

# A win for everyone

## FLORIDA GOLF COURSE WILL COEXIST WITH WETLANDS, WILDLIFE AND RESIDENTS

by  
MARK  
LESLIE

Photos by Steve  
Smyers Golf  
Course Architects

**C**all it a quintuple win. For the golf industry in general. For wading birds and water life. For the project developers and future golfers. For the Southwest Florida Water Management District. And for golf course architect Steve Smyers.

"The project and its effects on the local environment have worked out fantastically," says Smyers, referring to The Golf Club at BridgeWater, which is now under construction and features a core golf course being built as the centerpiece of a new 757-acre residential community.

The property, which is in Lakeland, is a reclaimed phosphate mine and has 259 acres

of manmade lakes and wetlands.

"It has all the earmarks to serve as a poster child for ecological progressiveness," says Smyers, a member of the executive committee of the U.S. Golf Association, which has been an industry leader in environmental awareness.

Time will tell whether BridgeWater will be a model for golf course construction in wetland areas.

"This is something I'll be tracking for a while," says Jeff Whealton, a senior environmental scientist with the Southwest Florida Water Management District. "I hope it will be the standard.

"We haven't had the best experiences with golf courses," Whealton adds. "Some are maintained more than if they were in a subdivision setting without golf courses. Besides direct impacts, there also are possible secondary impacts from golf courses that are a concern in the review of these projects. Secondary impacts are caused by such things as fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides running off of the course into the wetlands."

In BridgeWater's case, Smyers, golf course developer Dirty Five and housing developer LandMar Development aren't replacing distressed wetlands with improved wetlands – a task that wins laudatory support from most corners. They must perform under higher expectations.

The BridgeWater site contains a classic definition of a perfect ephemeral wetland, one that dries up during dry season and comes back full force in the rainy season, according to Whealton. The first time Whealton visited BridgeWater, wetlands were dry – brown, crispy vegetation that looked dead.

"If that were your snapshot in time, you would think, 'This is pitiful; how do you

get mitigation for this?' he says. "But I went back after the rainy season, and we were wading in knee-deep water with dragon flies everywhere and little frogs chirping. It was a 180-degree turnaround. It went from a moonscape to a wetland wonderland."

Some of the most important wetlands in the country are less than half-acre patches that, in Florida, are typically exempt from mitigation criteria. Frogs and tadpoles and other amphibians and invertebrates gather in these little pools, and when they dry out, they become pockets of water where the wildlife is concentrated.

Two or three wading-bird rookeries are located in the immediate area. These wetlands are like a wading-bird's buffet – a major food source, according to Whealton.

"It's very important these little wetlands be available for the wading birds," he says.

And that's precisely what the SWFWMD wants replicated by the Smyers team and Biological Research Associates of Tampa, the environmental consultant working on the project.

"The bottom line of our environmental resource permits is that the conditions in post-development have to be the same in predevelopment," Whealton says. "There has to be functional replacement."

The watchwords for wetlands mitigation are always create, enhance, restore and preserve or a combination of the four.

Smyers' design partner Patrick Andrews says that at BridgeWater they're wiping the slate clean, i.e., regrading the entire 200 acres of the golf course, except for the existing 20 acres of trees and lakes.


Smyers and the development companies reached an agreement with SWFWMD officials that all the mitigation required for the entire BridgeWater community would

### AT A GLANCE

#### The Golf Club at BridgeWater in Lakeland, Fla.

Cost:	\$6 million
Construction began:	Spring 2005
Target date for opening:	October 2006
Course length:	7,254 yards
Par:	71
Golf course acreage:	200
Lake and wetland acreage:	259
Grass on greens:	Tifdwarf Bermudagrass
Grass on tees:	Aussie Green Bermudagrass
Grass on fairways:	Aussie Green Bermudagrass
Architect:	Steve Smyers
Developer:	Dirty Five
Builder:	John G. Walton Construction Co.
Golf course superintendent:	Sean Klotzbach





The BridgeWater site contains a classic definition of a perfect ephemeral wetland, one that dries up during the dry season and comes back in the rainy season.



be incorporated on the golf course.

"In this case, we're serving a practical need for the community because without the mitigation of these wetlands, Southwest Florida Water Management District wasn't going to permit the community," Andrews says. "So, the community gets the practical benefit of getting all their mitigation taken care of so they're not worried about weaving homes around wetlands. They get an efficiency in how they can build out their community. Plus, we get a core golf course in relationship to a strong environmental context, which makes the best golf holes and provides a great experience for the golfer."

### The creation

Smyers says the development team will improve the ephemeral wetlands, creating 32 contiguous – rather than spotty and unconnected – acres that will be controlled to remain shallow year-round rather than just during the rainy season.

