Wake ready to show off changes at Palmetto Dunes

By ANDREW OVERBECK

When the GCSAA Tournament comes to Hilton Head Island in February, they will find the Robert Trent Jones Course at Palmetto Dunes Resort completely transformed.

"We pretty much erased the board and started over again," said superintendent Patrick Wake, who has worked at the resort for almost six years. "We recontoured the whole thing and gave the course more flow and movement before it was completely flat.

"We moved 150,000 cubic yards of earth, raised the ocean holes where you can see the water, enlarged the greens, rebuilt the course, dug new lagoons and retention ponds, and installed new drainage," he continued.

Wake worked alongside architect Roger Rulewich and golf course builder Southeastern Golf on the $3.5 million renovation project. The course now measures just over 7,000 yards from the tips and sports a new set of junior tees that cut the distance to around 2,800 yards. The course reopened on Labor Day weekend after just nine months of work.

"Work started in December 2001 and it was as good a time as any to shut down. After Sept. 11, a lot of people pulled the plug on projects because of the uncertainty. But since rounds and revenues were down anyway, shutting down and rebuilding didn't hurt us as bad as we had anticipated."

Wakes's Tools

GREENS MOWERS: 4 Toro Triplex 3100
TEE MOWERS: 4 Toro Triplex 3100
FAIRWAY MOWERS: 3 Toro 6500 D
ROUGH MOWERS: 2 Toro reelmowers, 3 Jacobsen 3810
RIDING BUNKER RAKE: 3 Toro Sand Pro
TURF UTILITY VEHICLES: 3 Carryall 272, 7 Carryalls
VERTI-CUT REELS: 1 Jacobsen Greensking IV
AERIFIERS: 3 Toro pull-behind, 1 Coremaster, 3 Toro walkers
TOPDRESSERS: 1 Turfco, 1 Olathe belt-driven Model 22
GROOMING REELS: 1 Exchange on Toro 3100
REEL GRINDER: 1 Neary
BEDKNIFE GRINDER: 1 Neary
IRRIGATION PUMP STATION: Flowtronex, 1,500 gpm
IRRIGATION SYSTEM: Toro E Osmac

EASE OF MAINTENANCE

According to Wake, the new layout should be much easier to maintain.

"Improving drainage was huge, we had 15 inches of rain the week before we opened and the course was still playable. Before, that would not have been possible," he said. "We also upped the size of the greens because we get 55,000 rounds a year. We also installed Champion bermudagrass. The Champion is a huge improvement over the Tifdwarf. It is faster and more consistent."

"We had to save as much of the system as possible. I worked with my assistant Travis Woods and director of golf John Betts to make cuts and decide what we would rely on and what we would rip out," said Wake. "We redid all the greens irrigation and on holes eight and 11 we redid the whole system except for mainlines."

Wake worked closely with Southeastern Golf to make the inevitable on-site decisions and keep the project on schedule.

"We made a lot of on-site adjustments," he said. "It was a very field-driven job because of the constraints of the existing routing and all the irrigation issues. We met every morning and had a big meeting once a week to review schedules and where we stood on timing. This was not a job that we were going to get an extension on. We had a nine-month schedule and we had to stay with it."

WAKE'S'S TOOLS

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Wake kept 419 bermudagrass in the fairways, but installed El Toro zoysia around all the bunker faces to reduce the amount of bunker edge maintenance.

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The only thing missing from the renovation, said Wake, was a new maintenance facility.

"We had talked about fitting in a new shop in the budget, but the project went over a bit," he said.

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ABOUT THE PHOTO:

The full-scale renovation included new tees...and new lagoons and retention ponds...