

# Hammock Dunes duties a dream come true for Portz

*From farm work to greenskeeping, soil remains critical to Pa. transplant*

By Vern Putney

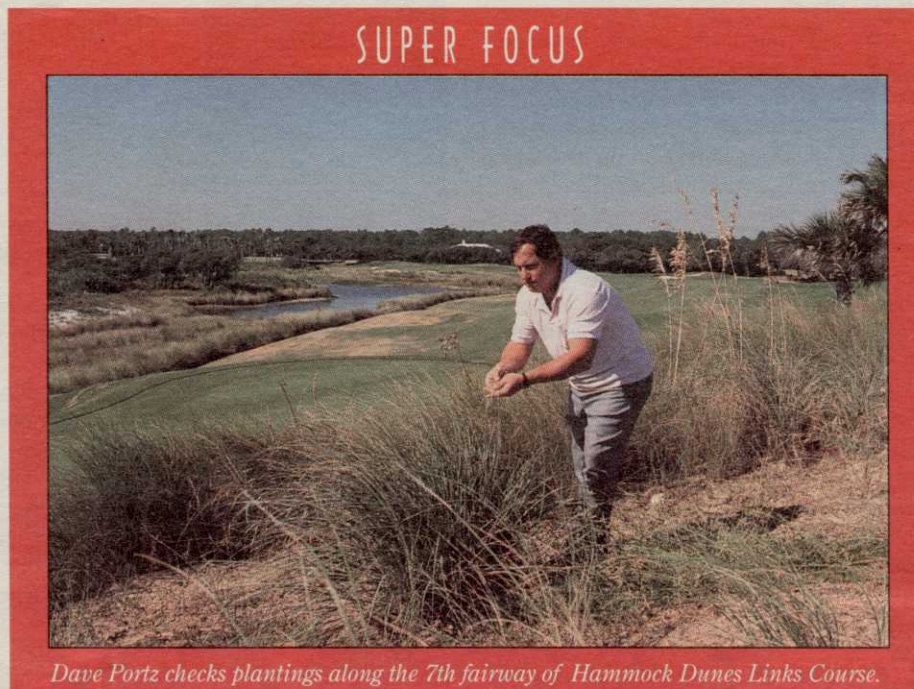
PALM COAST, Fla. — At 16, Dave Portz traded life on a farm in his native Emmaus, Pa., for maintenance work at Wedgewood Country Club in nearby Allentown, but he's never left the soil and the outdoors he so enjoys.

The breathtaking beauty of the private oceanside Hammock Dunes Club is a far cry from Portz' roots. But the personal magnetic attraction of location and unique challenge from a course superintendent's standpoint makes for a heady combination.

Noting Portz' love of the environment and his desire for course improvement, Wedgewood superintendent Dave Linde encouraged Portz to pursue a career in golf.

Portz agreed, to his own and eventually Hammock Dunes' mutually good fortune.

Portz graduated from Penn State University's winter course in turfgrass management in 1973, then accepted a position with Brookside CC in Allentown. He remained there 17 years before succumbing to the lure of Florida.



Dave Portz checks plantings along the 7th fairway of Hammock Dunes Links Course.

Relocation to the South was somewhat difficult because of Portz' limited exposure to Southern grasses. But Fred Kleinfelder, director of golf maintenance for IIT Corp., hired Portz to grow in Gary Player-designed Cypress Knolls, Sunsport's fifth golf course in a 2,250-acre community featuring five miles of oceanfront.

Soon afterward, Hammock Dunes course superintendent Dwight Kummer switched to Arnold Palmer's swank Bay Hill Country Club in Orlando. Portz was tapped as Kummer's replacement.

It was just the job Portz coveted — ocean breezes, continuous salt air, natural dunes, sandy soils and high water tables affording opportunity to test his skills in managing grasses in a demanding but rewarding setting.

Hammock Dunes ownership stresses protection and care of surroundings. That's nicely tailored to Portz' philosophy. He has taken full advantage of that support and remarkable course design by architect Tom Fazio of Jupiter.

Fazio's environmentalist view is reflected in his fitting the course to the site's natural beauty and characteristics. He enhanced beach, dune, wetlands, marshes and forest with rolling contours and elevated greens and tees, extending the dune line through

Portz' focus is on cultural practices — frequent vertical mowing of greens, tees and fairways, additional aerification to help reduce thatch accumulation, and frequent top dressing.

the course and creating dramatic ocean views and play.

Portz intends to maintain natural integrity while providing the best possible playing conditions. His focus is on cultural practices — frequent vertical mowing of greens, tees and fairways, additional aerification to help reduce thatch accumulation, and frequent top dressing.

An Integrated Pest Management program is monitored, and the use of chemicals strictly limited. The course's monitoring wells are tested regularly for products certified for use.

Each product must be evaluated by Hammock Dunes' safety department, headed by Candy Kilpatrick, and the environmental department, headed by Frank Meeker. This strict policy has necessitated using other resources to produce quality turf.

Fertility levels also are monitored carefully. Sandy soils and the amount of water necessary to maintain an oceanside course allow for more than average leaching. Therefore, Portz found that lighter and more frequent application suited his program. It provided less chance for excessive nutrients to reach the water table.

With the expertise of assistant Jim Lycans and a staff of 22, Portz feels the par 72 18-hole course equidistant of St. Augustine and Daytona Beach is kept in championship condition.

The facility encompasses 120 acres of grounds and includes a formal clubhouse directly on the ocean.

Hammock Dunes, opened in April 1989, was nominated that year for Golf Digest's "Best New Private Course" award, named to 14th place on Florida's best course list by Golfweek and named to that publication's top 50 courses in the Southeast.

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