

Guettler finds hosing around pays off

Fla. construction firm uses hose to evenly spread sand and gravel during greens construction

By Mark Leslie

Guettler & Sons originated the idea, inventor Bob Ritten made it "sing," and now golf course builders and superintendents are singing the praises of the invention.

The new creation pumps gravel, sand, or root-zone mix through a 2-3/8-inch hose and onto the green or sand bunker as far away as 1,000 feet.

"I believe it is going to be the way to build greens in the future," said Dee Greninger, superintendent of an Arnold Palmer Management Co. project, Northport National Golf and Country Club, in Northport at the Lake, Mo.

"It is state-of-the-art... The application is going to be the best thing on the market for doing the pea gravel and intermediate layer on the greens."

Greninger was on site to see the equipment used in construction of The Osage River Course, the first 18 holes of the 54-hole Northport complex.

Architect and builder Jim Fazio was equally enthused after seeing Guettler use the equipment to build St. Lucie County Municipal Golf Course in Vero Beach, Fla.

Ritten, a cousin to Pete Guettler, who owns the 37-year-old Ft. Pierce, Fla., business with son Tom, said the Guettlers had struggled with the technology for three or four years when they came to him.

An inventor with eight patents in the boat loading industry, Ritten spent a year developing the first "sandscaping" rig. Then, early this year Guettler added a subsidiary, Sandscape, Inc., using the technology.

The Guettlers have used the technology on five courses and found it has many advantages to traditional greens construction, which uses heavy equipment and laborers with rakes.

Greninger summed it up for Guettler: "It's advantages are twofold. It speeds up the process. And it allows you to work when weather conditions won't allow it."

It allowed Northport's greens to be built when it was too wet to work with heavy equipment, Greninger said, explaining that the machinery can be parked off the course and hoses hauled across the construction site.

Greninger also estimated the greens were built in two-thirds the ordinary time.

And Ritten said modifications to the hose have speeded that up.

U.S. Rubber has built a hose with a 2-3/8-inch inside diameter to replace the two-inch hoses used at Northport.

"That 3/8-inch makes a big difference," Ritten said. "The hose is lighter and easier to handle because the 3/8-inch is taken from the rubber. The outside diameter remains the same.

"I was concerned with the wear factor. But it has been nil. Everything's fine-tuned now. The combination is blended out right. We were getting (rubber) burn, but not now."

Ritten said the Sandscape system uses an air compressor. Air and soil material are mixed in a "gun" and forced through the hose.

"We can build a green in six hours with three men. Normally it takes eight to 10 hours using six to eight laborers, plus heavy equipment," he said.

Greninger said men at the end of the hoses



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follow grade stakes as they pour the material in— first the four-inch gravel layer on top of trenched drain tiles, then two- to four-inch choker (course sand) layer and finally the 12- to 14-inch root-zone mixture.

"You can blow it in exactly where you want it and not have to worry about grade or high spots and low spots and screwing up the original contour," Greninger said.

Traditional greens construction equipment endangers drain tiles and disturbs the choker layer, mixing it with the lower gravel blanket, he added.

"Quality-wise, when you don't have to get the equipment in and disturb that intermediate level and worry about crushing the drain tile, it's a better job. That's going to be a key," Greninger said.

"It's the most unique piece of equipment I've seen for building greens. In theory, you could do away with the bottom layer of gravel

because there's no threat of breaking the drain tile."

In fact, Guettler hopes USGA officials will concur that "sandscaped" greens can be built without the bottom layer, thereby reducing the construction costs further.

Ritten said that would cut down construction costs several thousand dollars. "You also will get better drainage because water now has to flow down into ditches, whereas if tiles are on top of the base it should drain from both sides and the top. You'd probably just put down a one-inch base of rock."

A practice green at St. Lucie is being built this way to test the idea, Ritten said.

Greninger said he can see other applications for sandscaping, especially on sand bunkers.

He said Northport will take full advantage of this idea.



Green sandscaping allows workers, left, to apply a four-inch gravel layer to a new green. The truck, above, transports gravel and pumps it to the site.

"It is allowing us to complete the grassing of the course without putting the sand in first," he said. "Previously, you had to bring in the sand first and stockpile it in the sand traps. But this system allows the bunkers' silt and sediment to settle out. Next spring or summer we will blow the sand in and not disturb the grass.

"There's less chance of sand being contaminated during the winter. It lets you stabilize the edge of the bunkers, too, before putting the sand in, so you don't have the topsoil washing into white sand."

Greninger said he could see a big advantage on existing courses. "Anytime you don't have to back a big truck over your fairway into your bunkers, that's good. Guys now have to stockpile and use lighter equipment and make a dozen trips back and forth to fill a trap... A lot of times you could even work amidst play," he said.

Ritten added: "I can see every course putting new white sand out there after construction. It's like trimming a house."

The men on the hose?

Ritten foresees them becoming as proficient as shapers— some of whom maneuver bulldozers like artists do paintbrushes.

"They will be able to put gravel down so well they won't have to stake the green," he said.

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