

Building long-lasting sod-wall bunkers like in the Old Country

By TERRY BUCHEN

ARCADIA, Mich. — In keeping with the links-type theme of Arcadia Bluffs Golf Club overlooking Lake Michigan here, course architects Rick Smith and Warren Henderson have incorporated many sod-wall sand bunkers with excellent results.

"In our sod-wall bunker design — drainage behind, below and around — the almost vertical stacking of sod is paramount for their long-term survival," said Henderson. "As long as there are very good drainage characteristics, the sod will last a long time and will not have to be replaced every two to three years."

Crews are using a locally grown bluegrass sod cut the normal 18-inch width and thickness for all the sod walls. The bottom row is laid approximately 6 inches above the bottom of the bunker soil subgrade. A 1-inch layer of soil is laid on top of each row and then the next row of sod is laid upside down, alternating back and forth (green side up; green side down, etc.) in the process.

As this occurs, the next row of sod is laid slightly back, keeping as vertical as possible while laying it back towards the existing soil slope, Henderson said.



Sod wall bunkers designed, constructed and maintained the easy way.

"All of our surface drainage around the sod-wall bunkers does not allow any water to get behind the sod wall," said Tim Furness, president of Furness Golf Construction, Inc., which is building the course. "This keeps the sod from getting too wet so it will not rot-out very fast at all."

Furness crews also are adding conventional 4-inch perforated ADS-

type drain tile and gravel, in a herring-bone design, to the bottoms of each bunker on 15-foot centers, or less.

"In maintaining our sod-wall bunkers, we have used a string-line trimmer, with the head flipped upside down, to mow the turf as closely as possible," said course superintendent Paul Emling. "Our maintenance goal is to try to keep the turf relatively short,



ON THE GREEN

so the individual rows and seams can be easily visible.

"If we did not do it this way," he added, "the turf would grow together and the rows and seams would not be visible, which would take the dramatic effect of the entire principle of building a sod-wall bunker, i.e. to be as vertical as possible while still affording a well-played shot."

Emling will experiment in various ways to achieve the look and playability that the owners and designers want. He may try using growth retardants; determining how different irrigation practices affect certain bunkers; overseeding with clump-type grasses such as sheeps and hard fescue; and blowing off excess sand from golf shots.

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