

## Tennessee's Hermitage layout sweeps environmental honors

By JAY FINEGAN

OLD HICKORY, Tenn. — The year-old President's Reserve course here has won big-time recognition for outstanding environmental achievements.

The 18-hole expansion at Hermitage Golf Course, opened in May 2000, has won the Soil and Land Conservationist of the Year

award from the Tennessee Conservation League (TCL). It was the first time a golf facility had even been nominated for the distinction, and the course swept it unanimously.

In addition, President's Reserve has won designation as a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary — the third course in

Tennessee to receive the recognition and the 303rd in the world to qualify for the honor.

And finally, the course has received the 2001 Aquatic Resource Preservation "Certificate of Merit" from the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation. An 11-judge panel selected the course for its stewardship of the

extensive wetlands on the 280-acre President's Reserve property.

### WETLAND BUFFER ZONES

The Nashville district of the Army Corps of Engineers (COE), which in 1998 issued a permit for construction of President's Reserve, nominated the course for the TCL award.

"In general, a minimum of 150



A crossbridge leading to the second hole at the President's Reserve course

acres is needed for a standard 18-hole course," the COE wrote to TLC director Marty Marina. "The President's Reserve course was planned and constructed on 280 acres. As a result of acquiring a much larger tract of land, the designer was able to minimize wetland impacts as well as maintain wetland buffers and upland forests as natural features on the course."

Indeed, owner Mike Eller and superintendent Bobby Schultz took to heart the COE's process of avoiding, minimizing and mitigating wetland impacts as part of their design criteria. Consequently, the environmental quality of this former cattle farm and walnut plantation was actually improved.

The Reserve was designed by Denis Griffiths and Associates, and built by Wadsworth Construction's Southeast division, under project superintendent Jon Vondomelin and vice president Edward Harbauer.

### ENVIRONMENTAL SHOWCASE

Schultz and Eller set out to make the course an environmental showcase.

Of the 45 acres of wetlands on the course, the architect was able to reduce impact to only 3.1 acres. Eller and Schultz, however, drew up a mitigation plan that more than offset that intrusion. Their blueprint included a restrictive covenant that protects 43.6 acres of wetlands in perpetuity, restores and creates 5.23 acres of wetlands, and preserves 17 acres of upland forest and buffers as natural resource protection areas.

"Environmental responsibilities are taken very seriously at the Hermitage, to preserve and allow golfers to enjoy the game in one of nature's purest settings," said Eller, president of Danner-Eller Golf Properties. "These beautiful wetland areas with the natural vegetation and wildlife are truly a setting that allows a golfer to have one of the most enjoyable golfing experiences anywhere.

"The President's Reserve is a championship-quality course that had the luxury of being built in a beautiful 300-acre natural environment," he added, "and it's rewarding to be recognized by these prestigious environmentalists for our

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GOLF COURSE NEWS

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## O'Brien to manage operations at First Tee

By JOEL JOYNER

ST. AUGUSTINE, Fla. — Joseph O'Brien, former chief operating officer of the GCSAA, has joined The First Tee as senior managing director of operations. While staying focused on development, O'Brien intends to offer services as part of the organization's game plan.

"The First Tee is really moving from a largely catalytic organization designed to help communities create affordable, accessible golf facilities for juniors, to one that also functions as a service organization," said O'Brien.

Having worked in chapter relations with the GCSAA, O'Brien is conversant with the challenges and opportunities of working with reasonably independent entities to achieve the same objectives.

"We're establishing a computer network between all our chapters by providing hardware, software and even cameras in order to formally register all the youngsters in the program," he said. "With 52 chapters, it's a monumental project."

### THE FIRST TEE NETWORK

Computers and training manuals have already been delivered to the chapters, and a national database will be prepared. "Chapters will be able to track student participation and development in the program," said O'Brien. "Their life skills progress, clinic and lesson participation and the success of their play will be collected to create a database.

"The chapters also can use their own imagination to utilize the computers to the fullest," he said. "Educational games may be offered to further develop student learning. Down the road, we also could help individual chapters create their own Web sites."

### PAR AND BIRDIE LEVELS

The organization has released its life skills curriculum for the par and birdie training levels. "We have trained personnel across the country ready to implement that program," O'Brien said. "The eagle level is still in development and will probably be available next year."

The life skills program covers everything from proper attitude and relationships on and off the golf course to terminology, rules and respect for the game.

### OTHER COMMITMENTS

The First Tee is following through with its other promises.

"We're sending practice balls to our chapters, in rather large quantities, as well as junior golf club sets and individual practice clubs," said O'Brien.

