Get Your Fill

Golf courses that need soil for building tees, adding contours or capping fairways should look for free dirt for their projects

BY MARK LESLIE

"Clean Fill Wanted." It's a sign you see along the country roads of America, often on a property cursed with a swampy spot or a deep ditch the owner wants filled. Golf courses that need soil for building tee boxes, adding contours or capping fairways should look for free "clean fill" for their projects.

That is precisely what happened at Ohio University (OU) in Athens, Ohio, and Reserve Run GC in Boardman, Ohio, two golf course projects designed by Barry Serafin of New Albany, Ohio. Serafin says costs for topsoil stripping and relaying can easily double or triple if the material has to be hauled from a distance.

When OU officials decided to lower Peden Stadium by 7 feet in order to add 1,700 seats, they needed to find a place to deposit about 20,000 cubic yards of earth. At the same time, Serafin and builder Quality Golf were planning to completely reconstruct Ohio University GC next to the stadium and needed "clean fill."

When Scott McDonald and Rick Vernal decided to build 18-hole Reserve Run GC, the property was an old 150-acre coal-mining site that Serafin describes as "barren soil with no nutrients at all." But, fortunately, Wal-Mart was building a new superstore down the road, and the contractors stripped all the topsoil for the store and parking lot and delivered it to the golf course site.

"I wouldn't call what came out of Peden Stadium 'clean fill,' " Serafin says. "We found a little of everything — old foundations, logs, bricks. It was not the best mix to work with, but it was good enough for fill. But the topsoil from Wal-Mart, once it was screened, was fine."

The particular circumstances at OU and Reserve Run worked well, says Serafin, who adds that similar situations could occur at a number of courses.

"It might be a dam, a housing development or a new mall being built," Serafin says of the sourcing of fill. "These

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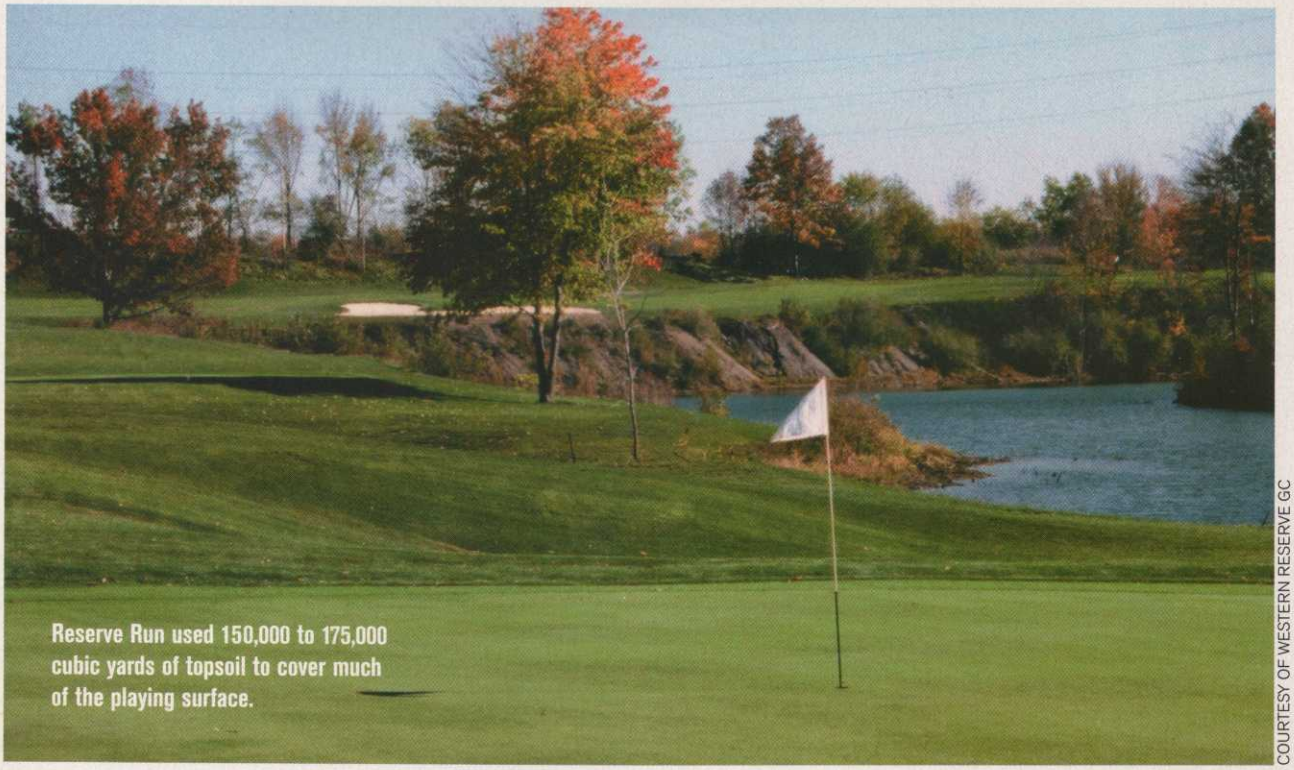

