

Quarry Hills calls globetrotting Kessener back to his roots

QUINCY, Mass. — After roaming the globe building golf courses most of his life, Massachusetts native Gary Kessener, 42, has returned home to oversee construction of one of the most ambitious golf projects ever undertaken in the United States — Quarry Hills Golf Course.

"It's a fascinating project," said Kessener of the 27-hole John Sanford-designed layout being built over three former landfills, a few miles from downtown Boston. "It's great to be able to do something like this where I grew up."

Quarry Hills developers Chick Geilich and Bill O'Connell reviewed more than 50 resumes and interviewed a half-dozen applicants before selecting Kessener. "We needed someone who had extensive grow-in and building experience," Geilich said. "Gary fit the bill. He's built 30 or more courses and started out running a bulldozer and planting trees by hand. He's been



Gary Kessener, superintendent of the Quarry Hills course, with the Boston skyline just visible in the distance

soccer fields and baseball fields on the site of the former Quincy landfill. The city signed a 50-year lease with the developers to close the landfill and build the recreation facilities.

Geilich and O'Connell then signed a similar agreement with the town of Milton, which needed

This led to a public-private partnership with the Massachusetts Highway Department's Central Artery Group, calling for delivery of more than 12 million tons of excavate (as many as 1,200 truckloads daily) from the "Big Dig," a gigantic highway and tunnel project designed to improve traffic flow through Boston.

Trucks have delivered more than 800,000 loads of excavate to the site, with the material used to sculpt the course, learning center and athletic fields. The tipping fees paid by the state for the Big Dig excavate are helping to pay for the project, expected to open in 2002.

The course is located on high ground just seven miles from downtown Boston. It overlooks

the entire city to the north, Boston Harbor and the islands to the east, and the 30,000-acre Blue Hills Reservation wilderness park to the west and south. Roughly 360 townhouse apartments and a hotel/conference center also are planned.

GLOBAL EXPERIENCE

Golf construction has been part of Kessener's life since his early teens. He spent summers in California, where he helped build greens on a course near his summer home. He graduated from high school in 1978 and went to work for his brother-in-law, who had a landscape business in California.

Kessener also worked on several courses, including Carmel Mountain Ranch in Temecula and Desert Falls Country Club in Palm Springs. He helped install Toro's first VT-1 irrigation system at Bixby Village in Long Beach.

He later worked as project supervisor for golf architects David Rainville, Ronald Fream and Greg Norman, doing the early leg work and overseeing construction projects in Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Argentina, France, Portugal and Tunisia. He even started his own firm, Golf Planning Management Construction Services,

located in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia.

LANDING THE JOB

Kessener kept in touch with his roots, flying back to Cape Cod yearly to visit relatives. Two years ago he noticed a sign announcing the Quarry Hills project. He later saw an ad seeking a superintendent for the project, contacted Geilich and was hired in November 1999.

Kessener believes the developers hired him based on his extensive construction experience. "Many of the Asian projects I was involved with were on an even larger scale than this one," he said. "It didn't overwhelm me. My ability to see light at the end of the tunnel helped me land this job."

WAITING FOR SNOW TO MELT

Kessener estimated 95 percent of the 12 million tons of fill material from the Big Dig was on site as of late December. At that time, 1.5 million cubic yards of material were stockpiled under the snow waiting to be spread.

Snow has occasionally slowed progress. When that happens, workers have redirected their efforts to filling in one of several quarries. Between 300 and 500 trucks continue to bring fill daily.



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SUPERINTENDENT IN THE SPOTLIGHT

all over the world but grew up in New England, so he also understood the peculiarities of our weather and conditions."

GENESIS OF QUARRY PROJECT

Geilich and O'Connell first approached Quincy Mayor James Sheets in 1991 with the idea of building a golf course,

to close its landfill, which bordered the Quincy property.

Abandoned quarries, wetlands and historical sites also had to be dealt with. The developers accumulated a 540-acre parcel that included three landfills and some private property.

12 MILLION TONS OF FILL

'Manufactured' topsoil solving many problems at Quarry Hills GC

QUINCY, Mass. — With native topsoil both expensive and scarce, Quarry Hills is manufacturing its own topsoil to cover much of the 27-hole John Sanford-designed course under construction in suburban Boston.

Manufacturing its own topsoil? That's right.

Working with Falmouth, Maine-based New England Organics, Quarry Hills is mixing sand, organic pellets and short paper fibers (SPFs) — recovered paper fibers generated by paper mills — to produce a high-quality loam that is erosion-resistant, weed-free, water-retentive and about 40 percent less expensive than native topsoil, according to superintendent Gary Kessener.

Quarry Hills is covering three landfills with more than 800,000 truck loads of excavate from the tunnel under construction in Boston known as the "Big Dig." The configuration of the landfills, coupled with the large amount of fill, has created steep slopes on the site.

