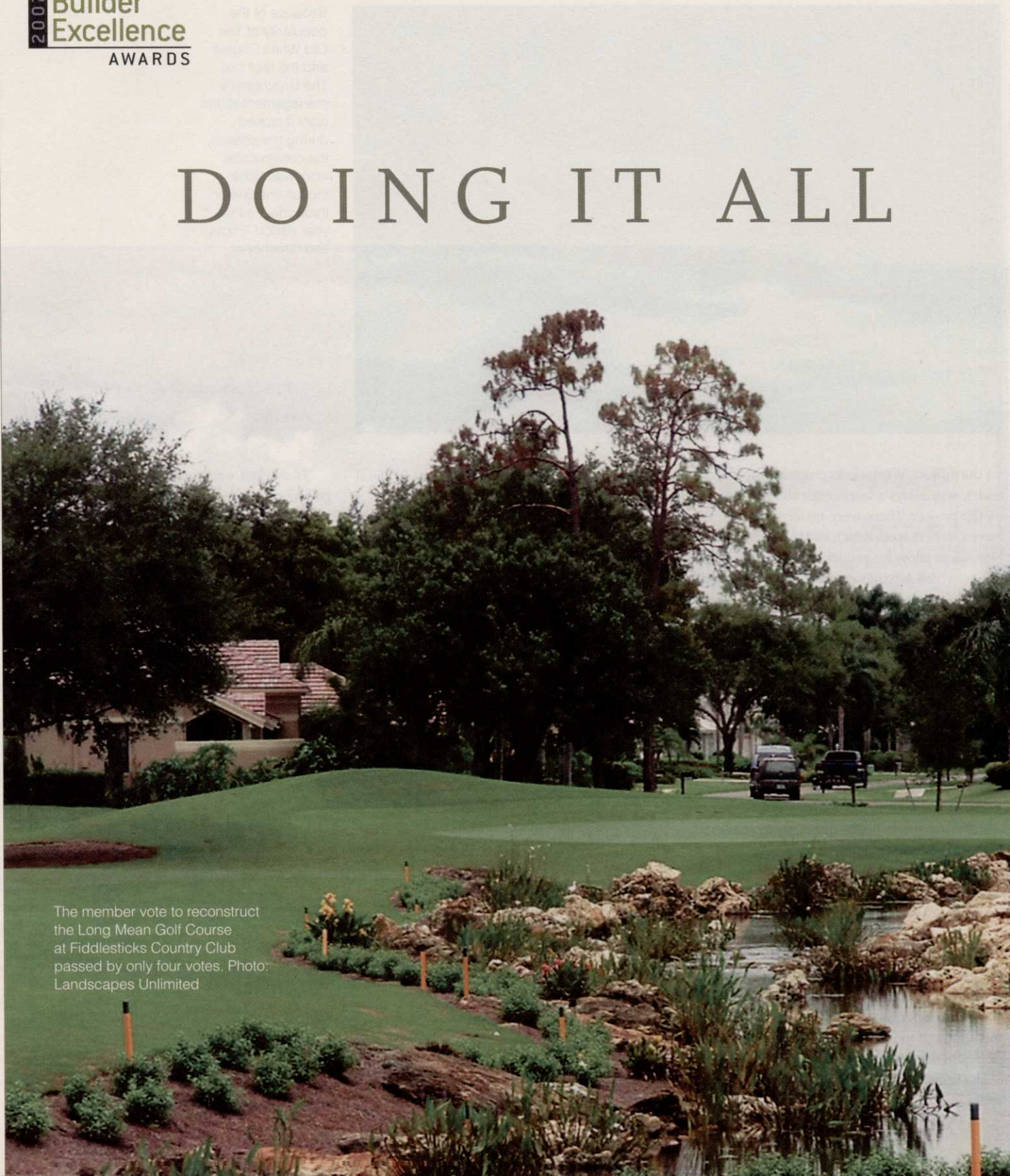


DESIGN CASE STUDY

GOLF COURSE  
INDUSTRY  
2007  
Builder  
Excellence  
AWARDS

# DOING IT ALL

The member vote to reconstruct the Long Mean Golf Course at Fiddlesticks Country Club passed by only four votes. Photo: Landscapes Unlimited



2007 **Heritage**  
Award Winner

## A builder takes a turnkey approach and battles hurricanes to reconstruct a Florida course

BY MICHAEL COLEMAN

**A**fter successfully reconstructing the Long Mean Golf Course, members of Fiddlesticks Country Club in Fort Myers, Fla., feel like they've turned back the clock 23 years when they step on the first tee. The restoration is an accomplishment that earned Landscapes Unlimited a vote of confidence from the most demanding client: the club's members.

"The members voted to do this, and it passed by four votes," says Greg Pick, executive vice president of Fiddlesticks. "Now, you can't find anybody that voted against it."

Unlike projects that disintegrate into squabbling among various contractors involved, this one was marked by teamwork and exceptionally good communication between contractors and club membership.

Landscapes Unlimited had responsibility for the entire package, including engineering, architecture, design, purchasing, construction and grow-in. With its background of building golf courses, some of which it owns, Landscapes has the resources to manage the additional risk of the design-build approach.

"We learned from our own experience," says Leonard Schilling, a regional manager for Landscapes based in Southern Pines, N.C. "We're better able to identify many pitfalls earlier."

While a company's capabilities are crucial, it all boils down to people, says architect Ron Garl of Ron Garl Golf Design based in Lakeland, Fla.

"They sent a very capable golf course superintendent down there," Garl says. "They picked CT Shaw, who was the right one for the job. He did a great job and was an excellent choice."

