

The wildlife and wildflowers have returned to this part of the Arizona desert — the formerly bouldered and barren land situated in the singed and dusty foothills of the majestic McDowell Mountains in northern Scottsdale. There are birds and jack rabbits inhabiting the land, as well as cattails and cactus.

Some environmentalists will have a difficult time believing it, but life reappeared on this strip-mined land with the help of a golf course. The Sanctuary GC at Westworld, which opened in November, is the state's first recipient of the Audubon International Signature Program and only the seventh golf course in the country to earn the distinction. The appropriately named Sanctuary received Audubon International's Silver Signature designation in May.

A course can only attain certification as an

Finding Sanctuary in the Dusty Desert

BY LARRY AYLWARD



Audubon Signature property if it incorporates programs focusing on wildlife habitat enhancement, water quality management and conservation, as well as other green plans into its earliest design phases. A course must be built to be environmentally sound from the start.

The Sanctuary is a feather in the marketing cap of SunCor Resort and Golf Management, the management company that operates the course, because of its friend-of-the-environment tag. There are nearly 200 courses in Arizona's Maricopa County, which includes Scottsdale, Phoenix, Tempe and Mesa, and competition for golfers is fierce. With the Audubon designation, the Sanctuary has an ecological leg up on the competition.

Superintendent Jeff Davis realizes it will take time for golfers to understand the Sanctuary's philosophy and, hence, appreciate it. But these golfers will soon get the idea, especially when they encounter signs on the course noting, "Environmentally protected area on left is marked with green stakes and should be played as a lateral hazard."

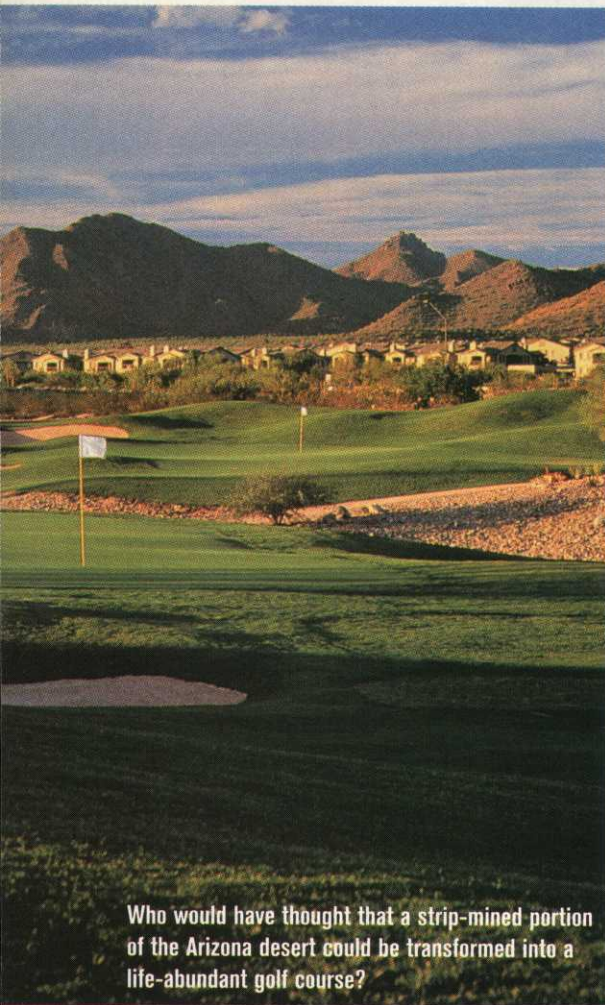
Davis scans one of the course's protected areas, a slope bordering a fairway. He explains that plant life there has thrived because of the signs. But he admits it's a constant battle to keep golfers from retrieving their balls if they hit them down the slope. "It's difficult to get total cooperation," Davis adds.

It's near 100 degrees this spring day, but Davis doesn't mind the heat as he studies the native vegetation throughout the course. He's proud that nearly 25 acres of the course were seeded with native plant mix, which has blossomed and matured in only a year.

Davis is also eager to let people know about the Sanctuary's \$1 million water recharge system, which helps replenish the underground water supply.

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GOLFERS WILL
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Who would have thought that a strip-mined portion of the Arizona desert could be transformed into a life-abundant golf course?

Money Shot

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"In the winter, when the course is off its peak water use, we divert the water normally used for irrigation, put it through a filter and pump it to recharge wells to contribute to the drinking water supply," Davis says.

Come again? The golf course adds water to the drinking supply?

"There are outsiders who don't understand the water issues in the golf industry," Davis contends. "They just think we use insane amounts of water and never put any back."

The golfer education process will also focus on some of the Sanctuary's management practices. For instance, if a fairway is ravaged by insects, Davis and his staff may leave it alone and try to contain the damage — abiding by Audubon's philosophy — before even thinking of using an insecticide.



With the help of signage, golfers will get the idea that the Sanctuary is about preserving the environment.

Davis and crew also don't fertilize as often as other area courses. Davis realizes that some golfers may flip out upon seeing a patch of brown grass, and they may not understand why everything isn't lush green. But he offers no apologies and vows that the Sanctuary will provide putting greens as good as any course in the valley.

"The biggest misconception that golfers have today is that all golf courses have to be green or they're not good," Davis insists.

Davis believes the Sanctuary can help change that thinking.

He believes golfers will feel good about playing a course that cares about the well-being of wildlife and wildflowers. ■

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Know Which Way

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least effective, then the service pays for itself," Wilmes says. "We think of ourselves as more than just a weather service. We're an information service."

Counting costs

DTN serves nearly 3,000 U.S. superintendents and costs \$984 annually. Wilmes admits the price is steep, but the cost is usually a small price to pay for the insurance it brings to superintendents, he adds. "What the service will save you in labor costs and misused chemicals will pay for the service easily over a year," Wilmes says.

Weather or Not's prices start at \$450 per month for its Premiere consulting package, and courses can opt to use the service for a minimum of six months. Also, Weather or Not has an event fee of \$175 per day, with service starting the day before the event.

System flexibility

With all the technology available, superintendents should be able to get the

information in the form they want.

"You have to decide which delivery system — Internet, pager, satellite or fax — is going to work best for you," Croke says. "That's also going to narrow the field some because not all services are capable of delivering information the way you need it delivered."

Still, some superintendents are skeptical that the services are worth the costs, especially to clubs with smaller budgets. Chris Thuer, superintendent at Frankfort CC in Frankfort, Ind., uses the Internet when he needs weather information. He

subscribed to a service for years, but he figured his return on investment wasn't high enough to continue paying the nearly \$1,000 per year for the service, especially when he can depend on the 'Net.

"I can't understand why anyone would pay for a service when you have so many free options on the Web," Thuer says. "For those of us running limited-budget clubs, paying money for a service can be prohibitive."

But that doesn't mean Thuer has ruled out buying a service in the future. Thuer says that if he could find a service that gave him evapotranspiration rates and disease forecasting — data he really needs — then he'd certainly subscribe.

Despite the advantages of weather services, Croke also warns against becoming too dependent on technology



Some superintendents turn to the Web for free weather information in the form of easy-to-understand symbols.

to warn of an emergency. Sometimes looking up at the sky will tell you all you need to know.

"We've become such a 'click-here' society that sometimes we forget technology is by no means fail-safe," Croke says. "Superintendents can never throw out common sense because they are some of the most sensible people I know. Believe your eyes. No service in the world will ever replace that." ■