

Stevinson Ranch's Barrett out front on environment

By DOUG SAUNDERS

The 10th hole on the Savannah Course at Stevenson Ranch in California is bordered by a towering stand of cottonwood trees that rise up from a thick tangle of underbrush. From the deep recesses of this 60-acre wetland, the cacophony of countless birds fills the air. As golfers look down the rolling fairway of the 430-yard par-4, their vibrant songs add to the setting. They study the route they want to play, but peer into the wetland hoping to glimpse one of the hundreds of songsters in the bramble. Golf here is more than the course itself, it becomes a grand path through nature.

Stevinson Ranch in California's Central Valley is a new course that not only has made strides to be a great golfing experience, it set out to be a model of environmental excellence. It is one of only five golf courses in the world, and the only one west of the Mississippi River, that has achieved Signature status from Audubon International. This designation is bestowed upon golf projects that from their outset commit to being a sustainable ecosystem that both protects and enhances wildlife habitat and natural resources through its design, maintenance, and management.



Natural waste areas like this are a part of Stevenson Ranch's allure.

Superintendent Roger Barrett has been aboard at Stevenson Ranch since May 1996 and has overseen the evolution of a work in progress.

"The relationship that we have with Audubon International as a Signature course is very unique in that we have implemented various programs from the moment that plans were being prepared for the course," Barrett said. "Throughout the design, care was taken to preserve natural habitat for wildlife, help to maintain migratory patterns for animals, and create mountings and grading that will benefit both irrigation and drainage."



In conjunction with the course design, there are guidelines for the design and construction of all of the infrastructure, including clubhouse, maintenance buildings, storage buildings to make them environmentally safe and energy-efficient. The idea is to minimize the impact to the entire ecosystem that has been created on the property.

For the golf course itself, the design team of architect John Harbottle III and project developer George Kelly wanted to produce a hard, fast playing surface which would emulate the true Scottish links style that highlights a playable surface rather than a wall-to-wall

Freddy Bird photos



Roger Barrett and Audubon International President Ron Dodson at Stevenson Ranch.

parkland look. This style lent itself to creating a course that would work well on a plot of land that has a high natural water table because they could limit irrigation use to a minimum.

"This has been an interesting challenge to work on a course where a hard and dry stand of turf is the goal," Barrett said. "We get a lot of heat in the summer and cool, foggy days in winter. At our course a little brown is a good thing, not something to be feared. We are showing many other facilities that you can provide a strong, healthy stand of turf without excessive use of water and chemicals."

Barrett began his career in turf management in 1960 after graduating

Continued on page 26

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Focus on Barrett

Continued from previous page

from the University of Massachusetts. Following short stints at various courses in the region, he worked on the construction of Glastonbury Hills Country Club in Hartford, Conn., in 1965. He remained as superintendent there until he headed west in 1991.

Glastonbury was a traditional parkland course, where a wall-to-wall manicured look was the ideal. Barrett came to Stevinson Ranch as part of the management team of O.B. Sports, which runs the facility and whom he worked for in the Las Vegas area for a time. The concepts at Stevinson presented a new perspective and a refreshing approach to turf management for Barrett.

"The biggest changes has been developing a program that promotes healthy turf that can withstand stress on its own. Here at Stevinson we use two-thirds less chemicals than would be needed on a course [with wall-to-wall coverage]. Our water usage is carefully monitored and determined through need. Through careful daily monitoring of conditions we can be more specific in determining outbreaks of any weed or insect infestations.

"We try to not take any drastic remedies until it is absolutely necessary. This tolerant approach to disease and infestation control is the responsible way to go," Barrett said of his carefully documented IPM program.

Around the golf course, the influence of the Audubon program abounds, both seen and unseen. For example, more than 50 bird houses have been installed to encourage nesting by the 85 species of birds that have been spotted onsite. More houses are added each year as over 80 percent of the houses are now occupied. The course's weather station gauges evaporation rates to help determine how much water is needed to be added each day. The carefully designed irrigation system has more than 1,000 heads that can be individually controlled to deal with trouble spots.

Unseen to the golfer are the subtle influences of the Audubon Signature program guidelines. The four 750-gpm irrigation pumps are energy-efficient variable speed pumps rather than single-speed units.

The maintenance buildings are heavily insulated with double-pane windows to improve both heating and air-conditioning efficiency. All concrete floors in the building are specially sealed to keep

residues and spills from soaking into the surface. Buildings use skylights and quartz lights to cut down electrical usage. Even the grading of parking lots is done in such a way that all runoff can be contained and controlled on site.

