Each one of Prestonwood’s superintendents and maintenance supervisors had a hand in fine-tuning the Club’s new maintenance building.

A ‘championship’ maintenance facility

Prestonwood Country Club near Raleigh, NC, is one of the Nike Tour stops, but when it built its new maintenance building, it was the members it needed to please.

By RON HALL/Managing Editor

It’s about 3 p.m. on a steamy Carolina afternoon. Laborers dressed in work boots, blue work pants and short-sleeve shirts swarm around compact tractors and large fairway mowers.

Some are refueling their machines. Several are blowing dirt and debris from them with air hoses that they pull down from overhead reels. Others are washing equipment. Each unit is readied for tomorrow’s jobs. Then, the machinery is parked inside the adjoining building. This maintenance program is truly a program.

Its heart is its maintenance building, and that heart has to be both big and efficient when that program is responsible for 54 holes as it is at Prestonwood Country Club in Cary, NC.

Indeed, just about every important function or decision related to golf course maintenance at Prestonwood CC radiates from the low-profile, 23,250-square-foot building.

The two-year-old maintenance building here is more than concrete block and steel, copper wires and plumbing. It’s the hub of three 18-hole golf courses that, themselves, are surrounded by new, upscale residential neighborhoods. That’s because the sale of homes and building lots drive Prestonwood CC development. The attraction, of course, is the golf and related recreational and social amenities at the Club. It’s probably the largest private country club in North Carolina.

Hot economy spurms boom

There is no end in sight to development in and around Prestonwood CC. Nearby Research Triangle Park’s concentration of high-tech industries is transforming Cary and other once-tiny communities surrounding Raleigh and Durham. Nobody knows when construction will stop. Or slow. Professional people are flowing into central Carolina to snatch up high-paying jobs. Many are eager to play year-round golf too.

“This is home to most of us. It seems like we spend more time here than we do at home,” says John Hilton. He’s referring to Prestonwood’s maintenance building. He’s head superintendent at Prestonwood CC, and he jokingly refers to himself as “the grandfather” of the staff.

While most golf or country clubs can’t afford the maintenance facility’s price tag, almost all of them can learn something from the cooperative effort that went into designing and building the facility.
Memories of dirt floor, no room

In a sense, the building reflects the strides that golf course maintenance has taken in the 30-plus years since Hilton started his career in golf.

"I can't help but remember the first building I ever worked with. It was open on two sides, had a dirt floor and was about 40 feet long and 10 feet wide," says Hilton, a genuinely pleasant man who sees his role at Prestonwood as contributing the practical experience he's gained over the years while fostering a spirit of "family" among the 66 fulltime golf maintenance employees.

It wasn't that long ago that Prestonwood CC itself was working out of a building that never really met its needs either. Not from the beginning. Not from 1986 when the initial developer of the country club bought 1,200 acres of mostly farmland, and 1 ¼ years into the project, hired veteran superintendent Hilton to team with Ron Gilmore, director of golf course operations, to finish off 27 holes of golf, plus a 4-hole, par-3 addition.

"The construction was difficult because it was being done in a flood plain. It was kind of a tough project to do," recalls Hilton. "Not from the beginning. Not from 1986 when the initial developer of the country club bought 1,200 acres of mostly farmland, and 1 ¼ years into the project, hired veteran superintendent Hilton to team with Ron Gilmore, director of golf course operations to finish off 27 holes of golf, plus a 4-hole, par-3 addition."

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existing statutes, including the pouring of the 5-inch concrete pad upon which the building rests—a single pour to avoid joints and seams. Then there’s another 1½ acres of concrete surrounding the building with reinforced fiber mesh for added strength.

**Liquid storage a priority**

“All areas in this building are of great concern to us, but there are three areas in particular that we wanted to take extra care with,” says Hilton. They are: chemical storage, the wash pad, and the fuel system.

“The fuel system has made my life a lot nicer,” claims Joe Seagroves, equipment superintendent and one of four equipment mechanics. He says the ignition key of each piece of equipment is coded so that the “Fuel Master” system records the amount of fuel each unit uses and how many miles of hours are on it. The system provides an accurate fuel inventory, prevents operators from putting the wrong fuel in their vehicles, and aids in tracking PM.

Not that everything is rosy in the mechanics’ lives in spite of working in a new building and with practically new mowers and tractors.

Since all the equipment is about the same age (finishing the first year of a three-year John Deere lease), routine maintenance on over 100 units all happens about the same time. “In a way, it’s kind of a maintenance nightmare,” admits Seagrove.

Nor, did everything associated with the maintenance building turn out perfect. For instance, nearby homeowners complained about the night lights at the facility—too bright. “We had to go to a different type of light,” says Hilton.

But these are minor glitches, and Hilton says he and his team of superintendents and their crews can maintain Prestonwood’s 54-holes more efficiently and, ultimately, to a higher-quality level because of the state-of-art facilities.

The superintendents and mechanics that use the building daily come up with new suggestions to make the facility more efficient and safer.

“We stress safety and sanitation here, and try to put things in place that allows us to have those things,” says Hilton. “Everybody is free to put their ideas on the table. It’s a real good environment here.”

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Workers try to keep everything in its place in the maintenance building.

Equipment Supervisor Joe Seagroves (left), Superintendent John Hinkle (center), and Ron Gilmore, director of golf course operations, have room to work efficiently.