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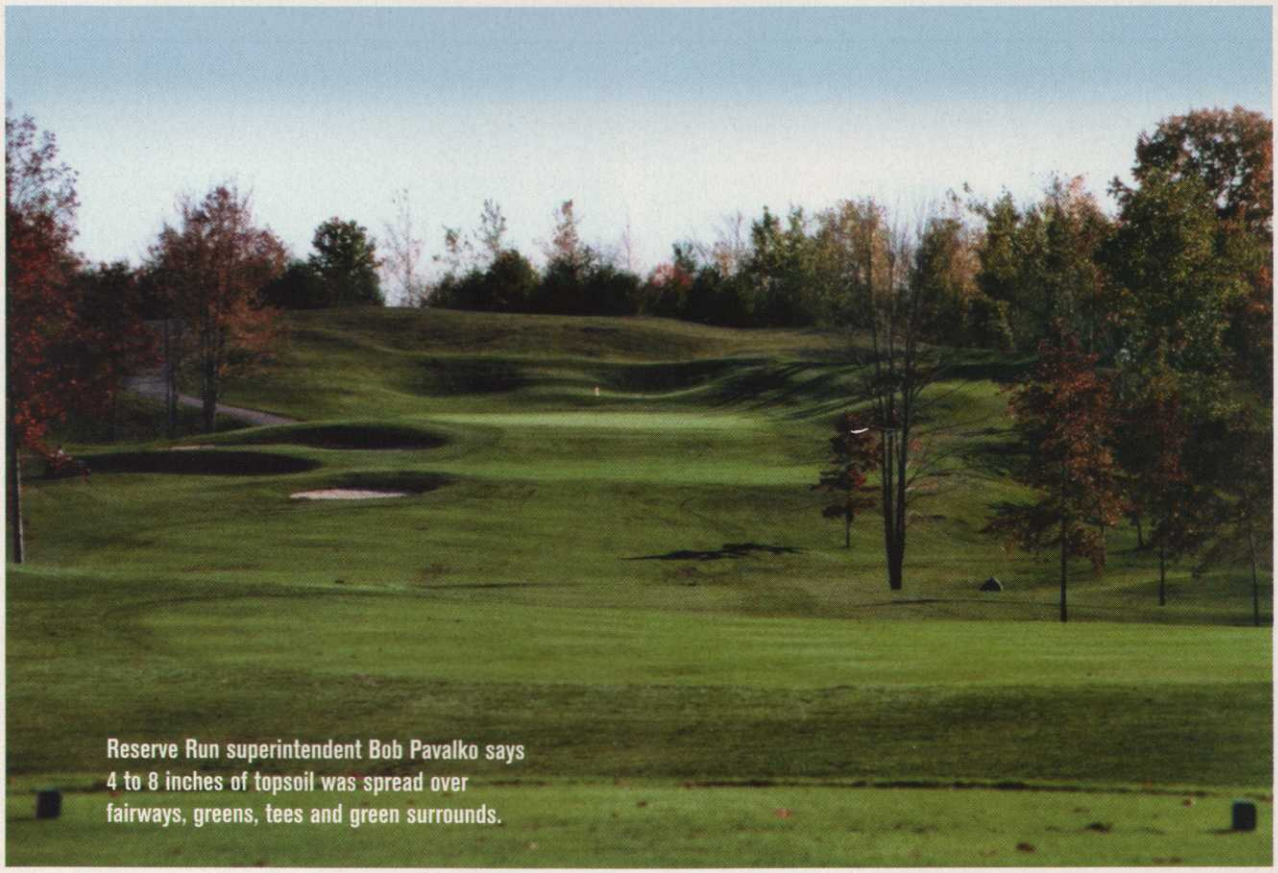
COURTESY OF WESTERN RESERVE GC



Reserve Run superintendent Bob Pavalko says 4 to 8 inches of topsoil was spread over fairways, greens, tees and green surrounds.

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projects have to find a place for the earth they are digging up, and a golf course would be as good as anyplace."

At Reserve Run, Serafin was given 150,000 to 175,000 cubic yards of topsoil to cover much of the playing surface, according to McDonald. Superintendent Bob Pavalko says 4 to 8 inches was spread over greens, tees, green surrounds and fairways. Even with few drainage tiles, the land is so "shaley" that "it drains tremendously well," he says.

"It was a blessing," Serafin says. "The course turned out great and has some very challenging and dramatic holes."

McDonald could not estimate how much he and Vernal saved by not having to pay for and haul the earth from afar, but topsoil costs about $8 to $10 per cubic yard, which includes transportation.

"They hauled topsoil for 91 days and had a D-9 bulldozer pushing dirt every day from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.," McDonald says. "On our end, my partner's blacktop company did the earthwork, while Zinni Golf Construction built the course."

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– BARRY SERAFIN, ARCHITECT

At OU, where Serafin wanted the fill spread, Quality Golf first removed the existing 1 to 2 feet of good sandy topsoil. After the fill was spread and shaped, the original topsoil was brought back.

Until it was used, the earth was stockpiled along the seventh hole. Serafin designated one-third of it to help contour the fairway of the par-4, 450-yard seventh hole. Much of the remainder was used to raise half the fairway of the first hole about 2 feet. The par-5, 520-yard hole was one of the low spots on the property. "In order to put in the drain tile, we had to raise the fairway a couple of feet," he says.

James Burkart of Columbus, Ohio-based James Burkart Associates, who is working with OU on a variety of athletic department construction projects, says the Peden Stadium excavation material was placed along a levy on the Hocking River until it was needed. "We created a 'fill slope' along the back of the levy and seeded it so it looked fine until Barry needed it," he says. "If planning is carried out properly, there are a lot of projects that can be done as close as possible to help out other projects. This happened to be unusual since it involved a golf course."

But, as Serafin points out, perhaps "unusual" should not apply to golf projects. ■

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