



Course Consulting Service IN THE FIELD



The condition of the putting greens at Chesapeake Hills is one of the highlights of playing golf there, but that wasn't always the case.

BACK FROM THE BRINK AGRONOMY SPARKS A TURNAROUND

Chesapeake Hills Golf Course | Lusby, Md.

During the summer of 2011, Chesapeake Hills Golf Course in Lusby, Maryland, was facing a difficult situation. Almost half of their putting greens had experienced widespread turf loss and all the remaining putting greens had some level of serious turf injury. Needless to say, playing conditions were not good and rounds and revenue were declining.

Calvert County, the owner of Chesapeake Hills, had been advised by some that the only way to turn things around would be to completely rebuild all 18 putting greens. A project of that scope would have likely cost more than \$1 million and would have required the greens to be closed for the better part of a year. The county could ill afford the cost of such a renovation or the lost revenue associated with closing the greens, but the current situation was also unsustainable. Newly hired Superintendent Mike Maher and USGA Agronomist Darin Bevard believed that there was a more affordable solution to the problems facing the golf course.

“The goal at Chesapeake Hills was to have high-quality turf coverage from tee to green and smooth putting conditions; they weren’t trying to host the U.S. Open,” said Bevard. “Mike and I advised the Parks and Recreation Department that implementing a sound program of relatively low-cost agronomic practices could deliver what everyone wanted.”



In 2011, widespread turf loss led to a significant drop in rounds and revenue. Through USGA Course Consulting Service visits, a program of relatively low-cost agronomic improvements helped turn things around.

and dry areas that were common with the old single-row system. In-ground moisture sensors were also installed in all the putting greens to further improve moisture management.

The 23 bunkers on the golf course were renovated. Drainage and liners were added to reduce the time spent repairing washouts and pumping water from the bunkers after a rain. In addition, a new maintenance

The first hurdle was to repair the worst damage to the putting greens and survive the remainder of the summer. Almost 10,000 square feet of new bentgrass sod was laid to repair severely damaged areas. The six worst-affected putting greens were temporarily closed to allow time for healing while traffic was carefully managed on the others to avoid wear in the repaired areas.

GCSAA Class A Superintendent Mike Maher describes his experience that summer, his first at Chesapeake Hills:

“We were in intensive care mode to get through the rest of that year. Not only were we trying to repair seriously damaged playing surfaces, we were also dealing with a drought and temperatures that were in the 90s for weeks at a time.”

“Once we made it through that summer, I worked with Darin through USGA Course Consulting Service visits to develop a long-term agronomic plan that was going to allow us to deliver better playing conditions on a consistent basis. We focused on improving water management, identifying and improving difficult growing environments and managing organic matter. These are all cost-effective steps that had extremely positive impacts on playing conditions.”

Over the next several years, Chesapeake Hills also invested in other parts of the course to further improve playability and maintenance efficiency.

The irrigation system was upgraded to provide full coverage of the golf course. Upgrading the irrigation system helped eliminate the bare spots

facility was built to improve the working environment for the maintenance staff and encourage a more efficient workflow. Investing in a new maintenance facility provided a much-needed morale boost for the team.

“Currently, we’re in the process of converting our common bermudagrass fairways and tees to Latitude 36 bermudagrass, a variety Darin Bevard recommended because of its ability to handle our hot summers and cool winters,” said Maher. “We converted nine holes last year and will do the remaining holes this year.”

“Converting to Latitude 36 is going to improve year-round playability,” said Bevard. “This was a recommendation I felt very strongly about, and we’re looking forward to seeing the benefits in the coming years.”

Maher speaks fondly of the collaboration between himself and Bevard and the success they’ve had at Chesapeake Hills:

“Darin has been an instrumental part of identifying the key priorities and helping us implement both large and small changes to our maintenance program. He helped us get through a very tough situation in 2011 and the recovery plan we developed saved hundreds of thousands of dollars compared to the cost of rebuilding the putting greens. Darin has been part of almost every significant improvement we’ve made since that time and we consider him part of the team here.”

The results of this collaboration with the USGA Course Consulting Service are hard to miss. Playing conditions have dramatically improved since 2011. In 2016, both rounds and revenue were the highest they’ve ever been – a 22-percent boost in rounds and 50-percent revenue increase from pre-recession peaks.

“It’s impressive to see what Mike and the team at Chesapeake Hills have been able to accomplish,” said Bevard. “It goes to show that having limited resources doesn’t mean that you can’t provide a great golf experience.”