color of GN-1 was what I saw," said Wagner. "It's also more aggressive. It will take more edging, verticutting and top dressing to maintain it. Also, I think the leaf blade is a little coarser than 419. When sod was first coming in, you could see the leaf blade is a little wider, a little more purple. But David [Barnes] tells me that, when you start mowing it, it improves."

Barnes said Norman himself likes the new grass because the ball sits up better. Barnes also said GN-1 is not only a darker shade of green than 419, it is more tolerant to nematodes.

"And maybe most important," he added, "GN-1 is a pure strain, a new strain. We had 16 holes at the Medalist done with 419 and you could see all sorts of colors and seedhead formations. If you go back to 1962 [when 419 was introduced], there have been mutations over the years. With 419, you see a grass that is 30 years older."

The ultimate testimonial, however, won't be available until Eaglebrook opens its doors this fall. Early reports have been extremely positive, but all the players in this drama — Barnes, Garl and Wagner — realize their reputations are staked to the success of GN-1 and Eaglebrook. Wagner and assistant Steve Gano, who have worked side by side on the grow-in, know this better than anyone.

"Everything at this job I take personally," Wagner said. "So my job and recommendation on grass is important. So far I've been real impressed with it. But if something went wrong, it would probably be my [job]."

Beatrice CC 1st Audubon-certified course in Neb.

BEATRICE, Neb. — Beatrice Country Club is the first golf course in Nebraska and 69th in the nation to achieve designation as a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary by the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System.

"We began working towards complete certification in the fall of 1994," said Casey Crittenden of Beatrice Country Club. "Our members have been supportive of this program and without that support we would not have been able to establish our facility as an environmental leader."

Critenden acknowledged the foresight of Bill Love, the course architect, and H&H Golf, the course contractors, for creating several areas around the property that were turned into natural settings for wildlife habitat.