

Rethinking greens to stay in the black

PROACTIVE COURSE RENOVATIONS AND REROUTING PROVIDE BETTER EXPERIENCES FOR GOLFERS AND AIM TO BOOST PROFITS

by
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Golf courses are businesses. Despite the intangible benefits provided by the beautiful settings and the opportunities for exercise and relaxation, they're all about the bottom line. If there's no profit, there's no golf course. As with all other service providers, profit depends on pleasing customers. Remodeling and rerouting, handled well, can increase play and keep a course competitive within a market – in essence, using the greens to keep the course in the black.

The Crenshaw Cliffside Golf Course at Barton Creek Resort & Spa in Austin, Texas, the historic Green Lakes Golf Course at Green Lakes State Park in Fayetteville, N.Y., and the Bay Course at the Seaview Resort & Spa, A Marriott Resort in Galloway, N.J., are good examples of courses that are changing to stay ahead in competitive markets.

Making great better

The Crenshaw Cliffside Golf Course closed for renovation just when it was in the best condition it had been in during the past six years, says Ken Gorzycki, director of golf

course maintenance. However, it wasn't a difficult decision.

"We took an already great course (recipient of the Golf Digest 2006 Reader's Choice Best Course to Play in Austin) and made it better," he says. "It all stems around the quality level we expect for our clientele. Though we'd had no negative input from course users, we knew we could take the golfing experience to a higher level."

The renovation for the Ben Crenshaw and Bill Coore-designed, links-style course is a considerable one, yet it retains all the significant elements of the original design and beauty of the setting. And while the work requires a shut-down from June 12 to Sept. 15, the renovation is as practical as it is strategic.

The Tifdwarf Bermudagrass greens were 15 years old, and it was time to improve them from a variety standpoint, Gorzycki says.

"We selected Champion, which we have on two of the other three courses here, because it's given us the most consistently good putting surfaces for the longest time," he says. "Analysis of the greens showed the upper four to five inches had heavy organic buildup. Below that level, the sand was clean and still met USGA specs. We opted to strip off that contaminated layer, bring in clean greens mix compatible with the existing base, reshape the greens – basically matching their original contours with a few tweaks here and there – and sprig in the Champion."

The bunkers were renovated, too. The crew excavated the sand, removed the existing drainage, flushed out the outfall drain pipe, installed new French drains, reshaped them back to the original design and added new sand.

The Crenshaw Cliffside course was the resort's only track with only three sets of

tee boxes, Gorzycki says.

"We added about nine new tees to allow us to add the fourth tee – a forward men's tee between our current men's and ladies' tees," he says. "This change will speed up play and make it more enjoyable."

Additionally, one of the effluent storage ponds was relined.

The timing of the Crenshaw Cliffside renovation was critical. The course closed during a time of the summer when play is light and the Bermudagrass growing conditions are best.

"We allowed three weeks to prepare and sprig the greens, leaving seven to eight weeks for them to grow into full coverage, and another two or three weeks to get them groomed for play by Sept. 15," Gorzycki says. "The other work fits into that 10-week window."

The renovation, which costs an estimated \$550 million, has been going smoothly. Because it focuses on matching the original design, not much input was required from the architectural team. The main contractor, Golf Works, is based in Austin, and that helps from the logistical side. Gorzycki had worked previously with Golf Works at another course, and Golf Works has worked with Crenshaw in the past, creating a comfort zone on such a tightly scheduled project.

"Our superintendent and assistant have been overseeing the daily construction operations as well as keeping up the other maintenance," Gorzycki says. "I've also kept in close contact with them and the project manager. We're hitting our goal for excellence with the ability to retain that level consistently."

Solving a problem

The historic Green Lakes Golf Course was originally designed by Robert Trent Jones,

Why remodel?

The six most common factors leading to a remodeling program are:

1. Replacing old, worn-out components
2. Correcting hard-to-maintain areas
3. Making adjustments to improve weak holes
4. Improving aesthetics
5. Restoring historic value
6. Making the course as good as it can be

Source: American Society of Golf Course Architects

Management of the Bay Course at the Seaview Resort & Spa in Galloway, N.J., decided to reroute the course to make it more appealing. Photo: Bay Course at Seaview Resort & Spa.



