

BY KATIE MORRIS

Outsourcing aquatic needs

A superintendent contracts pond maintenance because it's cost effective

Superintendents generally perform pond maintenance in house, but it's more beneficial for Todd Pippin, superintendent of the Club at Longview in Weddington, N.C., to outsource pond maintenance to Garner, N.C.-based Foster Lake & Pond Management.

"We're in a unique situation in which we have a service contract with a company that handles 95 percent of our needs," Pippin says.

Pippin's relationship with Foster Lake & Pond Management developed during his previous job as lead assistant superintendent at the Governors Club in Chapel Hill, N.C.

Longview has eight ponds that vary in size from a quarter of an acre to 7.8 acres – a total of 14 acres of surface area. Some ponds are used as the water supply for course irrigation, one is used as a sediment control pond, and others are scenic features.

"With the volume of water we use and the number of water systems we have, contracting is cheaper," Pippin says.

He spends about \$11,400 a year for Foster Lake's services.

Specific tools and products are needed for pond management, and using a service that has access to such tools is easier for Pippin. It's also more cost effective to have certified professionals apply the aquatic pesticides

rather than his crew.

"My guys are certified in turf and ornamental pesticide applications," Pippin says. "They would have to go back and take another test to become certified in aquatic pesticides."

Pippin signed a 12-month contract with Foster Lake to have one of its technicians perform the following tasks monthly:

- Pick up trash around the ponds;
- Inspect for pests such as muskrats;
- Check pH levels in the ponds;
- Apply pesticides such as diquat dibromide and copper compounds if needed;
- Add dyes if needed (dyes keep temperatures down and prevent algae from bloom-



Superintendent Todd Pippin spends about \$11,400 a year for a contractor to take care of all his pond management needs. Photo: Club at Longview

Longview has eight ponds that vary in size from a quarter of an acre to 7.8 acres – a total of 14 acres of surface area. Photo: Club at Longview



ing by limiting light penetration); and

- Sample fish population (if one is dominant over the other, it can be harmful to a pond's health).

Pippin, who views each maintenance task as “a spoke in a wheel representing a sound management system,” also has been experimenting with barley as a way to control algae. Research shows barley releases a natural toxin in the water that suppresses algae, he says.

“We put 8-inch-diameter tubes of barley into the ponds, and the results have been intermittent,” he says. “Sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't.”

The technician that's assigned to Longview checks each pond and picks up trash once a month. The inspection can last between four to eight hours, depending if the technician has to apply aquatic herbicides or other pond treatments.

“The same person comes out every month, so a relationship has formed between us,” Pippin says. “It also gives him the opportu-

nity to become familiar with the property and know it inside and out.”

The preventive measures are for aesthetics, the health of the ponds and the entire club because Pippin uses pond water to irrigate the property's turf. Everything from the clubhouse surrounds to landscaped areas to the golf course is irrigated with water pumped from the ponds.

“Typically, during the growing season, we pump from most of the ponds every night and replenish the water supply with well and storm runoff water,” he says.

Even through Foster Lake handles pond maintenance and treatment, Pippin purchases the aerators that run 24 hours a day. On average, one large professional-grade aerator costs between \$12,000 and \$15,000. He spends \$100,000 of the more-than-\$1-million annual maintenance budget for 13 5-hp aerators and one extra motor.

“Before purchasing, we had to calculate how much water to circulate to get the oxygen levels we needed,” he says.

Aerators are a necessary component of pond maintenance because they circulate water to maintain oxygen levels and reduce algae and odor, keeping a pond clean and healthy. With larger ponds, Pippin uses several aerators to circulate water, and depending on the size of the pond, adds or takes away aerators as needed.

Pippin purchases his aerators from a local distributor that sells Otterbine Barebo products. He's been using Otterbine since 2002, partly because of the company's service.

“It's a family-owned, service-orientated business that follows through with the process from sales to service,” Pippin says.

For those considering outsourcing their pond maintenance, Pippin suggests looking for contractors, asking for client referrals, talking to others who use them and picking their brains for ideas and information.

“You want to find someone who's on a preventive curve and wants to head-off problems, not someone with a reactive approach,” he says. **GCI**