"The idea was to find a way to stabilize all these slopes and retain moisture to promote plant growth," Sanford said. "This has proven to be very useful and cost effective, and it provides a way to use recycled product."

TRADEMARKED AS BIOMIX

During the manufacture of paper, wood is



Manufactured soil, using paper fibers, helps reduce erosion. Eroded ground in foreground is normal topsoil.

chipped and processed, with the longer fibers extracted to make paper. Fibers too short to use become a waste product. At Quarry Hills, one part short paper fibers are being mixed with one part sand and a quarter part organic slow-release fertilizer pellets produced at a nearby sewage treatment plant. The result is an organically enriched material New England Organics has trademarked as BioMix.

The short paper fibers provide valuable organic matter that improves soil structure, retains

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Selecting a bentgrass cultivar for greens takes research

By KEVIN ROSS

When Penncross bentgrass first became available in 1956, little did anyone know the standard this grass would set for more than 40 years. Penncross is still the best-selling bentgrass in the world — more than a million pounds are sold annually worldwide — but slowly things are changing.

Today's bentgrass market has more than 30 to choose from. With this many cultivars the question arises: which one should you choose?

A good starting point is the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program, or NTEP. Throughout the United States, turf trials are set up at various universities. These bents are evaluated and results are compiled and published.

What does this data tell you? Should you just select what's rated number one? No, this data is merely a starting point. Maintenance practices are different at each NTEP site, so it is important to know a few of the vital inputs, such as mowing heights, topdressing frequency, cultural practices, fertilization amounts and watering.

RESEARCH ON THE INTERNET

At the NTEP Web site (www.ntep.org), you can dig into data that will help you to see if a bent is suited for your region. The best way to look at bents that may perform for your conditions is to compare test sites that match your situation. This gives a better idea of its performance related to your conditions.

Also, on the Web site, you can compare how bents will

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Kessener

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McCourt Construction Co. is placing the fill. Course construction is underway, but will begin in earnest this summer with Country Golf Inc. of Michigan, the course builder. Plans call for grassing to begin this fall. If all goes as planned, Quarry Hills will have at least nine holes open

for play in 2002.

JUGGLING MANY BALLS

Kessener's extensive experience and his temperament are the main strengths he brings to the job, according to Geilich. "He fits in well and is liked and respected by the community," the developer said. "There is nothing he hasn't seen before."

Another helpful quality is Kessener's ability to deal with a

diverse group of engineers, architects, contractors and government officials to bring such a complicated project to fruition. "I work with them to adapt their designs - bridges, overflow structures and so on," he said. "Bringing them all together is the challenge."

Kessener faces hurdles and challenges every day. "It gets frustrating for Gary and every-

one else," Geilich said. "So many things are out of our control. We don't know when the fill is coming from the Big Dig. We don't know if the material will be usable until we test it. If it isn't usable, we have to move it off site. If we can use it, but don't need it at that particular moment, then we have to store it somewhere."

"And this is all before we can even start building the golf

course," Geilich added. "Then you have the dirt contractor getting in the way of the golf course contractor. There are constant disagreements about whose responsibility it is to move certain materials. Gary has been in the middle of all that and maintained the peace."

Working with unionized labor also has been trying, especially for a man used to hopping on a bulldozer, picking up a shovel or unloading a truck himself. Union rules forbid Kessener from doing anything except suggesting how others might do something. "That's frustrating," he said. "Very frustrating."

TROUBLESHOOTER

Kessener called Sanford's design a very creative layout. "John and I work together on a regular basis to fine-tune things," he said. "I rely on him as much for his design knowledge as he relies on me to be his eyes here on a daily basis. I'm a troubleshooter."

Despite all he's seen and experienced, the complexity of Quarry Hills still occasionally surprises Kessener.

"Things don't happen overnight, especially when you are dealing with regulatory agencies," he said. "We have to deal with officials and consultants from the towns of Quincy and Milton, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the federal government, as well as our own consultants and engineers."

"Then there are agencies that don't normally become involved in course construction, like the Massachusetts Highway Authority and various historical conservation committees. It's definitely double or even triple duty."

YOU CAN GO HOME AGAIN

Kessener saw Quarry Hills as an opportunity for his family, which includes his Thai wife and seven-year-old son, to return home and settle down. His willingness to stay on at Quarry Hills once play begins was another factor in his hiring.

"It's important that the person who is there while the irrigation and drainage are installed stays with the project once it opens," Geilich said. "If that person has to run it, he'll make sure they are installed correctly and won't take any shortcuts."

"That goes for the whole course," he said. "The person who builds it will make sure it's done right if he also has to maintain it."

Kessener speaks bits and pieces of five different languages - Thai, French, Spanish, Malay and Japanese.

"I can speak enough to get by," he said. "If you're in somebody else's house, you have to do things their way."

Now, Kessener is back in his own house. ■

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