

Championship cut

Chambers Bay is pleased with the results of its grinders.

BY ALYSE LAMPARYK

For superintendent David Wienecke, the quality of a clean cut is important as he prepares his facility for the U.S. Amateur Championship this August. In turn, the grinder he uses to maintain his mowers' blades is just as critical.

Chambers Bay Golf Course in University Place, Wash., has been open since 2007, but Wienecke purchased the grinders for the public 18-hole course in February 2006.

"We actually looked at three different manufacturers' grinders and tried them out and talked to people that used them and came up with Foley after that experience," Wienecke says, adding he purchased the Foley United ACCU-Master spin grinder and an ACCU-Pro bedknife grinder for just under \$52,000.

Wienecke had used Foley United grinders for 20 years, but he listened to his mechanic and did his due diligence about the product options in the market before making that purchase.

Four years later, Wienecke is still pleased with the grinders and their consistent performance and believes he has received a solid return on his investment.

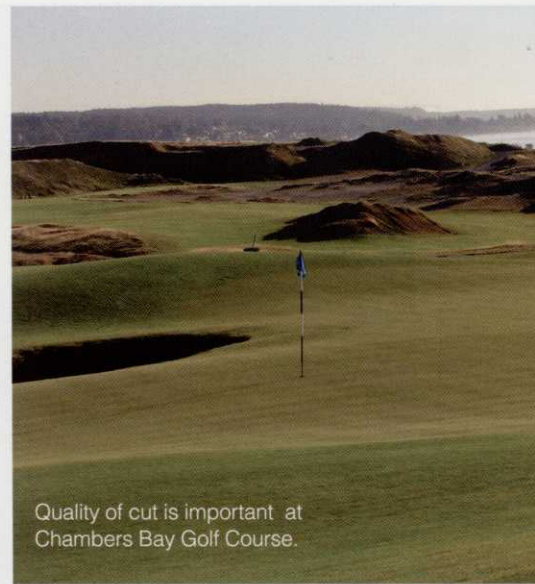
"There's no way that we could produce the quality of cut that we demand and that our golfer's expect and that the championships will need to have without having the quality of cut that we're able to achieve," Wienecke says of his grinders.

Considering it is the first public-access golf course to host a U.S. Amateur, appearance and cut are essential. Along with hosting the 2010 Amateur Championship in August, Chambers Bay Golf Course will be the site of the U.S. Open in 2015.

With about 30 staff members and a \$1.5 million annual maintenance budget, Wienecke does not seem unsettled by the upcoming high-profile events.

"We're really oriented towards a very high-quality of cut and so we use our grinders all the time," Wienecke says. Two of the employees work solely with the grinders, a skill that takes time to acquire.

"In terms of learning the operation of the machine, I think if you know how to use a grinder and how to set up reels then the learning curve is fairly easy, but the process of learning how to set up proper release angles



Quality of cut is important at Chambers Bay Golf Course.

and other things take time," Wienecke says.

In anticipation of the Amateur, Wienecke has asked Foley for a whole new set of grinders to help them continue to keep the course in top condition. Wienecke experienced some problems with the computer-control components. The course's grinders are used at least once a week, year-round, so wear and tear happens.

While at the Golf Industry Show in San Diego last month Wienecke spoke with Foley representatives who assured him they were working on straightening everything out. The only concern Wienecke had with the repair process was on the local level.

When it comes down to it, he is pleased with Foley United products. "I have had no problem, no concerns with the equipment and our service level from the manufacturer has been great. I'm fully satisfied with that," Wienecke says.

For now, the Audubon International Silver-Certified course will prepare for its national debut. As a public course it has high standards to live up to, but Wienecke is not worried.

"We act like and are maintained like a private golf course. So our standards are private, country club level," Wienecke says. **GCI**

Alyse Lamparyk is a freelance writer based in Athens, Ohio.

The University Place, Wash.-based course is preparing for the U.S. Amateur Championship in August.



PART OF THE PLAN

A solid set of grinders keeps maintenance costs in check at Stone Creek Golf Club.

BY ALYSE LAMPARYK

It has been a smooth ride for superintendent David Phipps ever since he purchased grinders for his course a decade ago. A 20-year golf industry veteran, Phipps knows how important a clean cut is for his course.

Phipps first encountered Bernhard & Co. grinders while working as an assistant superintendent at Oregon Golf Club. The course hired a new superintendent and with him he brought Bernhard Express Duals to replace another brand of grinders. Interested, Phipps and the course's mechanic fiddled around with the machine and were pleased with its ease and design.

When Phipps was hired as superintendent at Stone Creek Golf Club in Oregon City, Ore., he remembered how pleased he had been with the Bernhard product and purchased the first grinders for Stone Creek from the company. He chose the Express Dual 3000 and Anglemaster 3000 Bedknife Grinder for about \$35,000.

"It's all pros," says Phipps of the tool's versatility and reliability. "I have no problems with it at all."

Bernhard supplies are sold at a nearby location, so any repairs have been a quick fix. Not that there are many service calls to speak of at Stone Creek.

When Phipps was in need of a new vacuum cleaner for the unit, Bernhard sent it for free, as it was covered by the warranty. Other than that, Phipps has simply had to replace the grinding stone every once in a while. In the long run he has not had to put much money into the machinery.

Results of the Bernhard grinders are not just noticed by Phipps. "We're always being told what a great condition the golf course is in," Phipps says.

He attributes much of that to his equipment manager, Steve Mathre, who Phipps says is a fanatic about keeping the reels sharp so they get a quality cut and a good roll on the green. The mechanic takes conditions on the golf course seriously as they reflect his work, something he takes quite personally.

In addition to the equipment manager, Phipps has eight other employees. The annual maintenance budget of about \$627,000, allows for 12 or 13 employees during Stone Creek's peak season. While only the mechanic works with the grinders, Phipps feels that the learning



Equipment manager Steve Mathre takes a lot of pride keeping the mower reels sharp so they get a quality cut and a good roll on the green.

curve for the machinery is quite easy and his assistant could probably easily do it.

The frequency of use for the grinders depends on what type of projects are taking place on the course.

"Sometimes it's for all day and sometimes it's for two straight days," Phipps says. At the very least, the mechanic uses the grinders once a week and most frequently on the fairway or trim mowers.

Recently, Phipps and his employees began trying a new mowing pattern for their course in an effort to save time.

"We don't get a lot of growth this time of year, but we like to keep it low so we're not overtaken with growth during spring," Phipps says. For now the grounds are still working off the slow-release fertilizer and the grass is growing in slowly. Through it all, the grinders are still playing the same role: maintaining a crisp, clean cut.

Phipps acknowledges that a critical part in maintaining a golf course is having sharp reels. He finds it important to keep the turf clean because then less water is necessary, saving money and alleviating a lot of frayed edges.

Ultimately, Phipps says, "Keeping sharp equipment is all part of the plan." **GCI**

Alyse Lamparyk is a freelance writer based in Athens, Ohio.