One of his charges is to expand opportunities The First Tee may have in building coalitions with other youth organizations. "I'm looking at organizations that

work with children, are urban in nature, and may even have their own set of instructional processes attached," he said.

"Organizations like the Boys and Girls Clubs, the YMCA, police organizations and schools will help to increase the participation in and success of our junior golf program," O'Brien added.

## Hermitage

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efforts."

### COLLEGE OUTREACH

Eller and Schultz are now bringing in college students from Middle Tennessee State University's biology department to develop educational programs, nature studies and environmental quality enhancements.

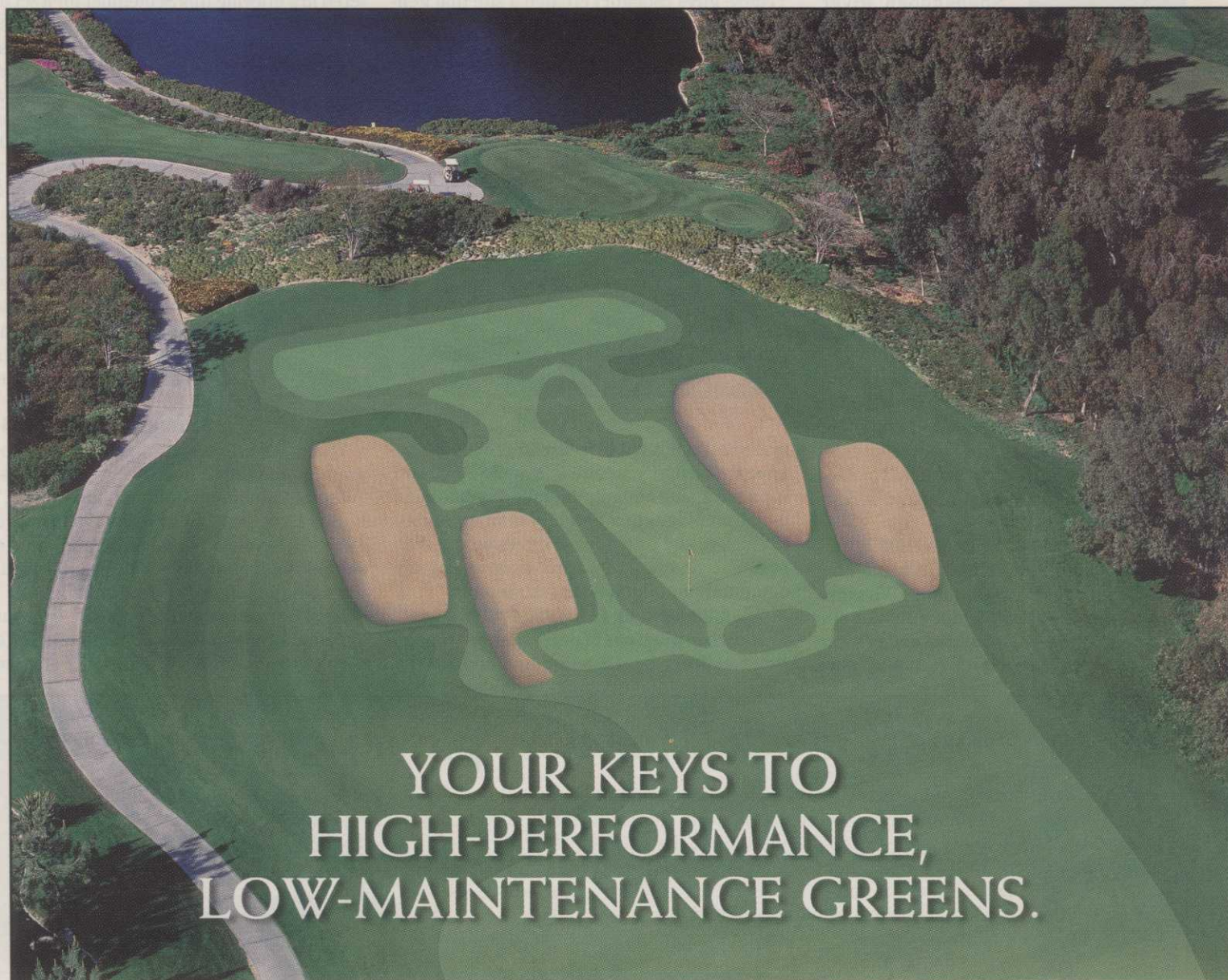
In addition, MTSU faculty and

students plan to collect water samples four times a year and make recommendations as needed to improve the quality of runoff at the site.

This year, more than 130 elementary-school teacher candidates are scheduled to see the advantages of a properly designed and maintained golf course. They will experience how the course can be a living laboratory for their classes. ■



Joe O'Brien



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