

## Start-up superintendent Mike Scott bringing Fazio design to life

By JAY FINEGAN

RINGOES, N.J. — Mike Scott had a terrific job for a young superintendent — head honcho at the famed Winged Foot Golf Club. But it wasn't enough. The former Army tank commander wanted to call all the shots. So he packed up and moved to The Ridge at Back Brook, a Tom Fazio design that won't open until next summer.

"It was just time to get on my own — to make all the decisions, not just run a crew from day to day," he said. "At Winged Foot, I ran the courses while Paul Latshaw was there as director of golf. I interviewed for his job, but they gave it to Eric Greytok, who came in from Pebble Beach. Eric and I went to Penn State together. We also worked together at Merion Golf Club. I wouldn't have grown if I'd stayed there another year."

Scott is glad he signed on at The Ridge, a golf-only private club situated in rural country northwest of Princeton, overlooking the Sourland Mountains of Hunterdon County.

Under development by owners Joel and Pam Moore, the 300-acre layout features the 20-foot-wide Back Brook, multiple rock-walled ridges and dense stands of century-old forest.

"It's a unique site," Scott allowed, "and it's going to be a tough course. The slope rating will probably be around 140."

### STRONG RESUME

With his 1995 Penn State degree in turfgrass science, Scott launched his groundskeeping career at Oak Hill Country Club, in Rochester, N.Y., then moved to the famed Merion, in Ardmore, Pa., where he became first assistant on the East Course. In 1999, he returned to Oak Hill, and from there he switched to Winged Foot, in New York's Westchester County.

His tournament experience includes



Mike Scott (second from left) with Fazio Design Group members (left to right) Bryan Bowers, Andy Banfield and Tom Griswold

groundskeeping stints at the 1995 Ryder Cup, at the 1997 U.S. Open at Congressional Country Club, in Bethesda, Md., and at the 1997 Australian PGA Championship at New South Wales Golf Club, in La Peruse. He spent five weeks there.

Prior to all this, from 1987 to 1991, Scott pulled Army duty as a tank commander in Kirchgoens, Germany, as a member of the 1st Brigade, 3rd Armored Division.

### STARTING ON GROUND FLOOR

As the start-up superintendent at The Ridge, Scott has to keep a lot of balls in the air. The challenge, however, is worthwhile. "To work with Tom Fazio and his team is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," he said. "Also, the course is closer to home for us, and we have two young kids."

Fazio visits every two months, he said, but two of his architects — Andy Banfield

and Tom Griswold — come in every two weeks.

Scott said the founder of the project, Princeton businessman Joel Moore, has a "tremendous vision" of what The Ridge will ultimately become — an exclusive, high-end championship course with a keen environmental ethic.

"We're definitely going for the Audubon Sanctuary program," Scott said. "What's great about a new course is that you can start on the ground floor and hopefully get everything right the first time."

His responsibilities include involvement in the day-to-day construction operations, so he'll be familiar with the grading, drainage and installation of the irrigation system. "We're putting in a state-of-the-art Toro SitePro 2000," he said. "It's fully computerized. You can run it from a Palm Pilot."

### LABOR FROM CENTRAL AMERICA

In addition, he's establishing the maintenance regimen, purchasing equipment and hiring a staff. He expects his maintenance crew to peak at 25 to 35, settling back to 10 or 12 off-season. With the local unemployment rate low, he'll be pulling in workers from Latin America.

"When I was at Merion," he noted, "I had guys from Ecuador and Puerto Rico. At Winged Foot, I had workers from Mexico, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Americans don't want to do manual labor for \$7.50 an hour, but these guys from South and Central America are hungry. They want tons of overtime."

"I don't care which country they come from, as long as they have a pulse," Scott added. "This isn't rocket science."

### EROSION CONTROL IS VITAL

After grow-in, he'll be responsible for maintaining Fazio's design. He hopes to have the course fully shaped and seeded by late September, with L-93 bentgrass on fairways and tees, A-4 bent on the greens and a bluegrass-fescue blend in the roughs.

For now, he's also overseeing the three contractors on site, one clearing trees, one building ponds and roads, and one — Pavlec Construction — building the layout.

Pavlec is working on six holes at a time. "They want us to close up and temporarily seed six holes before we go on to the next six," Scott said. "Right now we've got the front nine and the driving range wide open. The topsoil has been removed and we're shaping the subsoil."

"Erosion control is a big issue with the regulators, so we're keeping things tight," he said. "We can't afford to have a soil erosion problem shutting us down, even for a day. We've got \$12 million worth of equipment on site, and that leases for about \$40,000 a day."

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## Armyworms

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feast for about two weeks between birth and when they escape into the soil, only to emerge as moths in a few days.

Several generations of armyworms may occur in a single season, with female moths capable of laying as many as 14,000 eggs. The moths can ride the jet stream over great distances.

### 'GROSS AND STINKY'

Despite the bad news barrage, superintendents have stayed cool. "It seems to be mostly a media hysteria problem for homeowners," said Scott Cybulski, superintendent at the Falmouth Country Club in Falmouth, Maine. "The armyworms are pretty sensitive to chemical treatments. Banding sprays [one pass along the border of the course] seem to stop them."

Turf maintenance professionals rely on their training, experience and available resources to halt the small beasts. "Entomologists are saying that healthy, highly maintained grasses can outgrow this pest," Cybulski said.

Two of the best known insecticides – sevin and malathion – have a good knock down factor for armyworms. "We're pretty consistent about treating for ants and cutworms, which are a bit

sturdier than armyworms," said Cybulski. "I will spray if high-maintenance or aesthetic rough is affected, but only to quell the questions and complaints from members."

"I'm not really worried about losing turf to armyworms," he said. "Superintendents that encounter them have told me that they are basically gross and stinky."

### SHOWING NO FEAR

Sometimes, the best option in

dealing with armyworms is simply to do nothing.

"We had a little bout with them," said Greg Holder, assistant superintendent at the York Golf & Tennis Club, in southern Maine. "We had isolated areas that were just covered with armyworms. Basically, we just let them go."

The course followed recommendations by the University of Massachusetts turfgrass extension service. "They said, 'Don't even bother.' By the time we considered doing something about them, they were almost done with their feeding cycle," Holder said.

The armyworms showed up in the roughs, on the eighth and 10th greens, and on the ninth and 11th tees. The course was hit by a surprise attack, according to Holder. "I've been in this business for about 13 years," he said, "and this is the first time I've ever seen them this far north."

"They were on our greens, but it didn't seem like they were actively feeding," Holder said. "There's not a lot of leaf to offer on golf greens. I have heard that some of the local hayfields got whacked by armyworms, though." ■

## Mike Scott

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Water availability looms as Scott's biggest challenge. "We're out in the middle of the country with our own septic and our own wells, so there's no chance of using effluent," he explained. "Our aquifer doesn't have that much water. There are some houses adjacent to the property and we're worried about running their wells dry."

Mike Scott

### SEVEN-ACRE LAKE

He's meeting the problem with the excavation of a seven-acre lake, 12 feet deep, holding some 12 to 14 million gallons.

"We're negotiating with the state to let us take 9.5 million gallons out of the ground each month during June, July and August," Scott said. "For the rest of the year we'll try to skim from the creek. If we use our 9.5 million gallons in a certain month, and the creek is low, we'll have to use the pond – that's why we're making it so big."

"We want to have enough water allocated and in our pond to get us through the worst drought while we're growing in."

The par-72 course, when opened, will play from 7,100 yards down to 5,417, with four sets of tees. Half of the planned 275 members are already signed up. ■



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