Sugarloaf Golf Club embarks on major upgrade project

CARRABASSETT VALLEY, Maine — Already ranked the best daily-fee golf course in New England, Sugarloaf Golf Club officials hope a major improvement program will raise the facility to even greater heights. Crews embarked in November on $800,000 improvements to the course following a special Carrabassett Valley town meeting, at which voters overwhelmingly approved a $800,000 municipal bond to finance the work.

Sugarloaf USA, which leases the course from the town, will pay off the bond over the next 23 years. Golf magazine recently ranked Sugarloaf 26th in the “Top 100 Courses You Can Play in the United States.” Only two other New England courses were named and they stood at the 61st and 83rd positions. Sugarloaf has held the 20th position in the prestigious ranking since 1998, and has been number one in Maine every year since it opened 15 years ago.

“Sugarloaf USA is committed to continuing to improve and maintain the course to the highest standards,” said director of golf Scott Hoisington, adding that the two-year project will include a state-of-the-art irrigation system, bunker renovation, added drainage, improved tee and landing areas on the driving range, and paving for all of the cart paths and the parking lot.

Beginning in mid-November, the work will start with the paving of the parking lot. Golf course superintendent Mike Vella will oversee work on all other aspects of the project, including the clearing of some woods. “We want to make the course more player-friendly,” said Hoisington. “We know it is challenging. It is a heavily wooded, mountain course. But if they hit it in the woods, we want them to find it and be able to bang it out.”

Crews will complete the cart path program early next spring and continue to work on the bunkers and irrigation system next summer. Vella said. The improvements will be accomplished in a manner that will have “little to no impact to the golfers,” said Vella. Sugarloaf is a golf and ski resort.

Aquarina CC wins Audubon nod

MELBOURNE BEACH, Fla. — Aquarina Country Club, a Charles Ankrum design on a barrier island near here, has been designated as a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary by Audubon International. It is the 262nd course in the world and the 36th in Florida to win the prestigious environmental distinction.

The 18-hole semi-private layout, opened in 1996, joined the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses in 1997. The course, a 4,300-yard par-62 track, is set on 100 acres near the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge. The area is a rich haven for animals. Alligators are so common they sometimes have to be chased off the course. Florida panthers have been spotted here, and bobcats reside nearby. Snakes, turtles, eagles, herons, cranes, and numerous other bird species populate the area.

The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program requires an intense effort on the part of the golf course superintendent to implement programs addressing each of the categories for environmental excellence established by Audubon International.

“Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your support,” said John Vella, Aquarina course superintendent. “We are dedicated to creating a natural ecosystem that will provide a quality of life for animals and nature. We’re very excited about this award and it’s not easy to get.”

The 754-acre course had to complete an environmental enhancement program to gain the coveted status.

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“We will not be resting on our laurels,” said director of golf Scott Hoisington, adding that the two-year project will include a state-of-the-art irrigation system, bunker renovation, added drainage, improved tee and landing areas on the driving range, and paving for all of the cart paths and the parking lot.

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