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 project at Willoughby Golf Club in Stuart, Fla. The course is an 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 KEVIN DOWNING

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 a 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 challenged all levels of golfers.

As courses mature, the design characteristics and landscape materials can alter the playing conditions of the best golfers. Golf courses are 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 practice.

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 any perspective it gives you the feel of not being in a housing development.”

Course to open on donated land

By DEREK RICE

BATON ROUGE, La. — Thanks to a donation of 220 acres of land and a property tax levy that raised $3.2 million, the East Baton Rouge Parish Recreation and Parks Commission (BREC) will soon open a new flagship golf course, its seventh in the area.

Although there is no set date for the opening of Beaver Creek, Bill Palmer, BREC director, said conditions should dictate a summer opening.

“We don’t have a target date except for somewhere around July or August,” he said. “It’s growing in and doing very well. It’s been a kind winter and the grass is doing well.”

A group of landowners donated the land in 1995, keeping 322 acres for a residential community that is also under construction.

“The land is worth about 2.5 million. That’s a very significant donation,” Palmer said.

Because BREC and the developers have worked together from the start, the two projects will avoid many of the issues encountered by such close neighbors, Palmer said.

“We eliminated a lot of the potential problems by working together in the beginning,” he said.
Re-tooled Frenchman’s Creek re-opens

NORTH PALM BEACH, Fla.—WeitzGolf International recently completed an 18-hole renovation at Frenchman’s Creek Country Club based in Palm Beach Gardens. Architect Robert Cupp of Cupp Design directed the project, which broke ground on April 2, 2001, and was completed in time for winter play in 2002.

The renovation included striping and clearing the entire course and re-grading it to Cupp’s specifications. In addition, Weitz installed a new irrigation system.

The course now features larger greens grassed with TifEagle, fairways grassed with TifSport, new bunkers, new timber bridges and timber bulk-heading and custom-colored cart paths.

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that to expose the more typical open Kentucky rolling horse farm-type of landscape,” Rogers said.

The construction aspect of the project, which was handled by Landscapes Unlimited, included some work with the existing lakes on the property, Rogers said.

“We replaced the lake overflow structures and connection structures from what was a concrete gutter-type system, which was not the look we were trying to achieve,” he said.

“We extruded those and used a lot of the limestone on site. We had a water feature specialist, Horizon Golf, build more stream-like spillways that connected the ponds, which aesthetically was an improvement.”

Because of the extensive drainage system renovation, Rogers said, the fairways are completely new.

“There was a lot of disturbance in the fairways necessitated by the drainage that we planned to install,” he said. “As you can imagine, trying to save anything in the line of fairway turf was not a number that made any sense. We were kind of starting from scratch there.

“We did not alter the original routing to speak of. A few were lengthened, a few shortened, but the original corridors were maintained as they had existed.”

Rogers said his affiliation with the University of Kentucky came in handy on this project, from both a personal and professional standpoint.

“Most people don’t get a chance to give something back,” he said. “I was already familiar with the property from years past and got to do some significantly exciting things. I played it a few times under its old name.”

The renovated fairways are highlighted by new landscaping elements throughout the course.

This was the second renovation Weitz Golf has performed at Frenchman’s Creek, following a total restoration of the course’s clubhouse last summer.

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