

## GOLF BUSINESS PROFILE

# Good design plus a good superintendent add up to success for Florida course

Palm Beach County is a connoisseur's paradise for golfers. With more than 70 courses to its credit at last count, it also has one of the most competitive atmospheres a new golf course can face. Therefore, when a new course makes it into the black just 3 years after opening, the factors that made it so successful bear close examination.

Wellington One, a par 72 championship golf course located in the new community of Wellington, in the lush countryside west of West Palm Beach, opened in 1975 and by fiscal 1977 was already paying its own way. Its rapid acceptance, by residents and by visitors to Palm Beach County, and its financial equilibrium are the result of optimum climate, location, design, and conscientious maintenance. None of these factors represents plain good luck. Each was the result of a team effort involving the developer, the designer, and the course superintendent.

Because of its reputation, Wellington One has proven to be not only an enjoyable course but an excellent sales tool for the new community. In fact, it has been so popular that two additional courses are now in the works at Wellington.

*Norm Wyman, superintendent at Wellington One, stops on the course to talk with a member of his maintenance crew. He favors modern, labor-saving maintenance equipment, such as this fairway mower.*

## Location

Located in central Palm Beach County, Wellington One is blessed with the most pleasant climate in Florida. It is playable year-round and is accessible from the West Palm Beach urban area. Its location in a growing young community is also an asset. Because of Wellington's exceptional sports facilities in tennis and riding as well as golf, it has drawn young, vigorous, athletic families who make the most of all the community has to offer. The development is owned by Gould Realty Inc., a subsidiary of Gould Inc., a \$1.7 billion electromechanical manufacturing concern based in Illinois. Wellington is expected to have a population of 30,000 by 1990.

Wellington One also attracts its share of Florida visitors and tourists, who swell the ranks of players during the winter season.

## Design

George and Tom Fazio, designers of such top-ranked courses as Jupiter Hills, the National in Toronto, and Butler National Golf Club in Oak Brook, Ill., were selected to design Wellington One. At Wellington, as at

their other courses, they set out to design a course that "almost anyone can play reasonably well — but that no one can tear to pieces; one that can be enjoyed by all classes of golfers." It was also designed, according to the Fazios, to have its own "look" and to harmonize with its environment and climatic conditions.

The Fazios designed Wellington One along generous lines so that it could handle PGA-sponsored tournaments with plenty of gallery space. As a result, it is about 50 acres larger in area than the typical club course. Tom Fazio comments, "While most golf courses are designed to conserve land, Wellington One is extremely generous in acreage with nearly 200 acres overall." The course's overall length is 7,210 yards. Wellington One will have its first professional test in March, when it will host a 2-day event during the PGA "mini-tour."

Although Wellington One was designed with the professional in mind, it is adjustable to any type of player. It has more tees than virtually any course ever designed. Each hole has at least four tees and a number have five or six. As a result, the course is both challenging and enjoyable for good and average players and lady golfers as well as professionals.

Although the location chosen for Wellington One was "ideal" in many respects, according to the Fazios, the terrain required a lot of work before it could become a championship golf course. Originally part of the Flying Cow Ranch and very flat, the land contained tremendous muck holes and required 2.4 million cubic yards of fill to create the necessary contours. The course took almost 5 years to complete from initial planning to play. The fill used for contouring was dug from Wellington's 150-acre man-made lake.

After contouring, the course was planted with Tifdwarf greens and 419 bermudagrass fairways.

## A working superintendent

The Fazios give course superintendent Norm Wyman much of the credit for the success of Wellington One. "He's a



working superintendent," Tom comments.

Wyman is a perfectionist. Approaching 60, he is vigorous, enthusiastic, and experienced. He brings a number of unique assets to his work at Wellington. One is dedication. "When you become a golf course superintendent," he notes, "you marry the golf course. Your work is never done because you're working with something that's living. If it doesn't grow, you feed it. When it grows, you cut it. You just can't forget something that grows for a couple of days. It's not like construction or road building, it's more like a doctor with a patient."

Wyman is also experienced in handling people, money and machinery. After being a partner in his family's lumber business in New England for many years, he took up golf at the age of 47 and became an avid player. As a member and officer of clubs in New England and Florida, he became familiar with their common problems. Feeling it was time to make a change in his life, he finally joined a South Florida course as assistant superintendent. Studying at night, he read everything he could about course maintenance, especially the technical literature on diseases and chemicals. He became a superintendent within 3 years and joined Wellington in 1976.

