

Six courses sprawl through 8,000 acres in northern Arizona. Photo: Desert Mountain

The courses generated about 145,000 rounds last year.

Management has had to change its focus, and it puts more emphasis on the entire experience, not just a golf experience, Jones says. This approach seems to be taking hold, as more people are living at the community year-round, rather than treating the community as a second home or getaway, as

they did when Desert Mountain first opened. The members are using more of the community's other amenities, including the increasingly popular fitness and spa-related activities, and golfing less, Jones says.

The club also has faced other golf-related challenges and changes in its first 20 years. The biggest change is the method of irrigating the courses, Emerson says. Because of increasing consciousness of water conservation, the courses have switched to an irrigation system with effluent water. The courses now have irrigation systems that work more precisely, watering only as necessary to prevent waste.

Desert Mountain isn't immune to the skyrocketing costs other courses face. Management tries to stay on top of rising material costs

because of fuel costs and other factors and budget for it as much as possible. The business department provides frequent updates.

"We're operating in real-time," Emerson says. "That validated decisions we've made as managers about paths we need to go down. To run a club of this magnitude, you have to be able to pick up on trends."

Another key to running a club of this size is having a capable staff to run each aspect. Jones credits a solid training program for keeping everything running smoothly among the 700 employees. Comment cards and surveys are made available to members to rate their service and their interaction with the employees. A rating of 87 percent or higher must be maintained for employees to receive yearly incentives and bonuses.

Jones retains employees by making it a desirable place to work. Each year, he compares employees' pay with the standard acceptable rate in the industry to make sure all is fair.

Emerson left the course for employment elsewhere, only to return two years later. He has been at the club 11 straight years.

"People always want to look for something greener, but then you realize there's nothing better out there," he says. "What makes Desert Mountain exceptional is that it holds itself to high standards." – HW

Better coverage

In 2001, Tony Girardi, CGCS, knew he wanted to increase the irrigation system's coverage at Rockrimmon Country Club in Stamford, Conn. Course conditions weren't what he wanted, and improving coverage seemed to be the answer. But as nearby areas began to impose water restrictions, Girardi knew it wasn't just about water coverage, it was about efficiency, too.

Older than 25 years, the system was aging. The technology was outdated, and the sprinkler heads didn't water the course evenly, creating waste and less-than-desired conditions. So, after receiving the blessing of the green committee in 2001, Girardi chose a new and improved, wall-to-wall, multirow irrigation system.

The new system uses more sprinkler heads that are spaced closer together. The old system had 450 heads in single lines on the fairways. Now, there are 1,350 Rain Bird Eagle 700/750 heads with head-to-head spacing. The number of heads increased dramatically, partly because the coverage area was increased to include the roughs.

"Where we used to irrigate 30 acres, now we water 80 acres," Girardi says. "We're almost tripling the irrigation heads while putting out almost equal or just a little bit more water."

The irrigation system used to consume about 15 million gallons of water per year, and now, with 50 more acres of coverage, water usage increased to about 18 million gallons.



An aging irrigation system caused Rockrimmon Country Club to install a new one. Photo: Rockrimmon Country Club

"It's evident in the numbers that we've been more efficient with water," Girardi says. "I'm pretty confident what we installed is working pretty well for us."

Water efficiency is becoming more important in several areas of the U.S. as it becomes scarce and regions restrict usage. Girardi isn't



It took the contractor from August 2001 to early June 2002 to install the new irrigation system. Photo: Rockrimmon Country Club

oblivious to the situation – Stamford is next to Westchester County, N.Y., which imposed water restrictions.

Restrictions or not, Girardi tries to water efficiently. The new system helps him do that more than he has been able to with the older system. He can control each sprinkler head from his office computer or with handheld Palm Pilots and radio-controlled devices, improving head-to-head coverage. If there's a hot spot or a dry patch on the fairway, Girardi can independently run heads to bring more attention to those areas without wasting water by running all the heads at the same strength.

Although Girardi says he's no authority on irrigation, this is the second complete system he has installed during his career. In addition, he retrofitted Rockrimmon's system after he arrived 13 years ago.

The biggest benefit of the computerized system is the ability to integrate the evapotranspiration rate to water the course most efficiently, Girardi says.

It took contractor C.R.I.S. Irrigation from August 2001 to early June 2002 to install the system at a cost of \$1.3 million. The course, which generates about 14,000 rounds a year, remained open during that time. Surprisingly to the membership (the club has 175

members), it wasn't much of a disturbance. At first, it wasn't an easy sell for the greens committee and membership, Girardi says.

"It's something members really don't see because it's in the ground," he says, adding it's not like going into the clubhouse to dine and seeing a difference in the food quality. "They don't see it, so it's hard to justify," he says.

Once the project was completed, it took only one or two seasons for members to realize how much the playing conditions improved, Girardi says.

Because of the system's expanded coverage area, Girardi can't claim he's saving money on water or electricity costs, but he saves in manpower.

"Maintenance and repair costs decreased from \$10,000 annually to \$7,500 per year," he says. The savings are in the overall conditions of the golf course. We've got one of the biggest wait lists we've seen at the club. We're financially sound, we have a sound membership, and a big part of that is due to the irrigation and golf course conditioning." – HW

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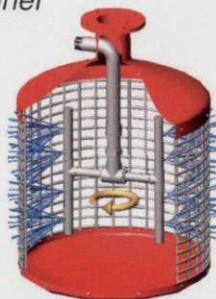
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