Continuity leads to consistency during club’s reconstruction

Editor’s note: This article is the first in a series that addresses the long-range planning and implementation of a reconstruction program at Willoughby Golf Club in Stuart, Fla. The course is a 18-hole residential facility that was owned and operated by a development company and then turned over to the membership after 10 years. The membership has now operated the facility for more than four years but the long-range planning began a few years prior to the takeover. Kevin Downing, CGCS, has been the golf course and landscape manager since the inception of the project and provides valuable insight into initiating their long-range plans.

By Kev In Down In

STUART, Fla. - As Willoughby Golf Club embarks in a full-scale renovation project that will involve closing the course for the next six months, proper long-range planning has been a key organizational advantage. I have headed up the renovation planning process which began in 1998. Since I have been at the club from the beginning, I have been able to easily identify what steps need to be taken to improve the layout because I understand the course's mission.

In the late 1980s the developers of Willoughby set out to create golf course that focused on the needs of the average golfer. They wanted to create a stimulating round of golf, but realized that most of the buyers were high handicap golfers.

The developers originally chose the Arthur Hills design firm because of their ability to work with environmentally sensitive property and because they understood the diverse needs of the eventual homeowners and club membership. I worked closely with their firm and the housing configuration to ensure that the course hit the targeted market. The result was a 6,000-yard course that still challenged all levels of golfers.

As courses mature, the design characteristics and landscape materials can alter the playing conditions of the best golf courses is dependent on the sanctity of par,” he said. “Rather than the sanctity of par, why don’t we just create shots. Suddenly the land requirement is about a third. That was the basis of the Golf Trail concept.”

Golf Trail is the combination of a golf course and a practice facility. Golfers use standard equipment to hit operator-supplied balls to target greens and fairways. Players can add a competitive component to their play.

Twin Creeks project progressing

By Derek Rice

AUSTIN, Texas — Twin Creeks, a 700-acre residential, country club and golf course community located in the Cedar Park area of Austin, will be the first private country club and the first Fred Couples signature course in the area when it opens this fall.

The project is a venture of Twin Creeks Holdings, a partnership between Crescent Resources LLC and SWD Communities. The development, undertaken by Weitz Golf International of Palm Beach, Fla., broke ground last October and is progressing on schedule, said Harry Turner, senior vice president of Twin Creeks Holdings.

“We're currently in construction with a planned opening of late this year,” he said. “We hope to have everything planted by the end of August and I believe that we will meet that as long as we don’t get any big rains or anything that's unforeseen.”

One reason the project is going so well, Turner said, is the land itself, which he said is attractive to both golfers and homeowners. “We've got a perfect piece of land. We've got 15 holes that don't have houses directly on the fairway so from a golfer's perspective it gives you the feel of not being in a housing development,” he said. “From
Holanda wraps up renovation work early

By ANDREW OVERBECK

NEWTOWN, Pa. — Superintendent Rick Holanda here at Aronimink Golf Club has taken advantage of a warm, dry winter to wrap up the final phase of a Donald Ross renovation and improvement project a month ahead of schedule. Architect Ron Prichard, who came to Aronimink two years ago after stints at Merion Golf Club in Ardmore, Pa., and Merion Golf Club in Lutherville, Md., has plenty of renovation experience.

“Ron Prichard came on board. We reactivated the plan and tackled the bunker restoration. We reshaped them and relocated them back to the Donald Ross design. We have made some of them deeper and added face,” said Holanda.

The restoration work was completed in 2000. This fall and winter, Holanda tackled the bunker restoration. “We reshaped them and relocated them back to the Donald Ross design. We have made some of them deeper and added faces.”

The pond in front of the 10th green that had been filled in back in the 1940s was also restored. “Apparently the green committee took the pond out during World War II because a lot of golf balls went in there and the members didn’t have money to waste on balls,” Holanda said. “We have put it back in and it makes the hole much stronger.”

“All the work went off without a hitch, even with stronger than usual levels of winter play.”

“Ron Prichard came out every week to work with us and give us new field drawings, and McDonald & Sons did a great job keeping a low profile,” said Holanda. “We didn’t work on more than two holes at a time.”

PREPARING FOR THE PGA CHAMPIONSHIP
With the restoration work wrapping up, Holanda is looking forward to getting the course into shape for the Senior PGA Championship next June.

“Our goal is to manicure the golf course and get it into tournament condition. We need a winter with lots of snow so I can take it easy because we have been working a summer schedule in the wintertime for the last two years,” he said. “But it has been worth it. I am ready to turn the course back to the members and let them enjoy it because they have been very supportive and a great team to work with.”

Continuity aids reconstruction

Continued from previous page

The 13th green at Willoughby will be renovated because members’ balls keep rolling over the existing bulkhead and into the water.

**Holanda removed the Poa annua greens with methyl bromide and the Poa annua, ryegrass and bentgrass fairways and tees with Roundup. The greens have been replaced with A4 bentgrass and the fairways and tees are L-93 bentgrass. The areas between the tees and fairways are planted with ryegrass, which Holanda said provides striking contrast. All of this work was completed in 2000.**

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layouts. Therefore it is important to observe the course in order to create a fair and competitive golf challenge. Fortunately at Willoughby we have been able to have continuity in staff, which has created an opportunity for continued membership satisfaction.

As the developer finished off sales operations and the membership peaked, long-range planning started in an unofficial capacity. I documented all weaknesses such as tee locations, severely contoured greens and obstacles that hindered the flow of play for future planning and compiled a list of all projects that had been completed over the years. As membership turnover became an issue, we have created a renovation plan that we will implement this summer. Arthur Hills’ firm will be involved with the renovation process, allowing for a continuity in course design.

In next month’s issue, I will focus on the components of our planning process that include: identifying priorities, categorizing improvements or modifications, creating membership excitement, and establishing construction time tables.

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