

A perfect fit

A new aerifier helps improve fairway conditions at Stockton Golf & Country Club. BY ALISSA CURTIS

Stockton Golf & Country Club, an 18-hole private club located in Stockton, Calif., experiences difficulties properly aerating the course's bermudagrass and perennial ryegrass playing surfaces because of the heavy clay soil.

Stockton's superintendent Jim Alwine says until June the club was using a borrowed, 10-year-old Soil Reliever. The machine was unable to withstand the facility's harsh soil conditions; the aerifier's tines would remove an excessive amount of soil from the ground.

"With our old machine, I was only able to aerate a couple of holes before it would break down," says Alwine, who has an \$840,000 to \$950,000 budget. "The tines would go into the ground and when they pulled out, they'd pull out a chunk of ground the size of a baseball. We were basically ruining the course."

In addition, many members complained about the rough fairway conditions after aeration. Golfers' balls would settle in large divots created by the aerifier, making the fairways difficult to play.

Alwine knew the club needed a new aerifier, but he struggled to find a machine that could remove the tightly compacted soil from the ground without tearing up the fairways.

After doing some research, Alwine became interested in the Wiedenmann Terra Spike XF. Impressed by the machine's updated features, strong structure and crank dial that allows users to set the tines at their exact desired height, he asked Wiedenmann to bring the aerifier to Stockton for a test run. Alwine tested the aerifier against the club's old machine, placing small flags in the holes made by both aerifiers to compare their performances.



Jim Alwine became interested in the Terra Spike XF after the 2008 Golf Industry Show.

"In my three years at Stockton, this is the first machine that has made it all the way though our fairways without any breakdown or malfunction," Alwine says. "It has the power and durability to penetrate some of the hardest soil I've ever worked on."

In the spring, Stockton purchased a Terra Spike XF and received two sets of free tines for about \$29,000. Since first using the aerifier in June, Alwine has seen the fairways conditions improve.

"Now, the fairways are so clean," Alwine says. "They're able to heal quickly, they're very playable, no one complains and it's much easier on the membership. Members who once complained are now applauding the process, saying, 'This is going to be so good for our fairways.'"

Before purchasing the Terra Spike XF, Stockton limited the number of times it aerified its fairways because of the damage the fairways endured. Now, the club is able to aerate the course twice a year without hesitation. Each June, Alwine will use hollow tines to remove plugs to open the turf for the summer golf season. He'll hollow-tine aerify again each September, in addition to pulling cores and overseeding. Plus, the club will use solid tines on the fairways each Monday the course is closed.

"Aerifying is the most important cultural practice that takes place on greens, tees or fairways," Alwine says. "I am very excited to finally give these fairways what they need."

The quickness of the Wiedenmann aerifier allows the club to complete aeration in half the time it used to take, allowing the course to remain open during periods of aeration. Alwine also says he has seen a 50 percent decrease in the number of dry spots on the fairways now that water is able to penetrate into the ground. GCI

Alissa Curtis is a freelance writer based in Columbus, Ohio.

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