Sr., in 1936. Known for its routing over a rolling landscape, it has been considered one of upstate New York's most popular courses. However, the par-5 12th hole always slowed play and backed up golfers.

"Golf course superintendent Dean Burton had identified its impact on slowing play long before we were able to schedule its renovation," says Brian Burnett, project manager for the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historical Preservation. "Golfers had to play over a large bunker to reach a raised green that sloped steeply on both sides. A shot missed to the left of the green would get lost in the tall grass and trees. A shot missed right would bounce dramatically to the right or get lost in a waste area between the No. 12 green and No. 13 tee. It was as much about searching for balls as playing them."

The green had been relocated in the 1950s and was one of two that weren't part of the original course design. Architect Barry Jordan, owner of Jordan Golf Design based in Manlius, N.Y., was consulted to help fix the problem.

"My goal was to improve playability while creating a better blend with the original holes," Jordan says. "We considered returning the green to its original position, but it just didn't make sense."

"The present green location was workable, and the green itself is in good shape," he adds. "I recommended keeping it intact and renovating everything directly around it, including the adjacent 13th-hole tee

boxes. Now, several deep bunkers frame the hole and contain shots that previously would have been lost. And because it's a par 5, it's now more enticing to try to reach the green in two shots."

Much of Jordan's original sketch was retained in his final design. By shifting the front bunker to the right side of the hole, an alley to the green was created on the left side. Playability and strategy were considerably enhanced without diminishing the challenges. The reconstruction also included the rerouting of the cart path and correcting drainage that comes off the hillside. Jordan created a tight drawing and then popped it up in a 3-D model that contained all of the elevations, which helped save money during the construction.

Three different contractors worked on the project, which cost about \$70,000. Acts II Construction (Gouverneur, N.Y.) cleared trees and rough graded the site. Daly Landscape (Kirkville, N.Y.) handled the finish grading, constructed the five new bunkers and installed drain lines. Bushnell Nurseries (Bridgeport, N.Y.) installed a drain inlet and discharge piping, installed almost 50,000 square feet of sod and constructed 335 linear feet of new asphalt cart path. The sod came from Sky High Turf Farms (Chittenango, N.Y.). A bluegrass blend was used for the fairways and rough areas, and bentgrass was used for the apron on the No. 12 green and the new tee boxes on the 13th hole.

"Working with multiple contractors was



Much of architect Barry Jordan's original redesign of Green Lakes Golf Course was retained in his final design. Photo: Jordan Golf Design

Renovation insight

Several publications from The American Society of Golf Course Architects provide valuable insight to the remodeling process. Especially beneficial are golf course component life span information ("Golf Course Items Expected Life Cycle") and the remodeling Q&A ("The Golf Course Remodeling Process - Questions & Answers"). ASGCA provides these and other informative documents free-of-charge by mail or e-mail. Call 262-786-5960 or e-mail info@asgca.org.

more difficult, but with costs a major factor and a narrow time frame to complete the project (June through August 2005) prior to installation of an irrigation system in the fall of 2005, it was the most workable alternative," Burnett says. "Barry Jordan and his project manager, Kurt Hackwelder, stayed on top of things from the design perspective. And Dean Burton and his staff were incredible, assisting in all aspects of the project. Working together, we made it happen on time with spectacular results."

Simple and effective

Although not a renovation, the driving force behind rerouting the Bay Course was to create inventory where there was demand, according to Steve Schaller, director



The 15-year-old greens on the Crenshaw Cliffside Golf Course at Barton Creek were changed from Tifdwarf Bermudagrass to Champion. Photo: Barton Creek Resort & Spa.

of golf for Seaview Resort & Spa.

"When there is more inventory (golf course availability) than users, golf course owners need to analyze why and determine what can be done to make their course more appealing," Schaller says. "We were after the delight factor."

The Bay Course is one of two courses on the property and is the host of the 2006 ShopRite LPGA Classic. Donald Ross designed the links-style course about 1914. The strategic rerouting restores Ross' original plan.

The rerouting didn't entail moving any greens or tees. There was no earth-moving or shaping or restructuring of the holes. It was basically a renumbering of holes nine through 17. It also eliminated back-to-back par threes and ends both nines on a par 5. The signature hole (previously the 13th and now the 17th) is a typical Donald Ross elevated green that's strategically bunkered to provide a challenge in the final stages of play.

