

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Howell back in 'Bama at The Ledges CC

By ANDREW OVERBECK

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. — It was a homecoming of sorts for superintendent Jim Howell when he accepted the grow-in challenge here at The Ledges Country Club. Howell spent seven years in the top job at Hoover Country Club in Birmingham, before leaving to tackle construction work at Country Club of St. Albans outside St. Louis.

"I went up there to finish the Tom Weiskopf/Jay Morrish course and then did the grow-in for the Michael Hurdzan/Dana Fry course," said Howell. "I got to know Michael and Dana really well. Because they knew I had spent time in Alabama and that my wife is from here, they introduced me to the opportunity at The Ledges."

Howell came on board in 1998 and The Ledges opened in April of 2000. The private layout, which is part of The Ledges of Huntsville Mountain real estate development, offers commanding views of downtown Huntsville and the surrounding countryside.

"The course sits at 1,582 feet, the highest point in town," Howell said. "Several holes outline the outside of the mountain. We were fortunate to be able to put the course on the outside of the mountain and put the houses on the inside."

While a number of holes play along cliffs, the layout itself is actually on gently rolling terrain. "The topography fools you," said Howell. "It is fairly flat once you get to the top."



Jim Howell

CALIFORNIA GREENS, SUBAIR AND ZOYSIAGRASS

At The Ledges, Howell is working with California greens and a SubAir system for the first time. Howell credits the construction methods for reducing disease pressure on his A1 bentgrass greens.

"The California greens are extremely fast draining," he said. "We didn't trench in the sub-surface. We used flat tile in the greens and put in a half-inch of pea gravel. The rest is all sand. The SubAir system has also been awesome in helping to remove water and reduce compaction in soils. When summer showers dump, these greens drain very well."

"As a result we have less disease pressure," he added. "It helps to be up on top of a mountain, but we get as hot and humid as anyone else. We are only spending \$9,000 a year in fertility and chemicals for the greens. The system allows us to spend that money elsewhere."

The Ledges is also unique according to Howell because they were the first course in the state to sod Meyer Zoysiagrass in the fairways, tees and green surrounds.

"I used it in St. Louis, but it grows much better here," he said. "It greens up quickly and the members love it because the ball sits right up. It takes longer to get established than Bermudagrass, and because we were in a drought in 1998 and 1999, it didn't really mend together until last year."

In order to combat the turf's tendency to thatch, Howell has instituted an aggressive

HOWELL'S TOOLS

GREENS MOWERS: 6 Toro 1000 walking greens mowers

TEE MOWERS: 5 Toro 1600 walking tee and approach mowers

FAIRWAY MOWERS: 2 Toro 3100 riding mowers, 3 Toro 6500-D fairway mowers

ROUGH MOWERS: 4 Toro 3500-D sidewinder rough mowers

RIDING BUNKER RAKE: 2 Toro 5020 Sand Pro

TURF UTILITY VEHICLES: 12 E-Z-GO gas, 2 Toro Workman, 2 Cushman

VERTI-CUT REELS: 1 Toro greens and tees unit, 1 Toro fairway unit

AERIFIERS: 1 Graden, 1 John Deere aerifier, 1 Toro aerifier

TOPDRESSERS: 1 Toro, 1 Terra Topper, 1 Ty-Crop

TOURNAMENT SPEED ROLLER: 1 Smithco smooth roller, 1 Brower roller

REEL GRINDER: 1 Foley accu-grinder
BEDKNIFE GRINDER: 1 Foley bedknife grinder

IRRIGATION PUMP STATION: Flowtronex, 1,200 gpm

IRRIGATION SYSTEM: Toro Site Pro 2000

GOLF CAR FLEET: 80 E-Z-GO electric

FLAGSTICKS: Standard 7' poles
COMPUTER & ACCESSORIES: 3 Intergraph PCs, printers and scanners
PRIMARY HERBICIDE: Ronstar
PRIMARY INSECTICIDE: Mach 2
PRIMARY FUNGICIDE: Daconil



The 14th hole at The Ledges Country Club in Huntsville, Ala.

2787, Systec 1998

PRIMARY SLOW-RELEASE FERTILIZER: Polyon

CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT: Graden for dethatching greens and SubAir units to remove moisture from greens profile

OLDEST PIECE OF EQUIPMENT ON COURSE: 1989 Cushman

TOTAL SQUARE FOOTAGE OF MAINTENANCE BUILDING: 10,500 sq. ft.

ANNUAL ROUNDS OF GOLF: 18,000 - 22,000

NORMAL GREEN SPEED: 11'

verticutting program, and uses Primo plant growth regulator and low nitrogen rates to "keep the canopy nice and tight." He also topdresses the fairways each spring and fall at one-eighth of an inch.

CLEANING UP THE EDGES

This year, Howell and his crew have gone back and redrained all of the bunkers and are working with a couple differ-

ent bunker liners to try and reduce wash outs and cut down on labor costs. Howell is also reestablishing the slope areas on the edges of the course to replace underbrush and weeds with native wildflower blends and fine fescues.

They have also revegetated wetland areas on the course and will be working on getting Audubon certification this year.

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