



By Helen M. Stone

# Rough cut

TPC Southwind uses fine fescue as natural areas, and saves time, resources and money in the process.

**M**emphis – Mecca for music, barbecue, blue-suede shoes... and sustainable golf? Sure enough. TPC Southwind earned the Golf Digest/ Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) Environmental Leaders in Golf Award multiple years and was the first course in Tennessee to be certified as an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary.

“As a TPC course mandate, we are expected to be environmentally conscious and take a leadership role in sustainability and making positive changes,” says TPC Southwind superintendent Jim Thomas, CGCS. The challenging private course has been working to conserve water, labor and resources since opening in 1988, with numerous upgrades and renovations.

In 2004, an ambitious project began to replace intensively maintained Bermudagrass in the roughs with fine fescue to save resources, money and time. “A few years ago, we did some more renovations and now we have about 20 acres in fine fescue,” says Thomas.

“This is a warm-season grass climate,” he says. “But we treat the fine fescue plantings as natural areas. We’ve let it grow up tall and kept the seedheads, which is a nice look. Most of the time, we mow it a few times a year to keep it around eight to 12 inches. I call it a managed native area.”

Since the original planting was well-adapted Bermudagrass, the renovation required several applications of glyphosate. “However, when you get a good solid, thick stand it does a good job of controlling weeds,” Thomas points out. “But if you get some damage or thinning you have to do some reestablishment.”

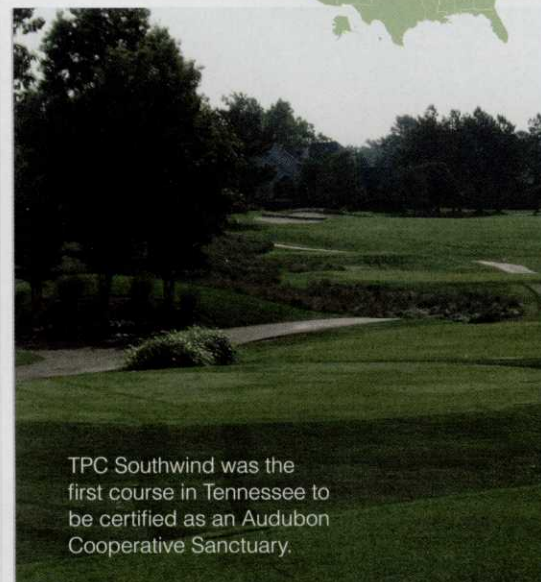
Thomas estimates that the latest renovation came in at about \$10,000, but the dollar savings keep on coming. “We save about \$7,500

or more a year just in mowing costs,” he says. “And that’s just in man hours; that doesn’t count fuel costs or depreciation.”

Since the fine fescue was installed after the course was constructed, Thomas says it’s difficult to quantify the exact water savings. “We’ve set up programs that separate the schedules for the fescue and the Bermuda, though,” he says. “We’ve seen some reduction in water. It’s hard to calculate, but I’d say about 30 percent savings – maybe more.”

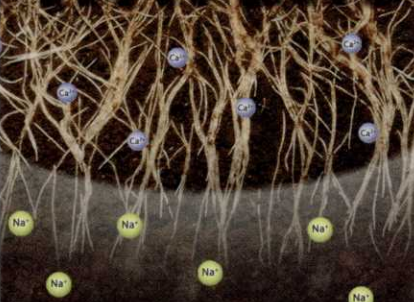
The renovation has resulted in other benefits as well. “How do you put a value on aesthetics?” Thomas asks. “It definitely provides color contrast; especially in the winter when the Bermuda is dormant and the fine fescue is bright green. But even in the summer, it has a different color and grain. It breaks up and divides the golf holes.”

“There are some holes where we’ve utilized it to add to the strength or integrity of the hole. If we have a sharp dogleg, it adds



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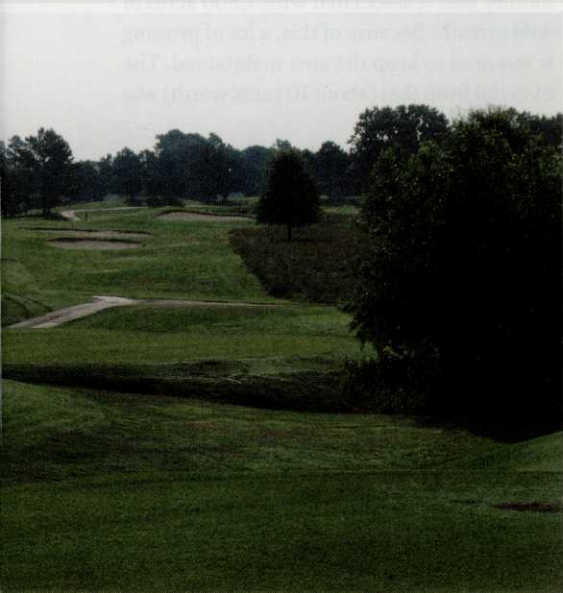
– Jim Thomas, CGCS,  
TPC Southwind

a severe penalty if someone is trying to cut the corner. It makes that risk/reward shot cutting the corner have more risk – and more reward,” Thomas explains.

“There are a lot of options you can use to create natural areas,” Thomas says. “I don’t know if you can really call fine fescue a native species, but I really like it fine fescue. We’ve tried tall fescue and it gets clumpy and it has coarse blades. Fine fescue has a uniform look, a finer leaf texture and I like the contrast and color it produces.”

Thomas is quick to give others credit where credit is due. “You have to give Jeff Plotts, the original superintendent, a lot more credit than me,” he says. “They really did a great job with the original design. For the most part, it was out of way and out of play. And the areas brought into play were very well done.” **GCI**

*Helen M. Stone is a freelance writer based on the West Coast and a frequent GCI contributor.*



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