"It will be stunning to look at – a marvelous addition to the golf course," he says.

The water fluctuates strongly in Florida between the dry and wet seasons, but Whealton says planners knew the final out-flow elevation from the property and could plan backwards from that spot, stacking all the water back up inside the project.

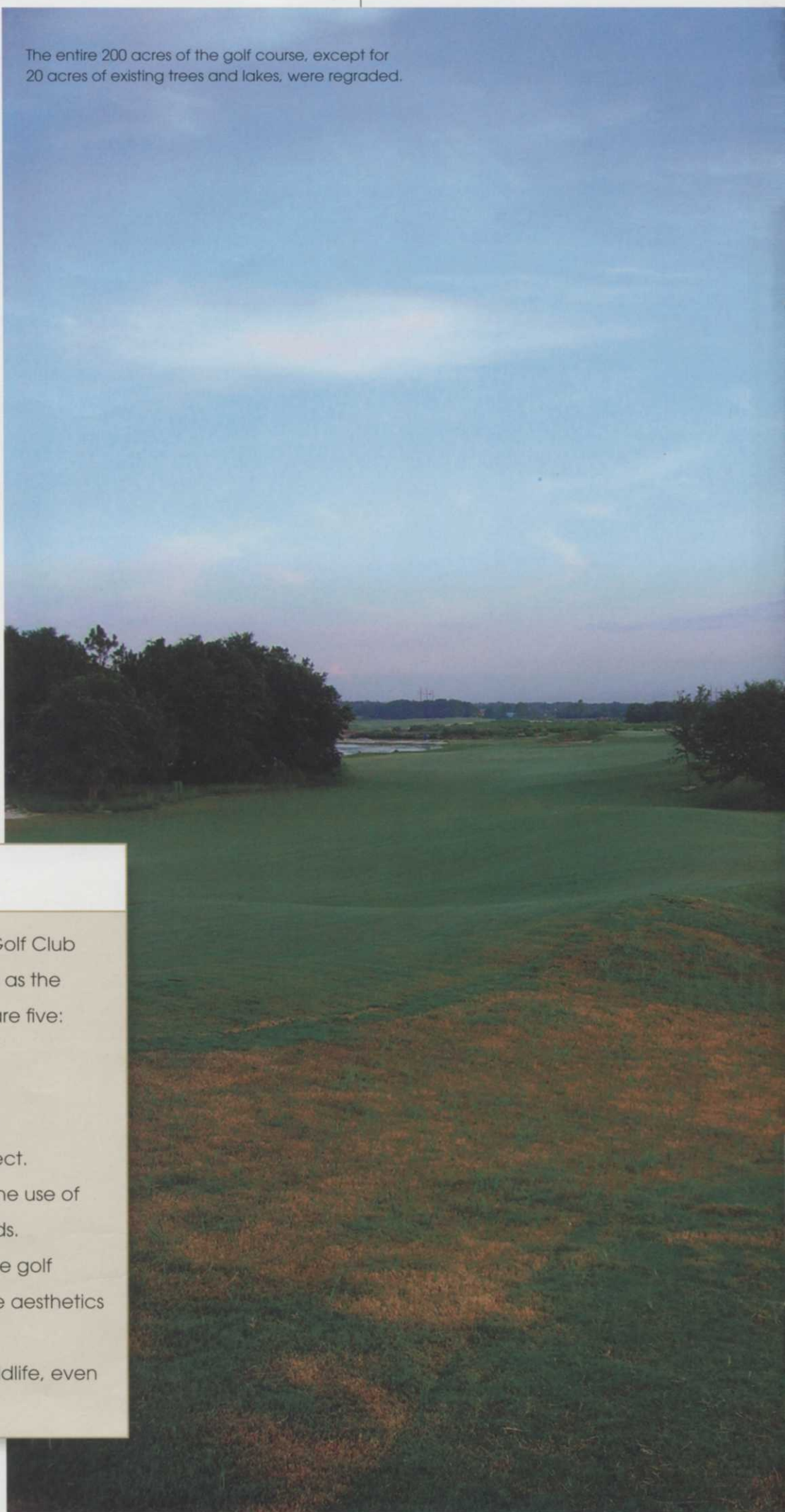
Having Mobile, Ala.-based golf course builder John G. Walton Construction Co.

The entire 200 acres of the golf course, except for 20 acres of existing trees and lakes, were regraded.

