

# Andy Brennan puts ingenuity to work at Opryland course

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The day Andy Brennan found out he was on the waiting list for Cornell University, he received an invitation to apply for admission to Vanderbilt University here. He decided to go south, and has been in the Nashville area since.

"I was already interested in golf courses," said Brennan, who grew up in New Jersey. He started hanging around local courses when he was 12, started caddying when he was 14, and was working on a summer maintenance crew at 17.

"My initial interest was in golf course architecture, and Vanderbilt was offering some interesting programs with their engineering degrees, integrating engineering with other study areas, including arts and sciences," Brennan said.

He ended up with an engineering science degree from Vanderbilt, with emphasis in civil engineering. That training has been a big help in his present job as superintendent at Spring House Golf Club at Opryland Hotel.

Brennan joined Spring House Golf Club when ground was broken for the new course in April, 1989. Before that, he had been with Temple Hills Golf and Country Club in Nashville, the last eight years as superintendent. He began at Temple Hills fresh from college, first as a working foreman, then assistant superintendent, and finally as superintendent from 1981-1989.

He saw the new Spring House course as an exciting challenge. The 7,007-yard course was carved out of farmland on the west bank of the Cumberland River on the east side of Nashville, not far from the Opryland Hotel.

The course is named after the old stone spring house, built in the late 1800s and still covering a running spring that bubbles out of the limestone bluffs.

Brennan said the course is blessed with good, silty river bottom soil instead of the rocky, heavy clay soils that cover much of the area. "Although it's a fine-particle soil, it can get hard quickly in dry weather, so it requires a lot of aeration and top dressing."

The flat, river bottom area was built up with bumps and mounds in construction to make it a "British Open" type course, said Brennan. Rocky bluffs along the west side of the course and the winding Cumberland River along the east side make for tricky wind shifts.

The Spring House course was built by Landscapes Unlimited of Lincoln, Neb. It was designed by Larry Nelson Design Associates. Golfscapes of Arlington, Tex., was the architect.

The course opened for play in September, 1990, thanks in part to the fact that much of the course was sodded. "We felt the investment in sod would be well spent in getting the turf established faster," Brennan said. "We sodded the greens, tee banks and bunker faces. Fairways were sprigged, but because of the nature of the terrain, one good rain would wash out a lot of sprigging on the slopes, so we put in sod."



Andy Brennan gives directions to a mower operator.

Sodding began in April and was completed in mid-August. Greens are Penncross bentgrass; 419 Tifway Bermuda was used on the rest. Because of a severe winter in mid-Tennessee, much sod suffered winter kill, so Spring House brought in sod from a number of suppliers.

Brennan said he was lucky to obtain use of a new top dresser, designed by Cushman, after the sod was lain. "We used it to fill in the seams and top dressed frequently as the sod was taking hold. One pleasant surprise was that, because of the fifth wheel design of the unit and the resulting low ground pressure, we were able to top dress the greens without worrying about compaction or rutting."

"It hauled a lot more sand, but left virtually no tracks in the turf so it had no more impact than regular, smaller top dressing units."

The fifth wheel top dresser was used extensively during grow-in on the greens. "We put on a lot of material—basically ran it almost wide open," Brennan said. "It saved us time and labor."

Brennan top dresses the greens with a mix of 80 percent sand and 20 percent spagnum peat. The construction contract called for left-

over mix to be stockpiled at the course, and the grounds crew is using that stockpile.

He said Spring House was built specifically for guests of the 1,891-room Opryland hotel, which operates at about 85 percent capacity year-round. "The majority of play will be by convention-goers, so we anticipate a wide range of golf ability by players," he said. "Our hope is to keep play to about 40,000 rounds per year. We don't want to overdo it."

The course will be open year-round, but because of the sometimes wide fluctuations in weather in mid-Tennessee, Brennan may have to close the course at times. The 18-hole course is par 72 and is built with five sets of tees to accommodate varying golfer skills.

Although annual precipitation in the area ranges around the 40-45 inch mark, Spring House course is equipped with "wall-to-wall" irrigation, with some 1,400 sprinkler heads, all computer controlled. Water supply comes from the course's own wells.

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