

MIDWEST BREEZES

Charles Anfield, CGCS, *Heritage Bluffs Golf Course*



Midwest Breezes: Tropical Style

Most superintendents who work at golf courses in the northern climates close their courses for the season. In late fall, we remove the water from the irrigation system, treat for snow mold and add sand or covers to protect our greens from the harsh effects of winter. We become more concerned with snow plow operations for a few months.

This year's Golf Industry Show was held down in Orlando, Florida. As a northern golf course superintendent I couldn't help wondering, what are the challenges for our counterparts in the South? So I decided to pack my clubs, (Southwest Airlines: golf bags fly free) make a few calls, and explore some courses in the central Florida area.

After my clubs and I arrived safely, I secured my rental car and proceeded to Walkabout Golf and Country Club in Mims on the east coast by Cape Canaveral. Ed Linder is the Superintendent. Walkabout's name is derived from an Australian Aboriginal rite of passage of walking around and surviving in

the Outback. The course is a Jan Stevenson design built in 2005. The property was designed as a golf residential community. With the collapse of the real estate market, much of the property is undeveloped and still in a rustic state. Ed gave me a driving tour of the golf course. Much of the course is carved out of native wetlands. Ed uses local on site materials like sand deposits, native grasses and ancient coral outcroppings for landscaping purposes. He explained that winter temperatures have been averaging twenty degrees below normal this year. This creates a challenge to grow in the overseed. Ed says the timing of the preparation and the seeding process is crucial to getting a good "take". Walkabout overseeds greens, tees and fairways. The greens are Tifdwarf Bermuda grass, over seeded with rye and *Poa trivialis*. The fairways and tees are overseeded with perennial rye. To add to the challenges, the course has been experiencing a three year drought. Ed has done many of his improvement projects "in house". One of his specialties is

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building revetted bunkers. Wildlife abounds on the course and the overall look is very links like.

Jason Moore is the Superintendent at Harmony Golf Preserve, in Harmony Florida. Harmony is located about 30 minutes southeast of Orlando and opened in 2002. Jason is originally from Woodridge, Illinois and relocated to Florida in 1989. He started working on golf courses shortly thereafter and began his job as Superintendent at Harmony in 2004. Troon Golf manages the property.

The course is a Johnny Miller design and the concept is to be more than a golf residential development. It has plans of creating a "city center".

The course sits on part of the 12,000 acre site. In addition to more housing on the site, future projects include baseball and soccer fields and exercise facilities. They have a nice, new clubhouse capable of hosting banquets, corporate meetings and of course golf outings. Prior to the golf course construction, most of the property was undeveloped wetlands and cattle pastures. Jason over-seeded his Tifdwarf greens with *Poa trivialis* and tees, fairways and rough with perennial rye. I can't believe the amount of wildlife we saw as we played the course. We saw bald eagles, ospreys, egrets, terns, herons, storks, sand hill cranes, and several different species of hawks. It is just remarkable, a birders delight. We even saw a copperhead snake and an alligator warming themselves in the Florida sun.

For my last stop I visited Steve Whaley at Royal St. Cloud Golf Links. St. Cloud is very close to Harmony, FL. Steve has been at the course since the grow-in in 2001. He has experienced many changes since the course opened. Two years ago he grew-in an additional nine holes. Steve's owner, Tom Butler is from Chicago and has implemented projects and practices to improve overall course conditions. The course was originally a reclaimed water distribution field. An adjacent wastewater plant pumped effluent water out on to the native grass site via an above ground irrigation system. The water was filtered by

the soil eventually returning to the water table. The golf course was a natural fit for the site and construction created a win-win situation using the effluent water to irrigate the golf turf. The course has a Scottish theme and is designed to be low maintenance using waste areas and native grasses. Even though Steve has unlimited water to use, he is still likes to keep playing conditions firm, just like in the "old country". He over-seeds his Tifeagle Ultradwarf greens with *Poa trivialis* and tees and fairways are over-seeded with perennial ryegrass.

The course was very busy on the day I visited.

Most of the play for these golf courses is in the winter. However, the courses are still open in the summer. There are no course closures or shut downs with the exception of during the over seeding process. During the winter, the "snowbirds" from our climate flock to the warm tropical

temperatures of central Florida. They do have expectations of a "green" course to play on. If the overseed is bad then they take their green dollars to the greener course. Some believe in the future there will be less over-seeding because of the cost. To over-seed the average course of 40 acres of playing surfaces, (greens, tees and fairways) the cost ranges between \$60-70,000. One can see why some courses do, and some don't. Currently overseeding is market driven by player demand. There are other costs involved including the cost of maintenance. One real challenge of the overseed process is the timing and grow-in. If it is too cold, the grow-in is slowed down, color is stunted and can be lost altogether. And after the winter ends the Bermuda grass will transition back to being the dominant turf type.

For us "snowbirds", golf in Florida in February is hard to beat. The sun is warm, birds are chirping, the grass is green (overseeded) and you can play golf. Not too shabby. -OC

