

BY MARGARET HEPP

Equipped for perfection

Connecticut club perpetually improves its golf course

Most superintendents are able to breathe a sigh of relief after a big renovation. But Tony Girardi, CGCS, at the 18-hole Rockrimmon Country Club in Stamford, Conn., has been overseeing construction projects since he arrived there 14 years ago.

“We’ve been in every phase of golf course construction, whether it’s building greens, tees or carpaths, reshaping fairways or expanding ponds,” he says. “We’ve installed an irrigation system and pumping station. We’ve done it all.”

Built in 1949 on an old family farm plot, members of the private facility hired Robert Trent Jones to design the first nine holes for \$7,500. The second nine holes were added in 1954, and a considerable renovation and addition took place in 1996.

With so much construction activity, Girardi no doubt would own a small fleet of equipment if he executed every project in-house. To maximize his \$1.3-million maintenance budget, he outsources large construction projects.

“Certain jobs – such as major greens construction, pond and creek restoration work, and reestablishing wetlands – are just overwhelming in regard to the construction equipment and manpower we would need,” he says. “We’ve brought in just about every piece of equipment out there.”

Hiring construction companies allows Girardi and his 19-man, in-season staff to focus on daily course maintenance, which still involves plenty of construction. Three years ago, Girardi decided to alleviate the stress on his John Deere front-end backhoe – 19 years old at the time – with a Bobcat 435 compact excavator. During the purchase process, he came across the Bobcat A300 skid steer and considered replacing both of his construction machines simultaneously.



The golf course at Rockrimmon has been through every phase of construction during the past 14 years, from rebuilding greens to USGA specs to improving internal drainage on existing native soil pushup greens (below). Photos: Rockrimmon Country Club



CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT

“Our Caterpillar skid steer had fixed front and rear wheels,” Girardi says. “To steer it, you had to skid – that’s why they call it a skid steer – and it really dug up our turf. The A300 options were far superior. It’s steerable, which means the tires rotate, versus a typical skid steer in which the tires are locked in one position.”

Girardi decided to purchase the Bobcat skid steer and mini excavator, which were funded by the club’s \$200,000 capital expenditure budget. Bobcat of Connecticut sold Girardi the A300 and the 435 for a bundle price and allowed him to trade in his Caterpillar skid steer for an additional discount. The dealer did a wonderful job of working with Rockrimmon to come up with a competitive price, Girardi says. He couldn’t be happier about the return value of his investments.

“The A300 and 435 have been wonderful machines and operate flawlessly for us,” he says. “Because we’re a golf course upgrading our property constantly, these pieces of equip-

ment are used daily. They’re used every time we do construction, literally. It’s taken so much of the burden off one John Deere 210 backhoe. We hardly even use the backhoe now.”

Girardi plans to replace his backhoe in the coming year, but his two Bobcat machines have bought him time.

“We have just the right amount of equipment,” he says. “I use my Bobcat machines for general golf course construction, mainly little projects. We’re not doing heavy-duty, earth-moving stuff with it. We use it for drainage work, to haul material and load trucks and for attachment work – stump grinding, trench work and carpath maintenance repair.”

Construction at Rockrimmon hasn’t taken a major toll on play in years past. Girardi has tried to minimize course disturbance by beginning renovations as late as possible in the fall and completing them by early spring.

“We’ve been fortunate to have an acquiescent membership,” he says. “They know their

patience is worth the payoff.”

While Girardi is pleased with the success of his past construction projects, he’s not one to rest on his laurels. In three of the past four years, the club has been rebuilding its greens slowly to USGA specs. At his next membership meeting, Girardi plans to propose to regrass the remainder of his *Poa annua*/bentgrass greens in one fell swoop, commencing mid-September 2009. He hopes to complete the job by late May 2010 and will reciprocate membership in the early season with six to eight clubs in the area.

And that’s not the only buildathon Girardi has up his sleeve. He’s also planning a complete renovation of Rockrimmon’s creeks and ponds, including banks, bridges and culverts – a multimillion-dollar renovation that will be contracted out.

For Girardi and Rockrimmon, the quest for perfection, it seems, will continue for years to come. **GCI**

To maximize his maintenance budget, Tony Girardi, CGCS, outsources major construction projects and focuses on daily course maintenance with his staff. Photo: Rockrimmon Country Club