## Everyone wins

There are many positive aspects of the development of The Golf Club at BridgeWater, which contains a core golf course being built as the centerpiece of a new 757-acre residential community. Here are five:

- The area's wading birds get an all-you-can-eat buffet.
- The Southwest Florida Water Management District gets its replacement ephemeral wetlands, fulfilling its mission and illustrating another solution for a major development project.
- Developers LandMar and Dirty Five are able to optimize the use of their 1,500 acres and preserve precious lakes and wetlands.
- Golf course architect Steve Smyers is able to design a core golf course uninhibited by housing and take advantage of the aesthetics of viable, high-class wetlands.
- Golf wins by proving it can cohabitate with all types of wildlife, even those that eat one another.







completely regrade the land allowed Smyers and Andrews to control the water so there won't be too much or too little water at any time.

"You have to control the grading so that in the wet season the plants won't be inundated with too much water, and in the dry season, there's not so much water that the wading birds can't forage for fish," Andrews says.

Walton is grading three zones: a deep zone, an intermediate zone and an upland native-grass zone, all of which will interact with the golf course.

"We're creating everything from upland habitat and live oaks to the buffer zones with native grasses bordering wetland areas," Andrews says.

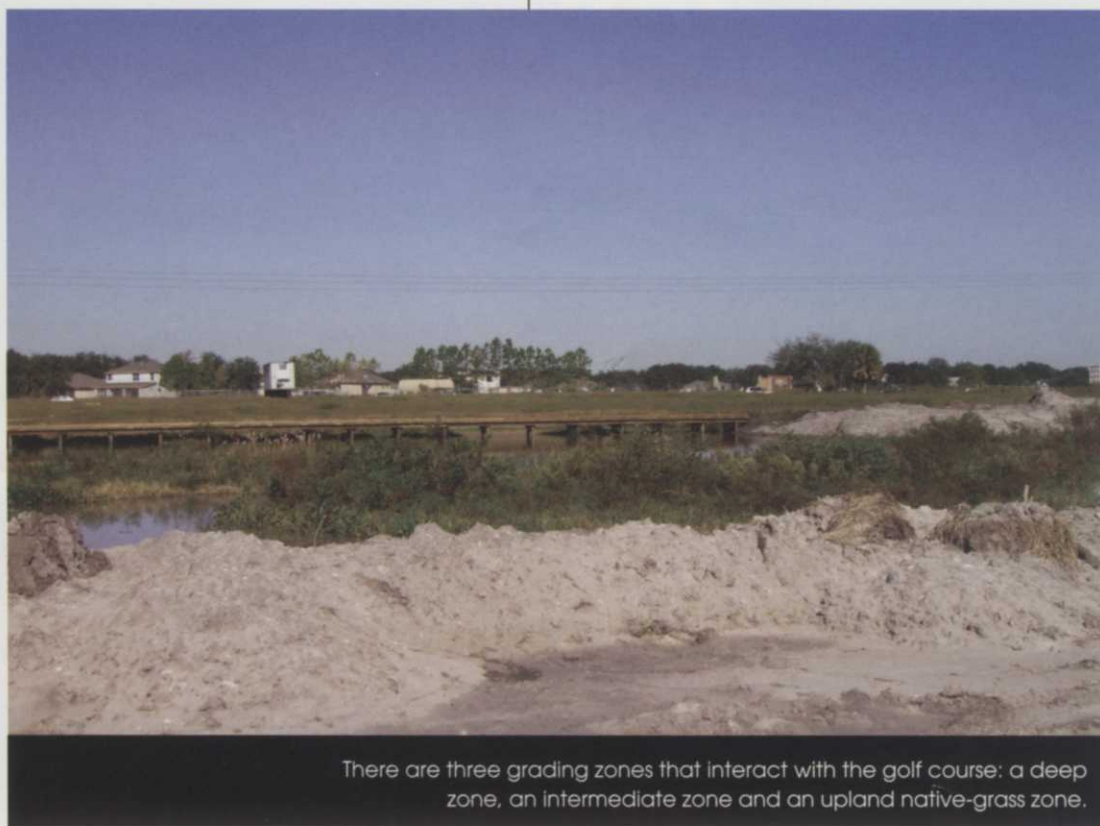
In effect, they're creating a 165-acre wildlife corridor that will include 79 acres of recreated wetlands and 64 acres of upland native plantings in trees and grasses. Upland materials range from a variety of native trees to grasses and shrubs, such as slash pine, sabal palm, cord grass and paspalum.

There also will be parks interspersed throughout the property and common areas around lakes and wetlands that are important amenities to people who will be living there, according to Lakeland planning manager Bruce Kistler. The new BridgeWater wetlands also will serve to handle runoff from the nearby interstate and an abutting office park. GCN

*Mark Leslie is a freelancer writer in Monmouth, Maine. He can be reached gripfast@adelphia.net.*



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