The 10th hole was previously the 17th hole. The rerouting now puts the 10th tee near the first tee at the midpoint of the course. Golfers have an easy option to start from the front nine or the back nine if they wish to play only nine holes, according to Schaller.

"The new location is much more convenient for golf outings and tournament play with double tee starts," he says. "Before the rerouting, the LPGA contestants, officials and volunteers were shuttled about three-fourths of a mile to the second starting tee.

It also separated the area logistically for spectators and the media. This routing is easier to maneuver, speeds the pace of play and enhances the overall experience. Logistically, it improves the flow, allowing our staff to serve outing and tournament participants more efficiently."

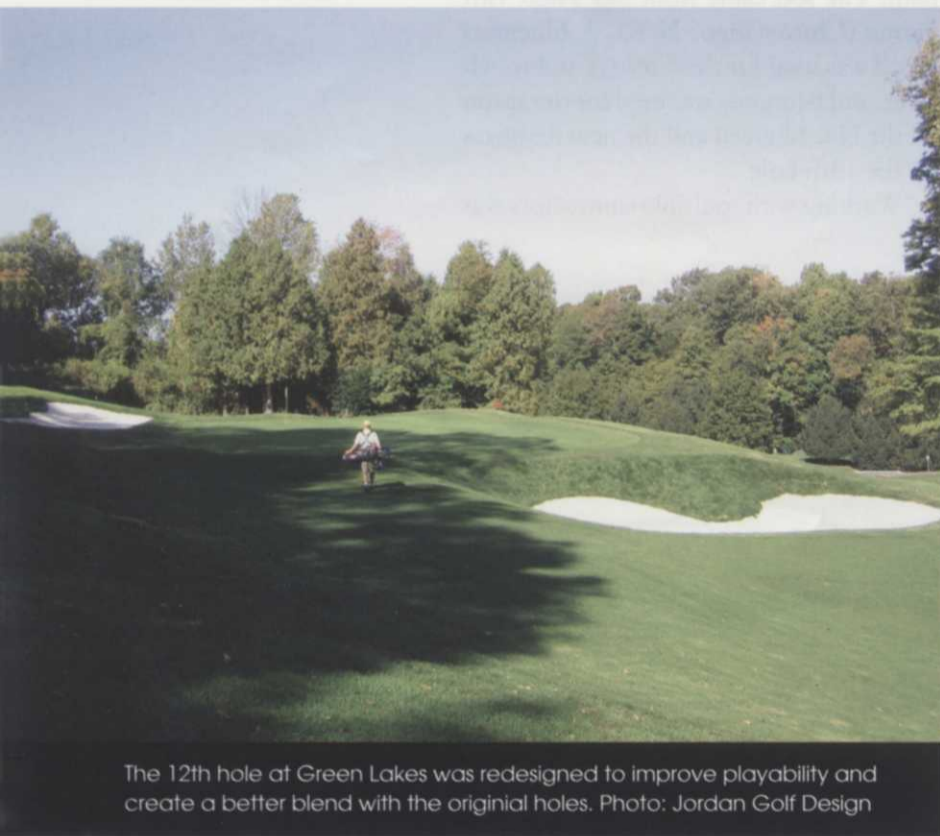
The rerouting is part of recognizing who the customers are to accommodate their needs and wants Schaller says.

"We're not sure why the routing was changed from the original, but this reroute was a matter of adapting to a changing customer base and doing it ahead of the curve," he says. "There are so many cultural changes that affect the golfing community, and resort courses fill a special niche. People want to attend their meetings and play golf, join the family at the beach or take golf lessons, play volleyball or go to the spa. The options are great, and people want to experience as much as possible."

The cost to reroute the course was minimal – about \$5,000 – just a few basics such as renumbering the tee markers and reprinting the scorecards, according to Schaller. For golf course superintendent Mark Beumont, the change simply required rerouting of the maintenance sequence to get the course ready for players.

The rewards, in terms of efficiency, playability and golfer appreciation, are well worth the effort, Schaller says. GCN

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The 12th hole at Green Lakes was redesigned to improve playability and create a better blend with the original holes. Photo: Jordan Golf Design