"All of these facets of our approach to the management of our facility seem like small items, but they add up to creating a more sustainable

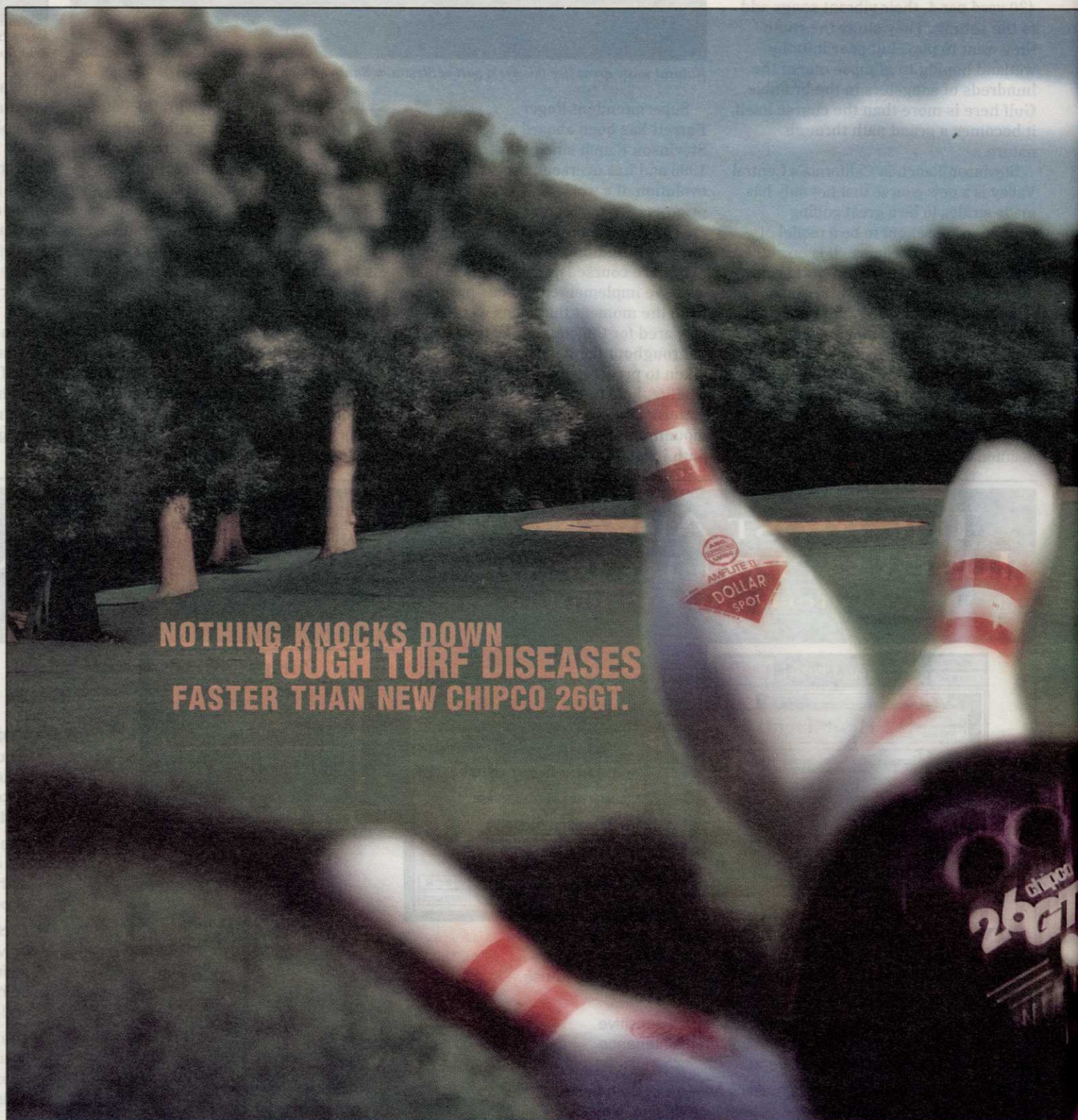
environment that can be a model for other golf facilities," Barrett said.

Barrett manages a crew of 20 in the summer and 15 during the winter. The spacious main building includes individual lockers, shower, and a full kitchen. The neat appearance helps develop a sense of pride in the work force that carries on out to the golf course.

"I have many other superin-

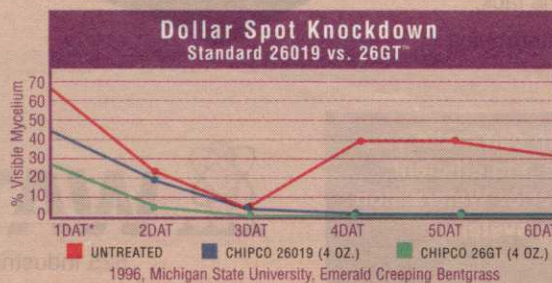
tendents in the state come to Stevinson to see what we are trying to accomplish here," Barrett said. "The direction we have taken to be an environmentally sensitive facility doesn't mean the quality of the course has to suffer. In actuality, we are showing to other courses that careful maintenance can improve the product for the golfer. We have seen the other courses making strides to improve."

In an effort to make the model of Stevinson Ranch more accessible to the general public, Barrett is beginning a program of adding nature trails into some of the course's hundreds of acres of wildlife habitat. The trails will help school groups and individuals enjoy and appreciate the beauty of the site. That appreciation is something that Barrett and Stevinson Ranch hope to nurture for years to come.



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