Wyman feels that because of his background "the people at Wellington rely on me more than they might. For one thing, I know how to control money. Most superintendents have not been in business before."

Taking his own golf game seriously (he plays twice a week and regularly shoots in the 80's) has also been a benefit in Wyman's second career. "If you aren't a golfer, how can you answer a golfer's questions?" he asks.

On the other hand," he adds, "this career has spoiled me for going out and just enjoying my golf game. When I come back from playing a round here, I have two or three things to fix. You're always looking for the problems."

#### Maintenance

One of the biggest problems golf course superintendents face in South Florida is keeping water at an optimum level. The area experiences heavy tropical rainstorms frequently in the summer and long dry spells in the winter. At Wellington One, the problem has been solved with an irrigation and drainage system Tom



*Riding mowers are almost a necessity for cutting tees at Wellington One, since each hole has at least four teeing areas.*

Fazio calls "one of the most sophisticated and largest in the country." Double and triple rows of pipes complement a completely automatic system with the latest pumping equipment and controls, all designed specifically for the course.

Due to a certain amount of settling of fill and some neglect in the early days of the course development, the drainage problem was a big one when Wyman joined Wellington.

"The course was under water in places for days at a time," he recalls. "After the first year we had big problems in the traps. I had to go into the traps, reshape and drain them, then place about \$20,000 worth of sand in them. The second summer, the big job was putting in drainage in the fairways so that the course wouldn't be down so much. I hired in some college boys and put in thousands of feet of drainage all over the course."

Wyman uses automation along with hand labor in maintaining the course. "We're getting more automated all the time," he notes. "I would prefer hand labor, but you can't get the labor. Therefore, every machine I buy will eliminate labor. The triplex mowers, for instance, will mow three times what one man can do by hand in the same amount of time."

During the winter, Wyman employs five or six laborers, plus a mechanic and an assistant superintendent. He adds a few extra hands in the summer.

"Of course," Wyman points out, "the more machines you buy, the more mechanics you need. And mechanics are even harder to find than laborers." Wyman and the local organization of golf course superintendents are doing all they can to solve this problem by persuading the area's technical college to train mechanics for golf course work. "If fifty mechanics graduated today," Wyman notes, "They'd be hired tomorrow."

Wyman is progressive about hiring women to work in the shop and on the course, feeling that they are naturally neater than men. He comments, "If a woman sees a cigarette pack lying on

the ground, she'll pick it up. A guy might throw his down right next to it."

The work day for Wyman's crews starts early in the morning and goes right through to 2:30 p.m. He's persuaded them to grab lunch while working and go home early. They benefit by missing the heat of the day and by having plenty of time left for recreation and personal business. The course benefits because there's no lost time while employees travel to and from lunch. Everyone is happy with the system, Wyman reports.

Landscaping is a continuing project at Wellington One. The course spent \$33,000 in 1978 alone purchasing trees and shrubs and added many from its own nursery as well. The new trees not only beautify the course, but provide backdrops which aid in play and serve as an additional safety factor.

This year, Wyman also supervised resurfacing of 1,635 lineal feet of existing cart paths and a 2,975-foot extension of new paths. Wellington One has 105 Melex electric golf cars.

At present, Wellington One operates out of a small pro shop with clubhouse facilities provided at Wellington's 11,000-square-foot tennis club near the 18th tee. The pro shop serves as headquarters for the staff and is currently being expanded to include a snack bar, showers, club storage, and card room.

In addition to these improvements and the two new courses, golf and tennis condominiums are being built on adjacent land. They will be available for daily, weekly, or monthly rental. Wyman says, "It will be a great layout and will make Wellington One one of the top golf resorts in the country."

#### The golf course as sales tool

Presence of a fine championship golf course in Wellington has been an aid to land and home sales.

Golfers' enthusiasm for Wellington One doesn't dim when they move into their new homes. Residents form a loyal core of players at Wellington One. For a modest annual membership fee, they play the course for the price of golf car rental. Rates for non-members are \$12 plus golf car rental in the summer and \$16 plus golf car rental in the winter. These are comparable to the rates at nearby courses.

In rough figures, about 40,000 rounds of golf are played at Wellington One every year. "In the winter," pro Mike Gibbons comments, "it's nothing to have 1,200 to 1,400 people per week." □