

Penn State landscape students' project a boon to grounds budget

By MARK LESLIE

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. — Superintendents at the country's 50-odd university golf courses might borrow a page from the Penn State Golf Course textbook. Through an innovative course, students are getting hands-on experience and the golf course is getting nine newly landscaped holes for the cost of the materials alone.

"That's a deal you can't beat," said Scott Rushe, assistant superintendent who coordinated all the materials while landscape Profs. Perry Morgan and Dan Stearns organized the students. "Our budget is limited. The students and instructors provided us with the finished product — they designed it all, built retaining walls, steps and a footbridge, and did the landscaping. And all it cost us was materials.

"Being union, if we had done the work we would have paid \$12, \$13 an hour to build a rock wall. It's hard to say how many hours the students put in — their class time, weekends, free time."

Free work like this need not be limited to universities, Rushe said. He cited a former employer, Country Club of Pittsburgh, where members donated money for flowers, shrubs and other items.

"At both private and public courses, the members can do that. Our ladies league here donated water coolers. This sort of thing can be done anywhere," he said.

The project proceeded so smoothly, there are hopes students will perform some improvements each year, said Rushe, given the assignment by superintendent Rick Bupp.

Jeff Mowrer, manager and head professional at Penn State, said the project primarily allows students "to learn to design and develop things in the classroom and then apply them in the field, which is what it's all about. Second, it's doing something to upgrade the image of the golf courses. We can show the work to people and say, 'Penn State students did that. Penn State professors did this.'"

Thirty-four students began the work last fall at 10 sites on the newly redesigned Blue Course. This semester, many of the same students are taking a planting design course in which they'll develop a landscape planting plan and also put the plants in the ground at the same 10 locations.

"They are designing and planning it. All we have to do is order plants, and look for donations to the university," Rushe said. "When we built the 11 new holes in 1992 we had a plain course — no landscaping or anything." When it opens this spring, it will be a beautified creation.

Among the current sites, much

of the work has been done around tee boxes. The bridge was built around a wetland area.

"We're taking the theory that's taught in the classroom and we're applying it in real life," said Morgan. "The good part about it is that we're able to learn from our experiences in a hands-on way. A lot of the design work is a sculptural thing — you can't just

do it strictly by the plans.

"Actually getting out there and picking out the stones for the walls and seeing how the available materials may affect the design are as important as the plans."

The project also boosted the students' cooperative and competitive spirits, which

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Students build a retaining wall at one of 10 sites on Penn State's newly redesigned Blue Course.

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Collier's Reserve the pacesetter in N.Y. Audubon's Signature Program

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The New York Audubon may be the only organization in the world working with developers in sustainability programs, while other groups stop with printed material. Compared to the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses, this program costs a lot more up front, but the payback is certain, Hiers said. "It easily cost us \$200,000. But before people get intimidated by that, it will cost a lot less to maintain," he said. "You use less water, electricity, fertilizer, pesticides. It's a more maintainable golf course. Payback for us will be about four years."



Tim Hiers

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— Tim Hiers

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"Instead of cutting down a tree and burying it, you leave it standing as a snag for eagles and ospreys, hawks and owls, woodpeckers and red-bellied woodpeckers," Hiers said. "Your whole focus is totally different. But the amazing part of this is, it actually makes the golf course look better and it's less expensive. It's better for the habitat and for the animals and birds."

Native vegetation replaced grass in certain areas of the Art Hills-designed track, he said.

And while it costs more to plant, after the first six months of keeping the weeds out, the natives use no water, electricity, fertilizer, pesticides, or labor.

"That is forever," Hiers said. "The most expensive thing to maintain on a golf course is what you have to care for by hand — with Flymos, weed eaters and other small specialty equipment. Those are also the most expensive pieces of equipment to maintain and the most dangerous to operate."

"What we've done is not necessarily all new. The top superintendents have been doing them for 20 years. But we've taken points A, B, C, D, E and F and put them all together in one package."

Hiers plans to set up an environmental educational center for visitors, nature trails for guided tours for schoolchildren, water conservation booklets for the club's 228 homeowners, and slide shows on the club's environment for its members.

Hiers, who came from ecology-friendly John's Island West in Vero Beach, said part of his motivation for joining the Signature program was to prove that golf courses are not environmental villains.

Dodson's office is located at 46 Rarick Road, Selkirk, N.Y. 12158; telephone 518-767-9051.

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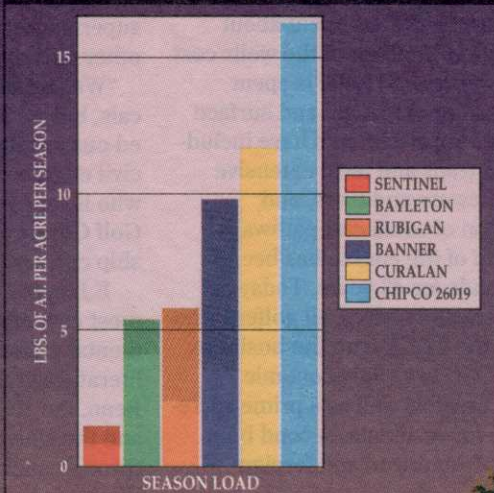


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Penn State

Continued from previous page improved the project. "Part of the interesting thing was to watch these teams work together and watch the leadership develop," says Stearns. "We saw lots of cooperation as well as lots of friendly competition. There was this overall determination within the class that the job had to be done right."

Help also originated from outside the campus. A stone mason volunteered time with the students, and Rushe said, "Various contractors in the area lent them hand tools — a great gesture."