Superintendent says he’s up to the peculiar turf task presented to him at Las Vegas putting complex  By Doug Cantor

The scene is the 17th green at Augusta National GC, where a mere 8-foot putt will mean the Masters championship. The speed is perfect, the ball breaks just right and the crowd goes wild. One more hole and the green jacket is in the bag.

Suddenly, the roar of a jet engine interrupts your round . . . and your fantasy. Yeah, it's the world-famous green (sort of). But this isn't Augusta, and it surely isn't Sunday afternoon at the Masters.

In reality, it's 3 a.m. and this is Las Vegas, City of Illusion, where the Eiffel Tower, the Great Pyramid and the Empire State Building meet. This latest illusion comes courtesy of The Greens of Las Vegas, a unique putting complex currently under construction near McCarran Airport in Sin City. Slated to open this fall, the 23-acre facility features authentic recreations of the greens from 24 of the most celebrated golf holes in the world.

Even more than it is for golfers, the layout of The Greens is a change of pace for its superintendent, Kent McCutcheon. With its desert location, lack of fairways and four sets of six greens inspired by courses as disparate as Medinah CC and St. Andrews, the complex has significantly different construction and maintenance issues from more traditional courses.

"I don't know of any superintendent who's had to do something like this," says McCutcheon, The Greens' director of agronomy.

Formerly the director of golf course operations at Las Vegas Paiute Golf Resort, the 31-year-old McCutcheon is now responsible for maintaining the 24 "inspired by" greens, complete with bunkers and water hazards, as well as two other 18-hole putting courses. In case that were not enough, one of the courses is modeled after Japanese-style greens with a wide variety of vegetation not normally found in the United States.

According to Brent Harvey of San Diego's Harvey Mills Design, the arid climate poses the biggest challenge to maintaining the greens.

"The Greens of Las Vegas is about 20 acres of turf compared to 90 acres we normally see in the desert," says Harvey, whose golf course irrigation consultancy worked closely with McCutcheon to develop the irrigation system. "But it is probably equal in terms of the effort."

Fortunately for McCutcheon, the plan is to use the same type of grass for every green. Still, he is going to have his hands full maintaining that much manicured turf.

"We have six acres of bentgrass," he explains. "It's the same as two golf  
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Just Greens

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courses. The greens will get
85 percent of the focus.”

The experienced
McCutcheon, who just
completed his term as presi-
dent of the Southern
Nevada Superintendents
Association, has his own
gallery of supporters.

“He’s the best,” says
Eddie Heinen, an amateur
golfer who got the idea for
The Greens of Las Vegas
while playing in Canada
with recent Masters winner
Mike Weir, his old team-
mate from Brigham Young
University. The original
plan was just to hold a series
of putting tournaments.
But over four years of rais-
ing capital, securing govern-
ment approvals and scout-
ing locations, it evolved into
the present project.

“Eddie’s added new fea-
tures to make it not so one-
dimensional,” says Weir,
who regularly talks with
Heinen over the phone
about the progress of the
project. “It will really work
well in Vegas.”

When it opens its doors
in November, The Greens
will offer free instructional
clinics, a golf camp for kids
and daily putting competi-
tions with sizable cash
prizes. It also will have a pro
shop, a sports bar and a
radio broadcast studio, as
well as the four signature
six-green courses.

Architects from the
renowned Dye Design
Group assisted Heinen with
selection of the greens.
Heinen admits he has
played only two of the origi-
nal holes, Castle Pines
No. 12 and Shinnecock
Hills No. 18. But for him,
that’s the beauty of the pro-
ject — now anyone can
take aim at greens that oth-
erwise might never be
accessible.

“Within an hour after
Tiger Woods makes a long
putt at Sawgrass, we can set
it up so anyone can try that
putt,” he says.

McCutcheon will have
to stay on his toes to accom-
modate all of Heinen’s big
ideas. Besides all the other
maintenance demands, the
course will be open around
the clock.

“It’s a 24/7 town,” Mc-
Cutcheon says. “You have a
lot of people who get off
work at 2 a.m., and they’re
not ready to go to bed.”

So far, McCutcheon has
not had much trouble with
the course’s lighting system,
but he is a bit worried it
could create a problem by
attracting cutworms.

Given the never-ending
schedule, it will be hard to
predict when the course will
experience the greatest
amount of traffic or just
how heavy it will be. Mc-
Cutcheon has not yet de-
cided when his eight-person
crew will do the bulk of the
prep work, though he says it
could, in fact, begin in the
wee hours of the morning.
In Vegas, there’s just no rest
for the weary.

One saving grace unlike
traditional courses: There is
not a first tee that must be
ready in the morning. If
need be, the crew can work
on one set of greens while
people play on the others.

Though he does not
expect to put in too much
overtime, McCutcheon says
the complex will require a
lot of hand-work and atten-
tion-to-detail. Indeed, he
may need to increase the
size of his crew to handle
landscaping after the facility
opens for business. He’s also
keeping his fingers crossed
that the once-a-decade
flood Las Vegas is due for
won’t come anytime soon.

But with all these con-
cerns, the veteran superin-
tendent remains un-
daunted. Even when
working on a standard
course, he says: “I always
focus on greens first. If
there’s anything I want, it’s
good greens.

“And,” he adds confi-
dently, “we’re going to have
the best greens in town.”

Cantor is a free-lance writer
from Chicago.

The famed Shinnecock Hills GC
in Southampton, N.Y., is
represented at the Greens of
Las Vegas.