Ervin values environmental integrity of his sites

Lindsay Ervin has been designing golf courses since joining late architect David Gill in Wisconsin when he graduated in landscape architecture from Purdue University in 1968. In 1973 he went to work with Greenhorn and O'Mara, a large multidisciplinary consulting firm in Maryland. Shortly afterward, he designed Hog Neck Golf Course in Easton, Md., an award-winning golf course that served as a springboard to a successful career. Ervin is a member of the American Society of Golf Course Architects and his firm, Lindsay Ervin & Associates, Inc., is headquartered in Crofton, Md.

Golf Course News: You have been aggressive in environmentally conscious design. Has this always been your philosophy in design?

Lindsay Ervin: Yes, it has always been. I've always wanted to ensure that we would maintain the integrity of the environmental aspects of the site. I've always liked to use the quality natural parts of the environment for the design of the golf course. We've worked to make sure that the course is designed to blend with the natural landscape, rather than overpower it.

GCN: Have we become better able to address environmental concerns?

LE: Over the last 10 years it's been more conscientious.

GCN: Has the industry as a whole been more environmentally conscientious in recent years?

LE: Knowing how to professionally apply fertilizers and pesticides.

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chemicals has had a big impact on maintaining the environment's integrity. Also, a lot of research has been done showing the positive effects of turf. I've seen more and more of the public responding positively as more evidence and information comes out. Things like [the book] A View from the Rough, for instance, address the positives in a very nice fashion.

GCN: New technology has helped protect water and other resources. What has been most helpful?

LE: Stopping erosion, using sod and getting it established. The key is to keep the velocity of the water down as it drains off the site. Where we have places like banks going down into a lake, putting sod helps get the turf established quicker, reducing erosion. Also, riprap stream channels slows the velocity of the water down. That is being done more now.

Also, the way we design helps. At Queenstown Harbor Golf Links, for example, we designed almost all the fairways to drain back into lakes we had created. This helps further prevent any potential nutrients from leaving the site by first going into this lake and settling. We're designing more of that adjacent to sensitive environmental areas. Also, we normally put sediment control basins in the low part of a site to capture potential runoff and we are leaving them in after construction. We plant wetland-type vegetative material there to make it look aesthetic and to catch any nutrients that might come off if, for instance, there is a heavy rain immediately after an application.

GCN: Has your home state of Maryland gone overboard in its attempts to protect Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Commission?

LE: Their [the Bay] Critical Area Commission's integrity. Also, a lot of instances address the positives in our area. Approval took quite a while — 40 hearings. Plus one wealthy homeowner was fighting them and caused a lot of problems. But they voted 22-1 in favor, that the golf course was a good use for that area, that it wouldn't harm the wildlife, the fertility and pesticide applications would not have a harmful effect on the ground water. And it has proven so.

The nitrogen content has decreased dramatically. It used to be 40% of the nitrogen content has decreased to drinkable water standards.

GCN: Is the turf you installed at Birdwood Golf Course, a renovation project you did? I would find on your golf courses?

LE: I don't want to design the same for each site we work with. As for the birdwood golf course, I don't end up with a fingerprint.

GCN: What would be your "dream" property?

LE: Along the ocean, like a Cypress Point-Pebble Beach type terrain, or even along the coast of Ireland.

GCN: You're a renovation project at West Point's course. Tell us about it.

LE: Originally, we started with plans for a driving range, remodeling parts of the golf course and connecting several holes that were separated by a major expressway. We wanted to connect the two parts of the course with a bridge. They had drainage problems with the five holes on the other side of the highway. We did our designs and bid the project out, but the construction costs came in so high we had to eliminate things. We eliminated the range. Instead of adding three or four new holes, we added one, some tees to another hole, built the bridge, took out a couple of par-3s and improved the drainage on the western portion of the site. We reversed another hole to get the view coming into the mountains. We did not renovate most of the greens and added two lakes. It was seeded last fall and is growing in now.

GCN: Your solo career was launched with some special help.

LE: Shortly after I joined Greenhorn and O'Mara, a developer in the D.C. area was doing a course and I got the job. That job was Hoge Neck, and instrumental in hiring me was Mrs. W. Alton Jones, the widow of the former CEO of Citgo and one of the founders of Augusta National. A philanthropist, she was living in Easton and knew the town needed a golf course...

Mrs. Jones was the reason I got Birdwood Golf Course for the University of Virginia. She moved to Charlottesville and discovered the university didn't have a golf course. So she matched funds for one, with the one stipulation: that they hire me.

GCN: You are in arguably the most difficult part of the country to grow turf. What about your selection of grasses?

LE: In 1993 when we had all the ice, the courses with zoysia grass and Bermudas got hammered and the ones with bentgrasses got through it. So until they come up with a tougher zoysia, I'm reticent to go in that direction. If you're doing 40,000 rounds at $50 a round, that's $2 million in revenue, and losing that kind of revenue hurts.

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