

Wetlands are championed at Columbus' Medallion Club

By MARK LESLIE

GENOATOWNSHIP, Ohio—In a costly show of goodwill, Champions Development Group has fashioned a wetlands preserve and learning center on 85 acres of its new golf course, opening a nature area that beforehand was inaccessible to the public.

Allies, not antagonists — that describes the relationship Hoover Nature Preserve and Champions Development Group developed as they progressed on The Medallion Club.

"They've given us a lot of freebies. I've always preached that conservationists and developers have to work together for joint goals. This is a good example of that," said Mike Bailey, who founded the Hoover Nature Preserve and is chairman of its advisory council.

Besides the terms of wetlands mitigation, Champions also "gave us a nature trail, an earthen overlook of the marsh, and they bulldozed the base for a parking lot and the fill for a turnaround," he added.

"They're tickled with what they have. We're happy because we got what we needed to make the project work," said Richard S. Brogan, director of site development for Champions. "We went to great lengths to do it and do it right."

"Champions were interesting developers," said Larry Hawkins, president of Geoscience Golf Development Services, which was involved in the project. "They were very environment-conscious and wanted to do a showcase property and cooperate with the city. The nature preserve was one result."

When Champions bought the 600-acre site, it inherited about 85 acres of protected wetlands and a blue heron rookery. Working with local, state and federal officials, and the Nature Preserve, Champions preserved the 85 acres including 25 acres of highest quality wetlands. Each acre of wetlands that was disturbed was replaced by 1.5 acres of wetlands.

Besides that, the developers improved an area fraught with flooding problems. Runoff from surrounding land had flooded subdivisions.

The Army Corps of Engineers required that Champions divert 70 percent of the water to the Hoover Reservoir, the city of Columbus' water supply. Working with Hawkins and



Champions Development Group not only created wetlands, but also a way for nature-lovers to walk to them.

Dave Tyndall of EMH&T engineers in Gahanna, Champions built a 15-foot-deep, 40-foot-wide channel that runs from a major lake excavation in the middle of the site, through the Hoover Nature Preserve and into the reservoir.

That rerouting, Hawkins said, "created the opportunity to develop the nature center."

"We asked that they build a marsh instead of a drainage ditch," Bailey said. The resulting eight-acre Mud-hen Marsh was designed for coots, a species of bird that lives in a hemming marsh complex — which is half emerging vegetation and half open water.



Bailey put the cost of his marsh complex at \$300,000.

Hoover Nature Preserve has become "our biggest supporter," Brogan said. "They've seen that we've tried to do our best and they've worked very closely with us. It's been a benefit to us both."

The golf course? Brogan believes it is a winner, too, gaining the goodwill of area golfers.

Designed by Jack Nicklaus II, 18 of the 27 holes are complete. The third nine will be built this year and is scheduled to open in July 1995.

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