Isaacs takes Spring Valley back to traditional look

By ANDREW OVERBECK

LEXINGTON, Ky. — In a day and age when superintendents change jobs on a more and more frequent basis, it's unusual to find someone who has worked at only one golf course in his entire career. Yet that is just what Richard Isaacs, superintendent here at Spring Valley Golf Club, has done.

"My dad Bige started as the superintendent here in 1958, and I started working for him when I was 13, raking traps in the summertime," said Isaacs. "I went to Eastern Kentucky for my turf management degree and I became an assistant. I took over his position in 1997 when he retired."

When Isaacs took over the course, which was designed by former golf pro and superintendent Clarence "Buck" Blankenship in 1949, it was beginning to show its age. The club has 365 members, but Isaacs said the owners wanted to bump that up closer to 400. With that in mind, he has been overseeing a two-year renovation process that was scheduled to wrap up this year.

"Foster told us to go over to The Camargo Club in Cincinnati to check out their Raynor bunkers and we basically fed off that style," said Isaacs. "Our owner has been in construction his whole life and he thinks that if it's not straight, it's not right. Raynor was a road builder before he got into building golf courses and he thought the same way. So those two matched up real well."

The bunkers, as a result, are squared off, as are all the tees and greens. The tees were laser graded and the greens surrounds were squared off in preparation for an eventual greens renovation.

"It has more of a British look," said Isaacs. "We have squared things off to carry that theme throughout."

As part of the bunker work, Isaacs has installed Meyer zoysia grass on all the faces to help save on maintenance costs because it is slower growing in the summer. All car paths and landscaping beds were also upgraded to provide a more consistent look throughout the course.

The renovation process began one hole at a time in fall 2001, and Isaacs and Bohannan finished 10 holes before the start of the playing season. This fall they decided to close down nine holes entirely to keep from disrupting play. The renovation will be completed this spring.

"This renovation sets us up for the final phase, which would be coring the old greens and putting in USGA-spec greens," said Isaacs. "We didn't want to do work now and then turn around and have to redo it."

To show members what new greens would look and play like, Isaacs took out the club's swimming pool and put in a USGA-spec putting green with L-93 creeping bentgrass.

"This gets the members involved and shows them what the greens could be like. I don't think it puts any faster, but it looks better and it holds the ball well. The members like it."

1 Jacobsen Greens Kings
TEE MOWERS:
1 Ransome Greensplex
FAIRWAY MOWERS:
2 Jacobsen LF 128
ROUGH MOWERS:
1 Rhino Turf Flex
RIDING BUNKER RAKE:
1 Toro Sand Pro
TURF UTILITY VEHICLES:
3 Carryall II, 1 Toro Workman
VERTI-CUT REELS:

The course features squared-off bunkers reminiscent of Seth Raynor.

1 Jacobsen AERIFIERS:
1 John Deere Aer Core 800, 1 Ryan
TOPDRESSERS:
1 Turbo Mete-R-Matic III
REEL GRINDER:
1 Foley Accu-Pro 630
BEDKNIFE GRINDER:
1 Foley 660
IRRIGATION PUMP STATION:
Flowtronex, 400 gpm

1 John Deere Aer Core 800, 1 Ryan
TOPDRESSERS:
1 Turbo Mete-R-Matic III
REEL GRINDER:
1 Foley Accu-Pro 630
BEDKNIFE GRINDER:
1 Foley 660
IRRIGATION PUMP STATION:
Flowtronex, 400 gpm

PRIMARY SLOW-RELEASE FERTILIZER:
Contec
CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT:
My crew
TOTAL SQUARE FOOTAGE OF MAINTENANCE BUILDING: 3,500 sq. ft.
ANNUAL ROUNDS OF GOLF: 20,000
NORMAL GREEN SPEED: 8.5'-9.5'