Alongside Shaw was golf course superintendent Ryan Costello, who was brought in by the club to assist with the construction phase.

"He and CT were joined at the hip for the entire project," Pick says. "Ryan would write a weekly report for the members so they knew what we were doing. It eliminated a lot of controversy."

In the eyes of the members who voted against it, the polished communication helped the project evolve from a rough stone into a crown jewel. Having a primary contractor also contributed.

"Having a contractor that has the capability to oversee

all aspects of a job is fantastic for the club," Costello says. "You don't have to worry about who to call. It's their job to handle everything."

The original contract stated the guaranteed maximum price to be \$4.9 million and the designer-builder to be responsible for additional costs except for scope changes. The final cost was about \$5.2 million after several club-approved scope changes and improvements.

### AT A GLANCE **Fiddlesticks Country Club**

**Location:** Fort Myers, Fla.

**Type of project:** Reconstruction

**Cost:** \$5.2 million

**Construction started:** February 2005

**Course opened:** November 2005

**Builder:** Landscapes Unlimited

**Architect:** Ron Garl Golf Design

**Golf course superintendents:** CT Shaw and Ryan Costello

**Owner:** Club members



During the reconstruction, Landscapes Unlimited was responsible for engineering, architecture, design, purchasing, construction and grow-in. Photo: Landscapes Unlimited

#### NOT SO EASY

Even though Landscapes' turnkey approach made certain aspects of the project easy, Mother Nature wasn't so helpful. The crew at Fiddlesticks Country Club survived repeated lashings from hurricanes, but with the help of Landscapes, it restored the course to prominence within a tight schedule. With some of the turf eradicated because of a fall pesticide spraying, the construction phase began Feb. 14, 2005. The course was finished and grow-in of the Tifway 419 Bermudagrass complete when another hurricane came lumbering through and conflicted with the opening.

Pick toasted the team involved for collaborat-

ing to overcome the hurricanes that swarmed the area from day one until the opening Nov. 3, 2005. Pick's crew rebounded quickly from the first blow from Hurricane Charlie in August of 2004.

"We had a lot of clean up to do, and we just got it done," he says.

Much of Costello's work early on was coordinating the cleanup of 500 trees blown down by Hurricane Charlie. Once the cleanup was complete, the project progressed more smoothly. Fiddlesticks' membership helped with that progress. It was represented by two members with construction backgrounds, Hap Skillman and Frank Scott. They helped Costello track the progress of the work and communicated,

A cleanup of 500 downed trees as a result of Hurricane Charlie affected the reconstruction project. Photo: Landscapes Unlimited

FROM



“You really had a good mesh of the right people and personalities,” Schilling says.

The group Fiddlesticks put together with members Skillman and Scott was terrific because they knew construction and how to work through challenges, Schilling says.

Garl, who designed the course 25 years ago, was brought back for the reconstruction to help the club retain the heritage of the course. One of the enhancements Garl likes is a new waste area that swings around the first fairway, adding a wow factor to the opening hole. The waste area mimics the soft dunes of inland Florida.

“If you go inland, that’s what happens to the natural land,” Garl says. “Mother Nature is our best guide.”

Members are enjoying one of the better courses in Florida since the reconstruction.

“It truly is the flagship of golf in Southwest Florida because it withstood the test of time,” Garl says. “We’re excited to have a job done that well by a great team.”

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almost daily, with the team from Landscapes, including Shaw and Oscar San Juan, the irrigation superintendent.

“Just the way the three of us worked together was far and away the best part of the project for me,” Costello says. “No one was trying to be special. We were all doing our part. That was fantastic.”

In addition to the hurricanes, there were other challenges:

- Shrinking greens and bunkers. Greens suffered a loss of pin placements under normal maintenance. The bunkers and greens were restored to the original specifications while adjusting for TifEagle greens.

- Outdated irrigation. The original plan was to replace two old pump stations and improve water capacity. During planning and design, it was determined that one of the pumps also served the Wee Friendly course at the club. The team determined both courses’ water problems could be solved by installing a larger pump station at that site and leaving the second pump station in place.

- Deteriorated cart paths. Old paths were replaced and waste areas were utilized to handle much of the cart traffic.

- Stagnant canal. The third hole was improved by adding a series of waterfalls to a revamped creek. Native limestone found during construction was used for landscaping the signature hole.

**A DIFFERENT APPROACH**

All members of the team working together was crucial because the approach to the project was so different.

“Having Landscapes Unlimited be the only go-to, I’d never heard of that before,” Costello says. “It was very interesting having one person in charge of construction, architecture, grow-in, grassing – just every aspect of it.”

Landscapes’ expertise in multiple areas made the project run smoothly, Schilling says.

“It was just a matter of focusing the resources we already had into that, and we felt we could do it pretty successfully,” he says.

Knowledgeable club members also were helpful.

**What the judges said**

“There was a unique relationship in which Landscapes actually became the owner agent and was the only go-to company through which the ownership or membership worked. Landscapes then went out and contracted with the original architect, Ron Garl, irrigation architects and anyone needed to provide engineering or landscape design for the project. It was a success because they created a good product at an agreed upon price in a timely manner.”

— **Terry Buchen, president of Golf Agronomy International in Williamsburg, Va.**

“It’s pretty remarkable that it turnkeyed the job from design to actual grow-in. It looks like the owner is very happy with the outcome. They’re making money on their investment, which shows the builder accomplished its job.”

— **Joe Livingston, CGCS, River Crest Country Club in Fort Worth, Texas**